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The Greenville News

TUESDAY, APRIL 9, 2019 | GREENVILLEONLINE.COM

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ZF confirms BMW to buy US-made transmissions



A technician in Germany works on a prototype of ZF's enhanced 8-speed automatic transmission. The auto supplier, which received an order from BMW worth billions for this product, will start production at its Saarbrücken plant in 2022. Production in South Carolina for BMW's Spartanburg plant will follow, ZF announced Friday. BY MARIKA KALIFIS/ZEITUNG

In new deal, ZF plant in Laurens will supply transmissions to Spartanburg BMW plant

Anna B. Mitchell Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

Two major German automotive companies have agreed that their U.S. subsidiaries will do business with each other right here in South Carolina.

In separate statements Friday, ZF and BMW confirmed that ZF's plant in Laurens County — the German automotive supplier's only U.S. site for making transmissions — will at some unnamed point in the future start supplying transmissions to the BMW plant in Spartanburg County.

It marks a major step for BMW, which heretofore has sourced all its drive trains in Europe.

"This is a positive development for ZF and the community, and will certainly have a positive impact on the Upstate," ZF spokeswoman Ashley Van Hens told The Greenville News. "We continue to be thankful for the workforce and partnerships in the area that support us."

"Great news for South Carolina!" wrote Sky Foster, the manager for corporate communications at BMW's Spartanburg plant, in an email. Automotive News first reported last month that BMW was

See BMW, Page 5A

"This business win is the largest single order in the history of ZF."

Wolf-Henning Scheider CEO of ZF

Eastside will see jump in water bills

MetroConnects overhauls fees, set to increase revenue 30%

Anna B. Mitchell Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

The folks who collect wastewater through most of Greenville's Eastside will be raising their rates July 1 in a billing change that will allow the sewer utility's revenues to increase by 30%.

Created in 2009 to serve rapidly growing urban and suburban centers beyond existing city lines, the MetroConnects sewer authority has operated largely out of public view during its 50-year existence.

Today it serves roughly 44,000 households and businesses in some of greater Greenville's most populated suburban areas (96% of its customers are residential). Recently, its willingness to extend lines southwest has also opened up great swaths of

See BILLS, Page 3A

Wright's mom speaks out on 'Good Morning America'

Elizabeth LaFleur Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

The mother of Raniya Wright, a Waterboro fifth-grader who died after getting into a fight in her classroom, broke her silence with a television interview with ABC News' "Good Morning America" on Monday.

The network also aired pieces of her interview on Sunday night. In the interview, Ashley Wright said she sent her daughter to school thinking she'd be protected while not in her own care.

Raniya Wright went to school on March 25 and never came home.

See WRIGHT, Page 5A

USA TODAY Trump's choice to replace Nielsen already key in immigrant policy. 1B

Clemson football Jones and other young defensive backs join promising secondary. 1C

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Bills

Continued from Page 1A

Greenville County to economic development, including a pending 8,350-acre expansion that includes the proposed South Greenville Enterprise Park south of Interstate 85.

With sewer comes development because the other option for wastewater, septic systems, cannot handle densely populated areas or industry.

With taxing authority, MetroConnects quietly adds the cost of its sewer service to the year-end property tax bills of all 63,000 land owners within its geographic service boundaries — including 19,000 who don't use sewers.

The latter group of people have proven politically difficult for MetroConnects. The utility's effort in December to grow all the way to State 418 near Fork Shoals was quashed when dozens of rural residents whose homes use septic tanks showed up at public meetings to protest.

That reality, coupled with costs mounting to rehabilitate aging sewer lines, has prompted MetroConnects to change its fee structure.

This summer, the sewer utility will switch to a monthly fee-for-service system that will drop charges altogether on those 19,000 who have no sewer access while increasing the bill for the other 44,000 property owners who do.

MetroConnects General Manager Carol Elliott said her system, a public entity subject to disclosure laws, has been dipping into its reserves to pay for needed repairs the past couple of years. With the fee changes, she said, the system's revenue will jump from \$9 million to \$11.7 million.

"We have been operating in a deficit," Elliott said. "We spent over \$30 million over the past 18 years performing rehabilitation of our system, and we have no debt. We've done that 100 percent on our revenue."

The utility commissioned a rate study finished in February that showed MetroConnects charges were well below its peers in and around Greenville County, she said, and that the new fees will make it about average. Collecting a fee instead of a tax, she said, is also the industry standard. The Greenville News requested a copy of the study Wednesday but has not yet received it.

In Greenville County, the change means MetroConnects will no longer have to get County Council approval for increases, she said. The MetroConnects board can set its own rates when they aren't tied to taxes.

Your bill

At the county's median home value, \$187,000, a MetroConnects customer currently pays \$42 a year in sewer-related taxes plus a service fee that would be \$39 on a house of this value.

Annually, these homeowners are looking at a sewer bill of about \$80. Metro's tax rate and service fee have not gone up since 2010.



ReWa, headquartered on Mauldin Road in Greenville, is primarily a wastewater treatment operation that works with smaller operators such as Greenville County's MetroConnects. (KEN BARNARD/GREenville NEWS)

Under the system's rate change, these same customers will get billed monthly for sewer service starting on July 1. On their Greenville Water bill will be a new line from MetroConnects charging an \$11 monthly flat service fee plus a charge of \$1.54 for every 1,000 gallons of water households consume.

An apple-to-apple comparison of rates before and after the change is impossible, but sewer customers consuming the bare minimum of water will pay \$25.4 a month. That comes to \$304 a year. Average households, which consume 9,000 gallons of water a month, will pay something closer to \$25 a month (nearly \$300 annually).

Factoring out the 19,000 property owners no longer paying sewer taxes to MetroConnects, these rate increases are why the utility expects to see its total revenue increase up 30%.

Am I a Metro customer?

MetroConnects is the sewer collector for most of the county's urban and suburban areas except for cities, which have their own sewer-collection operators.

Many MetroConnects customers may not know who collects their wastewater, Elliott said. She said that homeowners who live in unincorporated Greenville County and definitely have sewer service (i.e., don't have a septic tank), should look for a paragraph in their water bill over the next couple of months.

Perhaps the best way to check if you are a Metro customer is by looking at your 2018 property tax statement.

The Metro service boundary covers most of Greenville's Eastside, stretching from Travelers Rest to Taylors (not including the Taylors sewer district), south to the Woodruff Road and Five Forks area, including parts of Batesville Road, and wraps around the southern side of greater Greenville, mostly north of Inter-

state 85, and down Interstate 265 next to the cities of Mauldin, Simpsonville and Fourteen Inn.

The expansion that MetroConnects has in the works south of Interstate 85 will extend the utility's boundaries to West Georgia Road, growing its territory by 8.9%. This will add 2,477 properties to Metro's service area — though potential customers will have to request service before Metro will run lines to them.

Developers have been among those pushing hardest for the expansion so that Metro can run sewer lines down the fast-growing U.S. 25 corridor, including the South Greenville Enterprise Park. The Greenville County Council this week voted unanimously to support it.

The sewer business

In Greenville County, at least a dozen different entities control pieces of the sewer business.

ReWa, formerly known as the Western Carolina Regional Sewer Authority, treats wastewater at a couple of plants around town and builds sewer trunk lines, the big pipes that bring service to about half of the county.

Every Greenville County resident with sewer service pays ReWa a fee for cleaning wastewater. With the MetroConnects billing changes, customers will see charges for both ReWa and MetroConnects.

This is because smaller sewer-line operations, such as the cities of Greenville and Mauldin and MetroConnects, are so-called wastewater "collectors," who run their own smaller sewer lines to ReWa's trunk lines and bill individual customers for the service. The Gantt, Taylors and Parker special purpose districts are also among six fire departments in this sewer collection business.

MetroConnects is roughly as big as all the other sewer collectors combined.

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