

# Powering the People

## SMARTER ENERGY, SMARTER FUTURE

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### **Southern Company Chief Operating Officer Kim Greene discusses the importance of keeping customers at the center of technology-driven change**

What's key for Southern Company, and always will be, said Kim Greene, Southern's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, is thinking about how best to provide customers the products and services they want. Criticizing energy companies as staid and unchanging is dead wrong, she told attendees at the Institute for Electric Innovation's recent "Powering the People: Smarter Energy, Smarter Future" event.

In the past, many improvements to the energy grid were invisible to customers, but that changed about ten years ago with Southern's smart meter rollout. Southern now has 4.4 million smart meters installed at customers' residences and businesses. Customers want to see how much energy they've used and avoid surprises when their bill arrives at month's end. When there's a power outage, customers also want to know when power will be restored -that's something smart meters facilitate.



Customers also want to be sure the system is resilient - able to withstand disruptions, especially for vital facilities like hospitals, police stations, and military bases. Finally, customers are interested in distributed energy technologies. Greene noted that thirty of Southern's top 50 commercial and industrial customers have sustainability goals. Southern must have the products and services to meet their needs.

To meet its customers' wants and needs, Southern has a new business model. No longer simply a regional power company, Southern now produces and delivers electricity and natural gas to customers in 19 states. Last year, Southern also acquired PowerSecure, a distributed energy company that uses patented technology to provide backup generation for customers. PowerSecure recently concluded a strategic alliance with fuel cell maker Bloom Energy, so Southern is "marrying those two technologies," Greene said, and working with some of the most advanced companies in the country.

Southern is also continuing its leadership in research and development. It recently opened its Southern Energy Innovation Center in Atlanta's Technology Square, where it works with customers and other firms interested in developing new technologies. It also founded a venture capital fund, Energy Impact Partners, to focus on small companies with ideas to bring new products and services to the energy space.

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Just outside of Birmingham, Alabama, Southern is building what it calls “the neighborhood of the future” - a microgrid of 60 homes that will have the most energy efficient appliances, insulation, heat pumps, air conditioners, and electric vehicle plug-ins stations. It will have PowerSecure distributed resources, solar panels, and storage. In addition to deploying technology needed to make the microgrid work, Southern will identify appropriate business models for the microgrid and its customers, as well as how these translate to an appropriate rate and regulatory structure.

Greene concluded by noting that new technology options will pose challenges to the traditional regulatory structure and to the power industry business model. The industry, its regulators, and others will need to work collaboratively, she said, so companies can continue to provide the services customers want: clean, safe, reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy.



*The Edison Foundation*

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Institute for Electric Innovation  
701 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. | Washington, D.C. 20004-2696  
202.508.5440 | Visit us at: [www.edisonfoundation.net](http://www.edisonfoundation.net)