



Powered by principle

Southern Company is known for excellent customer service, high reliability and affordable prices and is committed to innovation and a low-carbon future. In addition to being one of the largest producers of electricity in the U.S. and the largest wholesale provider in the Southeast, Southern Company operates a private LTE voice and data network connecting their affiliate utility operations, Georgia Power, Alabama Power and Mississippi Power. The company needed a fully managed, reliable, layer 2, point-to-point connectivity solution with SLAs from end-to-end, so they could build and manage their own proprietary network to deliver a superior customer experience.

At a glance



Industry

Utility

Customer

NYSE: SO

Headquarters Atlanta, GA

29K+ employees

Operates 7 regulated utilities

9M customers in 6 states

Challenges

Reliable, point-to-point, layer 2 connectivity

End-to-end SLAs, including the last mile

Highly resilient, cost-effective connections

Carrier diversity

Rural connectivity

Solutions

Switched Ethernet-Ethernet VPL

Connecting hubs and towers

Access with end-to-end SLA

Results

Achieved last-mile network diversity

Realized end-to-end management/SLA requirements

Engaged partnership with regular reviews

Powered by Communications

Connecting the company's electric, natural gas and renewable energy operations is no small task and requires a communications network as strong as the subsidiaries it supports. Used primarily as a data network for those subsidiaries, communication is mostly uplink and machine-to-machine. The backbone of that system is a 4G advanced push-to-talk (PTT) Long-Term Evolution (LTE) network, which includes 1,300 cell sites geographically aligned with their power company and local exchange carrier (LEC) footprint, as well as 60 sites located in an out-of-franchise area. They operate and maintain their own MPLS network to support their LTE network. Their push-to-talk LTE network also supports commercial customers and fleet customers, including state, county, municipalities and DOT.

Patrick O'Neil, contract analyst in Southern Company's CIO strategic supplier management organization, works closely with the engineering team to specify requirements and explained that they're responsible for 'all things IT' such as sourcing prospective vendors.

He stressed that reliability and control were essential since the network is used primarily to provide uplink, machine-to-machine data reporting for the operating subsidiaries. The ideal partner would be able to deliver a 'purpose-built' solution and meet the company's stringent service level agreement and sometimes remote geographic requirements including successfully passing the company's network security team's proposal vetting process.

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Patrick O'Neil
Contract Analyst

Essential components for the chosen vendor's solution included reliable, point-to-point, layer 2 connectivity managed from end-to-end. A high priority was placed on a provider that also managed the last-mile access, including SLAs to support Southern Company's critical LTE infrastructure. Layer 2 connectivity was critical as a building block that they could control completely to overlay their MPLS network on top. Finally, they needed highly-resilient, cost-effective connections with redundancy to avoid network outages.

While maintaining internal control was a key requirement, when there was a problem with the network, O'Neil and his team didn't want to be the ones to escalate to get the problem resolved. "We want to be recognized and treated as a valued and priority customer. Southern has a lot of critical infrastructure riding on our LTE network and expected that our chosen provider would address issues quickly and thoroughly, so we didn't have to."

Power play

Competition for the company's business was strong, but Southern knew that their decision would be guided by non-negotiable criteria: an ability to meet their SLA and strict technical requirements while being cost competitive. There would also be an advantage to a provider that operated within their territory to make construction easier and help reduce costs.

Windstream Enterprise Switched Ethernet met Southern Company's stringent technical specifications and security requirements. In addition, Windstream Enterprise had the advantage of delivering Switched Ethernet services in rural areas of GA and AL via their ILEC footprint. Switched Ethernet virtual private line was an ideal layer 2 service enabling Southern to build their own MPLS network, including carrier diversity. Moreover, Windstream Enterprise was able to provide end-to-end SLAs and the last mile connectivity—which was a nonstandard offer—with the commitment to manage the third-party provider and take accountability end-to-end.

Power surge

The partnership between Southern Company and WE connectivity in rural markets has provided the diversity, security and end-to-end SLAs Southern Company needed to build its LTE and data network. The company has also been impressed with WE's commitment to the relationship, citing regular and quarterly meetings to review network performance, identify needs and proactively recommend solutions. Windstream Enterprise also collaborates with Southern Company and shares its proactive planning strategies to keep critical infrastructure operational in preparation for severe weather and storms.

Cloud-enabled connectivity, communications and security—guaranteed.

“Windstream Enterprise has been a good partner in terms of being flexible to meet the end-to-end management and SLA requirements at a competitive price, and they truly listen to us. That attention to the relationship has been a true differentiator for Windstream Enterprise as compared to other service providers.”

Patrick O'Neil
Contract Analyst

To learn more, visit [windstreamenterprise.com](https://www.windstreamenterprise.com)

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