

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of)	
)	
High-Cost Universal Service Support	)	WC Docket No. 05-337
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service	)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Lifeline and Link Up	)	WC Docket No. 03-109
)	
Universal Service Contribution Methodology	)	WC Docket No. 06-122
)	
Numbering Resource Optimization	)	CC Docket No. 99-200
)	
Implementation of the Local Competition)	
Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996	)	CC Docket No. 96-98
)	
Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation)	
Regime	)	CC Docket No. 01-92
)	
Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic	)	CC Docket No. 99-68
)	
IP-Enabled Services	)	WC Docket No. 04-36

**ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER
AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING**

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By the Commission: Chairman Martin issuing a separate statement; Commissioners Copps, Adelstein, Tate, and McDowell issuing a joint statement.

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I. ORDER ON REMAND – ISP-BOUND TRAFFIC

1. The actions we take in this order respond to the writ of mandamus granted by the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (D.C. Circuit) directing the Commission to respond to its prior remand of the Commission’s intercarrier compensation rules for Internet Service Provider (ISP)-bound traffic.¹ As discussed below, we conclude that we have authority to impose ISP-bound traffic rules.

A. Background

2. On February 26, 1999, the Commission issued a Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in which it held that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate because end users access websites across state lines.² Because the *Local Competition First Report and Order* concluded that the reciprocal compensation obligation in section 251(b)(5) applied only to local traffic, the Commission found in the *Declaratory Ruling* that ISP-bound traffic is not subject to section 251(b)(5).³ On March 24, 2000, in the *Bell Atlantic* decision, the D.C. Circuit vacated certain provisions of the *Declaratory Ruling*.⁴ The court did not question the Commission’s finding that ISP-bound traffic is interstate. Rather, the court held that the Commission had not adequately explained how its end-to-end jurisdictional analysis was relevant to determining whether a call to an ISP is subject to reciprocal compensation under section 251(b)(5).⁵ In particular, the court noted that a LEC serving an ISP appears

¹ *In re Core Communications, Inc.*, 531 F.3d 849, 861-62 (D.C. Cir. 2008) (directing the Commission to respond to the remand in the form of a final, appealable order which explains its legal authority to issue the pricing rules for ISP-bound traffic adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*).

² See *Inter-carrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket No. 99-68, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 14 FCC Rcd 3689 (1999) (*Declaratory Ruling*), vacated and remanded, *Bell Atlantic Tel. Cos. v. FCC*, 206 F.3d 1 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (*Bell Atlantic*).

³ See also *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and Interconnection between Local Exchange Carriers and Commercial Mobile Radio Service Providers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 95-185, First Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 15499, 16013, paras. 1033–34 (1996) (subsequent history omitted) (*Local Competition First Report and Order*).

⁴ *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 1.

⁵ See *id.* at 5.

to perform the function of “termination” because the LEC delivers traffic from the calling party through its end office switch to the called party, the ISP.⁶

3. On April 27, 2001, the Commission released the *ISP Remand Order*, which concluded that section 251(g) excludes ISP-bound traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5).⁷ The Commission explained that section 251(g) maintains the pre-1996 Act compensation requirements for “exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access,” thereby excluding such traffic from the reciprocal compensation requirements that the 1996 Act imposed.⁸ The Commission concluded that ISP-bound traffic was “information access” and, therefore, was subject instead to the Commission’s section 201 jurisdiction over interstate communications.⁹ The Commission also found “convincing evidence in the record” that carriers had “targeted ISPs as customers merely to take advantage of . . . intercarrier payments” (including offering free service to ISPs, paying ISPs to be their customers, and sometimes engaging in outright fraud). It therefore adopted an ISP payment regime in order to “limit, if not end, the opportunity for regulatory arbitrage.”¹⁰ The Commission concluded that a bill-and-keep regime might eliminate incentives for arbitrage and force carriers to look to their own customers for cost recovery.¹¹ To avoid a flash cut to bill-and-keep, however, the Commission adopted a compensation regime pending completion of the *Inter-carrier Compensation* proceeding.¹² Specifically, the regime adopted by the Commission consisted of: (1) a gradually declining cap on intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic, beginning at \$.0015 per minute-of-use and declining to \$.0007 per minute-of-use; (2) a growth cap on total ISP-bound minutes for which a LEC may receive this compensation; (3) a “new markets rule” requiring bill-and-keep for the exchange of this traffic if two carriers were not exchanging traffic pursuant to an interconnection agreement prior to the adoption of the regime; and (4) a “mirroring rule” that gave incumbent LECs the benefit of the rate cap only if they offered to exchange all traffic

⁶ See *id.* at 6.

⁷ See *Inter-carrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68, Order on Remand and Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 9151, 9171–72, para. 44 (2001) (*ISP Remand Order*), remanded but not vacated by *WorldCom, Inc. v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429, 432 (D.C. Cir. 2002) (*WorldCom*) (subsequent history omitted) (holding that section 251(g) appears to provide for the continued enforcement “of certain pre-Act regulatory ‘interconnection restrictions and obligations’”).

⁸ The term “1996 Act” refers to the Telecommunications Act of 1996. Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996). The term “Act” refers to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended. 47 U.S.C. § 151 *et seq.*

⁹ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9175, para. 52. Thus, the Commission affirmed its prior finding in the *Declaratory Ruling* that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. See *id.*; see also *Declaratory Ruling*, 14 FCC Rcd at 3710-03, paras. 18-20.

¹⁰ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9187, para. 77.

¹¹ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9184-85, paras. 74-75. The Commission discussed at length the market distortions and regulatory arbitrage opportunities created by the application of per-minute reciprocal compensation rates to ISP-bound traffic. In particular, the Commission found that requiring compensation for this type of traffic at existing reciprocal compensation rates undermined the operation of competitive markets because competitive LECs were able to recover a disproportionate share of their costs from other carriers, thereby distorting the price signals sent to their ISP customers. See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9181-86, paras. 67-76.

¹² See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9153, para. 2 (citing *Developing a Unified Inter-carrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 16 FCC Rcd 9610 (2001) (*Inter-carrier Compensation NPRM*)).

subject to section 251(b)(5) at the same rates.¹³ These rate caps reflected the downward trend in intercarrier compensation rates contained in then-recently negotiated interconnection agreements.¹⁴

4. On May 3, 2002, the D.C. Circuit found that the Commission had not provided an adequate legal basis for the rules it adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*.¹⁵ Once again, the court did not question the Commission's finding that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. Rather, the court held that section 251(g) of the Act did not provide a basis for the Commission's decision. The court held that section 251(g) is simply a transitional device that preserved obligations that predated the 1996 Act until the Commission adopts superseding rules, and that there was no pre-1996 Act obligation with respect to intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic.¹⁶ Although the court rejected the legal rationale for the compensation rules, the court remanded, but did not vacate, the *ISP Remand Order* to the Commission, and it observed that "there is plainly a non-trivial likelihood that the Commission has authority" to adopt the rules.¹⁷ Accordingly, the rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* have remained in effect.

5. On November 5, 2007, Core filed a petition for writ of mandamus with the D.C. Circuit seeking to compel the Commission to enter an order resolving the court's remand in the *WorldCom* decision.¹⁸ On July 8, 2008, the court granted a writ of mandamus and directed the Commission to respond to the *WorldCom* remand in the form of a final, appealable order which explains its legal authority to issue the pricing rules for ISP-bound traffic adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*.¹⁹ The court directed the Commission to respond to the writ of mandamus by November 5, 2008.²⁰

B. Discussion

6. In this order, we respond to the D.C. Circuit's remand order in *WorldCom v. FCC*,²¹ and the court's writ of mandamus in *Core Communications Inc.*²² Specifically, we hold that although ISP-bound traffic falls within the scope of section 251(b)(5), this interstate, interexchange traffic is to be afforded different treatment from other section 251(b)(5) traffic pursuant to our authority under section 201 and 251(i) of the Act.

1. Scope of Section 251(b)(5)

¹³ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9187-89, 9193-94, paras. 78, 80, 89. In a subsequent order, the Commission granted forbearance to all telecommunications carriers with respect to the growth caps and the new markets rule. *See Petition of Core Communications, Inc. for Forbearance Under 47 U.S.C. § 160(c) from Application of the ISP Remand Order*, WC Docket No. 03-171, Order, 19 FCC Rcd 20179 (2004) (*Core Forbearance Order*). Thus, only the rate caps and mirroring rule remain in effect today.

¹⁴ *See ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9190-91, para. 85.

¹⁵ *See WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 429.

¹⁶ *See id.* at 433.

¹⁷ *See id.* at 434.

¹⁸ Pet. for Writ of Mandamus to the Federal Communications Commission, D.C. Cir. 07-1446 (filed Nov. 5, 2007).

¹⁹ *Core Communications, Inc.*, 531 F.3d at 861-62.

²⁰ *See id.* If the Commission fails to comply with the writ by the November 5th deadline, the rules will be vacated on November 6, 2008. *See id.* at 862.

²¹ *See* 288 F.3d at 434.

²² *See* 531 F.3d at 861-62.

7. As an initial matter, we conclude that the scope of section 251(b)(5) is broad enough to encompass ISP-bound traffic. To be sure, we acknowledge that, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic,²³ and some commenters continue to press for such an interpretation.²⁴ As other commenters recognize, however, the Commission, in the *ISP Remand Order*, reconsidered that judgment and concluded that it was a mistake to read section 251(b)(5) as limited to local traffic, given that “local” is not a term used in section 251(b)(5).²⁵ We recognize, as the Supreme Court noted in *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utilities Board*, that “[i]t would be a gross understatement to say that the 1996 Act is not a model of clarity.”²⁶ Nevertheless, we find that the better view is that section 251(b)(5) is not limited to local traffic.

8. We begin by looking at the text of the statute. Section 251(b)(5) imposes on all LECs the “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications.”²⁷ The Act broadly defines “telecommunications” as “the transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user’s choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received.”²⁸ Its scope is not limited geographically (“local,” “intrastate,” or “interstate”) or to particular services (“telephone exchange service,”²⁹ telephone toll service,³⁰ or “exchange access”³¹). We find that the traffic we elect to bring within this framework fits squarely within the meaning of “telecommunications.” We also observe that had Congress intended to preclude the Commission from bringing certain types of telecommunications traffic within the section

²³ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16012-13, para. 1033.

²⁴ See, e.g., Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless at 24–32; Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President, Legal and Industry, National Cable and Telecommunications Association (NCTA), to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 9 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (NCTA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Verizon *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 38–42; NARUC *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 6–7; Rural Alliance *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 144–49; Cincinnati Bell *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 5–11; Maine Public Utilities Commission and Vermont Public Service Board *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 7; New York State Department of Public Service *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 7; Verizon and BellSouth, Supplemental White Paper on ISP Reciprocal Compensation, CC Docket No. 96-98, 99-68 at 16–20 (filed July 20, 2004) (Verizon/BellSouth Supp. ISP White Paper); NARUC’s Initial Comments at 7 n.13 (May 23, 2004). But see, e.g., ICF *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 39.

²⁵ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9166–67, para. 35. See also, e.g., Qwest, Legal Authority for Comprehensive Intercarrier Compensation Reform 2–4 (Qwest White Paper), attached to Letter from Melissa Newman, Counsel for Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 06-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, 05-195, 06-122 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (Qwest Oct. 7, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham et al., Counsel for T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 9–10 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (T-Mobile Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2, 15–18; AT&T Reply to Comment Sought on Missoula Plan Phantom Traffic Interim Process Call Detail Records Proposal, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, DA 06-2294 (WCB 2006) (*Missoula Phantom Traffic*) at 35–41; Brief from Gary M. Epstein, Counsel for ICF, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 29–35 (filed Oct. 5, 2004).

²⁶ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 397.

²⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

²⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 153(43).

²⁹ *Id.* § 153(47).

³⁰ *Id.* § 153(48).

³¹ *Id.* § 153(16).

251(b)(5) framework, it could have easily done so by incorporating restrictive terms in section 251(b)(5). Because Congress used the term “telecommunications,” the broadest of the statute’s defined terms, we conclude that section 251(b)(5) is not limited only to the transport and termination of certain types of telecommunications traffic, such as local traffic.

9. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order* the Commission concluded that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic, but recognized that “[u]ltimately . . . the rates that local carriers impose for the transport and termination of local traffic and for the transport and termination of long distance traffic should converge.”³² In the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission reversed course on the scope of section 251(b)(5), finding that “the phrase ‘local traffic’ created unnecessary ambiguities, and we correct that mistake here.”³³ The *ISP Remand Order* noted that “the term ‘local,’ not being a statutorily defined category, . . . is not a term used in section 251(b)(5).”³⁴ The Commission found that the scope of section 251(b)(5) is limited only by section 251(g), which temporarily grandfathered the pre-1996 Act rules governing “exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access” provided to interexchange carriers and information service providers until “explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission.”³⁵ On appeal, the D.C. Circuit left intact the Commission’s findings concerning the scope of section 251(b)(5), although it took issue with other aspects of the *ISP Remand Order*.³⁶

10. We disagree with commenters who argue that section 251(b)(5) only can be applied to traffic exchanged between LECs, and not traffic exchanged between a LEC and another carrier.³⁷ The Commission rejected that argument in the *Local Competition Order*, finding that section 251(b)(5) applies to traffic exchanged by a LEC and any other telecommunications carrier, and adopted rules implementing that finding.³⁸ In a specific application of that principle, the Commission concluded that “CMRS providers will not be classified as LECs,”³⁹ but nevertheless found that “LECs are obligated,

³² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16012, para. 1033.

³³ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9173, para. 46.

³⁴ *Id.* at 9167, para. 34.

³⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

³⁶ *See WorldCom v. FCC*, 288 F.3d at 429.

³⁷ *See, e.g.*, Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless (“The best interpretation of § 251(b)(5) – read in light of the text, structure, and history of the 1996 Act – is that the reciprocal compensation obligation applies only to intraexchange (or ‘local’) voice calls that originate on the network of one LEC (or wireless provider) and terminate on the network of another LEC (or wireless provider) operating in the same exchange (or, in the case of wireless providers, the same MTA.”); Letter from Ann D. Berkowitz, Associate Director, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 26 (filed May 17, 2004) (attaching white paper entitled “Internet-Bound Traffic is Not Compensable Under Sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2)”) (Verizon/BellSouth White Paper) (“By its nature, ‘reciprocal compensation’ must [] apply to ‘telecommunications’ exchanged *between LECs* (or carriers, like CMRS providers, that the Commission is authorized to treat as LECs), not to traffic that is exchanged between LECs and non-LECs.”) (emphasis in original).

³⁸ *See Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16013-16, paras. 1034-41. *See also* 47 C.F.R. 51.703(a) (“Each LEC shall establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for transport and termination of telecommunications traffic with any requesting telecommunications carrier”); *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9193-94, para. 89 n.177 (“Section 251(b)(5) applies to telecommunications traffic between a LEC and a telecommunications carrier . . .”).

³⁹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15996, para. 1005.

pursuant to section 251(b)(5) (and the corresponding pricing standards of section 252(d)(2)), to enter into reciprocal compensation agreements with all CMRS providers.”⁴⁰ No one challenged that finding on appeal, and it has been settled law for the past 12 years. We see no reason to revisit that conclusion now. While section 251(b)(5) indisputably imposes the duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements on LECs alone, Congress did not limit the class of potential beneficiaries of that obligation to LECs.⁴¹

11. We also disagree with commenters who argue that section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) limits the scope of section 251(b)(5).⁴² Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) provides that a state commission “shall not consider the terms and conditions for reciprocal compensation to be just and reasonable” unless “such terms and conditions provide for the mutual and reciprocal recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier’s network facilities of calls that originate on the network facilities of the other carrier.”⁴³ Verizon and others argue that this provision necessarily excludes interexchange traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5), because at the time the 1996 Act was passed calls neither originated nor terminated on an interexchange carrier’s network.⁴⁴ We reject this reasoning because it erroneously assumes that Congress intended the pricing standards in section 252(d)(2) to limit the otherwise broad scope of section 251(b)(5). We do not believe that Congress intended the tail to wag the dog.

12. Section 251(b)(5) defines the scope of traffic that is subject to reciprocal compensation. Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i), in turn, deals with the mechanics of who owes what to whom, it does not define the scope of traffic to which section 251(b)(5) applies. Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) provides that, at a minimum, a reciprocal compensation arrangement must provide for the recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier’s network of calls that originate on the network of the other carrier.⁴⁵ Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) does not address what happens when carriers exchange traffic that originates or terminates on a third carrier’s network. This does not mean, as Verizon suggests, that section 251(b)(5) must be read as limited to traffic involving only two carriers. Rather, it means that there is a gap in the pricing rules in section 252(d)(2), and the Commission has authority under section 201(b) to adopt rules to fill that gap.

13. We also reject Verizon’s argument that a telecommunications carrier that delivers traffic to an ISP is not eligible for reciprocal compensation because the carrier does not “terminate”

⁴⁰ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15997, para. 1008.

⁴¹ If Congress had intended to limit the class of potential beneficiaries of LECs’ duty to establish reciprocal obligation arrangements, it would have said so explicitly. See 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(3) (describing the “duty to provide dialing parity to competing providers of telephone exchange service and telephone toll service”).

⁴² See, e.g., Verizon/BellSouth White Paper at 41–43; New York State Department of Public Service *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 8–9; TDS *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 19 n.27; VeriSign *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments, Attach B. at 9, 12, 26–28; Qwest *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 39; NASUCA *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Reply at 17; Leap Wireless International, Inc. *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Reply, Ex. 5 at 8.

⁴³ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(i).

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Maine Public Utilities Commission and Vermont Public Service Board *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 7–8; New York State Department of Public Service *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Comments at 7–10; Verizon/BellSouth Supp. ISP White Paper at 16–20; NARUC *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM* Initial Comments at 7 n.13.

⁴⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(i).

telecommunications traffic at the ISP.⁴⁶ In the *Local Competition Order*, the Commission defined “termination” as “the switching of traffic that is subject to section 251(b)(5) at the terminating carrier’s end office switch ... and delivery of that traffic to the called party’s premises.”⁴⁷ As the D.C. Circuit suggested in the *Bell Atlantic* decision, “Calls to ISPs appear to fit this definition: the traffic is switched by the LEC whose customer is the ISP and then delivered to the ISP, which is clearly the ‘called party.’”⁴⁸ We agree.⁴⁹

14. Verizon also argues that the reference to reciprocal compensation in the competitive checklist in section 271,⁵⁰ which was designed to ensure that local markets are open to competition, somehow shows that Congress intended to limit the scope of section 251(b)(5) to local traffic.⁵¹ We do not see how this argument sheds any light on the scope of section 251(b)(5). Congress no doubt included the reference to reciprocal compensation in section 271 because section 251(b)(5) applies to local traffic, a point that no one disputes. That does not suggest, however, that section 251(b)(5) applies *only* to local traffic.

15. We need not respond to every other variation of the argument that the history and structure of the Act somehow demonstrate that section 251(b)(5) is limited to local traffic. At best, these arguments show that one plausible interpretation of the statute is that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic, a view that the Commission embraced in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*. These arguments do not persuade us, however, that this is the only plausible reading of the statute. Moreover, many of the same arguments based on the history and context of the adoption of section 251 to limit its scope to local traffic were rejected by the D.C. Circuit in the context of section 251(c).⁵² We find

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless at 33–34; Verizon/BellSouth White Paper at 31–32.

⁴⁷ *Local Competition Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16015, para. 1040. See also 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(d).

⁴⁸ 206 F.3d at 6.

⁴⁹ We reject Verizon’s argument against the application of section 251(b)(5) to ISP-bound traffic because this traffic is one-way traffic and as such is not reciprocal, see Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless at 26 (Oct. 2, 2008); Verizon White Paper at 41–43 (May 17, 2004). As Level 3 points out, these arguments have been rejected by the Commission and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. See Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 18; *Pacific Bell v. Cook Telecom, Inc.*, 197 F.3d 1236, 1242–44 (9th Cir. 1999) (reciprocal compensation applies to paging traffic); *TSR Wireless, LLC v. U.S. West Communications, Inc.*, 15 FCC Rcd 11166, 11178 para. 21 (2000) (the Commission’s reciprocal compensation rules “draw [] no distinction between one-way and two-way carriers”). Because our conclusion in this order concerning the scope of section 251(b)(5) is no longer tied to whether this traffic is local or long distance, we need not address arguments made by the parties as to whether ISP-bound traffic constitutes “telephone exchange service” under the Act. See e.g., Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 1 (filed Sept. 24, 2004).

⁵⁰ See 47 U.S.C. § 271(c)(2)(B)(xiii).

⁵¹ See Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless at 26; Verizon/BellSouth White Paper at 9.

⁵² *United States Telecom Association v. FCC*, 359 F.3d 554, 592 (D.C. Cir. 2004) (*USTA II*), cert. denied sub nom., *Nat’l Ass’n of Regulatory Utility Comm’rs v. United States Telecom Ass’n*, 543 U.S. 925, 125 S. Ct. 313, 160 L.Ed.2d 223 (2004) (“Even under the deferential *Chevron* standard of review, an agency cannot, absent strong structural or contextual evidence, exclude from coverage certain items that clearly fall within the plain meaning of a statutory term. The argument that long distance services are not ‘telecommunications services’ has no support.”). In *USTA II*, the D.C. Circuit was addressing whether the term “telecommunications services” was limited to local

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that the better reading of the Act as a whole, in particular the broad language of section 251(b)(5) and the grandfather clause in section 251(g), supports our view that the transport and termination of all telecommunications exchanged with LECs is subject to the reciprocal compensation regime in sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2).

16. Notwithstanding section 251(b)(5)'s broad scope, we agree with the finding in the *ISP Remand Order* that traffic encompassed by section 251(g) is excluded from section 251(b)(5) except to the extent that the Commission acts to bring that traffic within its scope. Section 251(g) preserved the pre-1996 Act regulatory regime that applies to access traffic, including rules governing "receipt of compensation."⁵³ Here, however, the D.C. Circuit has held that ISP-bound traffic did not fall within the section 251(g) carve out from section 251(b)(5) as "there had been *no* pre-Act obligation relating to intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic."⁵⁴ As a result, we find that ISP-bound traffic falls within the scope of section 251(b)(5).

2. Authority Under Section 201

17. The section 251(b)(5) finding above, however, does not end our legal analysis here. That is because the ISP-bound traffic at issue here is clearly interstate in nature and thus also subject to our section 201 authority. The Commission unquestionably has authority to regulate intercarrier compensation with respect to interstate access services, rates charged by CMRS providers, and other traffic subject to Commission authority such as ISP-bound traffic. Section 2(a) of the Act establishes the Commission's jurisdiction over interstate services, for which the Commission ensures just, reasonable, and not unjustly and unreasonably discriminatory rates under section 201 and 202.⁵⁵ Likewise, the Commission has authority over the rates of CMRS providers pursuant to section 332 of the Act.⁵⁶

18. In sections 251 and 252 of the Act, Congress altered the traditional regulatory framework based on jurisdiction by expanding the applicability of national rules to historically intrastate issues and state rules to historically interstate issues.⁵⁷ In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that the 1996 Act created parallel jurisdiction for the Commission and the states over interstate and intrastate matters under sections 251 and 252.⁵⁸ The Commission and the states "are to address the same matters through their parallel jurisdiction over both interstate and intrastate matters under sections 251 and 252."⁵⁹ Moreover, section 251(i) provides that "[n]othing in this section shall be construed to limit or otherwise affect the Commission's authority under section 201."⁶⁰ In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission concluded that section 251(i) "affirms that the Commission's preexisting authority under section 201 continues to apply for purely interstate

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telecommunications services under section 251(c), while here we consider the analogous question of whether "telecommunications" is limited to local telecommunications under section 251(b).

⁵³ 47 U.S.C. 251(g).

⁵⁴ *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433.

⁵⁵ 47 U.S.C. §§ 152(a), 201, 202.

⁵⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 332.

⁵⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15544, para. 83.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 15544-45, para. 85.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(i).

activities.”⁶¹

19. In implementing sections 251 and 252 in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission’s treatment of LEC-CMRS traffic provides an instructive example. Prior to the 1996 Act, the Commission expressly preempted “state and local regulations of the kind of interconnection to which CMRS providers are entitled” based on its authority under section 201 and 332 of the Act.⁶² Nevertheless, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission brought LEC-CMRS interconnection within the section 251 framework as it relates to intraMTA (including interstate intraMTA) traffic.⁶³ The Commission recognized, however, that it continued to retain separate authority over CMRS traffic.⁶⁴

20. Courts confirmed that, in permitting LEC-CMRS interconnection to be addressed through the section 251 framework, the Commission did not in any way lose its independent jurisdiction or authority to regulate that traffic under other provisions of the Act. Thus, although the Eighth Circuit invalidated the Commission’s TELRIC pricing rules in general,⁶⁵ it recognized that “because section 332(c)(1)(B) gives the FCC the authority to order LECs to interconnect with CMRS carriers, we believe that the Commission has the authority to issue the rules of special concern to the CMRS providers, [including the reciprocal compensation rules] but only as these provisions apply to CMRS providers. Thus, [the pricing] rules . . . remain in full force and effect with respect to the CMRS providers, and our order of vacation does not apply to them in the CMRS context.”⁶⁶ Subsequently, the D.C. Circuit held that CMRS providers were entitled to pursue formal complaints under section 208 of the Act for violations of the Commission’s reciprocal compensation rules.⁶⁷

21. We build upon our actions in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* and find here that addressing ISP-bound traffic through the section 251 framework does not diminish the Commission’s independent jurisdiction or authority to regulate traffic under other provisions of the Act. Specifically, we retain our authority under section 201 to regulate ISP-bound traffic, despite acknowledging that such traffic is section 251(b)(5) traffic. With respect to interstate services, the Act has long provided us with the authority to establish just and reasonable “charges, practices, classifications, and regulations.”⁶⁸ The Commission thus retains full authority to regulate charges for traffic and services subject to federal jurisdiction, even when it is within the sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework. Because we re-affirm our findings concerning the interstate nature of ISP-bound traffic, which have not been vacated by

⁶¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order* at 15546–47, para. 91.

⁶² *Implementation of Sections 3(n) and 332*, GN Docket No. 93-252, Second Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 1411, 1498, para. 230 (1994).

⁶³ *See Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16005, para. 1023.

⁶⁴ *Id.* (“By opting to proceed under sections 251 and 252, we are not finding that section 332 jurisdiction over interconnection has been repealed by implication, or rejecting it as an alternative basis for jurisdiction.”).

⁶⁵ We note that the Supreme Court later reversed this decision and affirmed the TELRIC methodology. *See Verizon Commc’ns, Inc. v. FCC*, 535 U.S. 467 (2002) (*Verizon v. FCC*).

⁶⁶ *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC*, 120 F.3d 753, 800 n.21 (8th Cir. 1997) (*Iowa Utils. I*) (vacated and remanded in part on other grounds, *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. 366 (1999) (*AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*)).

⁶⁷ *See Qwest Corp. v. FCC*, 252 F.3d 462, 465-66 (D.C. Cir. 2001) (describing the Eighth Circuit’s analysis of section 332(c)(1)(B) in *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC* and concluding that an attempt to relitigate the issue was barred by the doctrine of issue preclusion).

⁶⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 201(b).

any court, it follows that such traffic falls under the Commission's section 201 authority preserved by the Act and that we therefore have the authority to issue pricing rules pursuant to that section.⁶⁹ This conclusion is reinforced by section 251(i) of the Act. As the Commission explained in the *ISP Remand Order*, section 251(i) "expressly affirms the Commission's role in an evolving telecommunications marketplace, in which Congress anticipates that the Commission will continue to develop appropriate pricing and compensation mechanisms for traffic that falls within the purview of section 201."⁷⁰ It concluded that section 251(i), together with section 201, equips the Commission with the tools necessary to keep pace with regulatory developments and new technologies.⁷¹ When read together, these statutory sections preserve the Commission's authority to address new issues that fall within its section 201 authority over interstate traffic, including compensation for the exchange of ISP-bound traffic. Consequently, in the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission properly exercised its authority under section 201(b) to issue pricing rules governing the payment of compensation between carriers for ISP-bound traffic.⁷²

22. Our result today is consistent with the D.C. Circuit's opinion in *Bell Atlantic*, which concluded that the jurisdictional nature of traffic is not dispositive of whether reciprocal compensation is owed under section 251(b)(5).⁷³ It is also consistent with the D.C. Circuit's *WorldCom* decision, in which the court rejected the Commission's view that section 251(g) excluded ISP-bound traffic from the scope

⁶⁹ We have consistently found that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. ISP-bound traffic melds a traditional circuit-switched local telephone call over the PSTN to packet switched IP-based Internet communication to Web sites. See e.g., *Declaratory Ruling*, 14 FCC Rcd at 3702, para. 18; *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9175, para. 52. This conclusion has not been questioned by the D.C. Circuit. See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 431; *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, 206 F.3d at 5 ("There is no dispute that the Commission has historically been justified in relying on this method when determining whether a particular communication is jurisdictionally interstate."). In other contexts, the Commission has likewise found that services that offer access to the Internet are jurisdictionally interstate services. In 1998, for example, the Commission found that ADSL service is jurisdictionally interstate. See *GTE Tel. Operating Cos.*, CC Docket No. 98-79, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 22466, 22481, para. 28 (1998) ("finding that GTE's ADSL service is subject to federal jurisdiction" and is "an interstate service"). More recently, the Commission has confirmed this ruling for a variety of broadband Internet access services. See *Inquiry Concerning High-Speed Access to the Internet Over Cable and Other Facilities*, GN Docket No. 00-185, CS Docket No. 02-52, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 17 FCC Rcd 4798, 4832, para. 59 (2002) (finding that, "on an end-to-end analysis," "cable modem service is an interstate information service"); *Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 14853 at 14914, para. 110 (2005), *aff'd by Brand X*, 545 U.S. 967; *Appropriate Regulatory Treatment for Broadband Access to the Internet Over Wireless Networks*, WT 07-53, Declaratory Ruling, 22 FCC Rcd 5901, 5911, para. 28 (2007); *United Power Line Council's Petition for Declaratory Ruling Regarding the Classification of Broadband over Power Line Internet Access Service as an Information Service*, WC 06-10, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 21 FCC Rcd 13281, 13288, para. 11 (2006). In the *Vonage Order*, the Commission likewise found that VoIP services are jurisdictionally interstate, employing the same end-to-end analysis reflected in those other orders. *Vonage Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 22413-14, paras. 17-18.

⁷⁰ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9174, para. 50.

⁷¹ See *ISP Remand Order*, at 9175, para. 51.

⁷² We thus respond to the D.C. Circuit's remand order in *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434, and the court's writ of mandamus in *Core Communications*, 531 F.3d at 861-62, which directed the Commission to explain its legal authority to issue the pricing rules for ISP-bound traffic adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*. Specifically, we find, for the reasons set forth here that the Commission had the authority to adopt the pricing regime pursuant to our broad authority under section 201(b) to issue rules governing interstate traffic.

⁷³ See *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 5.

of section 251(b)(5), but made no other findings.⁷⁴ Finally, this result does not run afoul of the Eighth Circuit's decision on remand from the Supreme Court in the *Iowa Utilities Board* litigation, which held that "the FCC does not have the authority to set the actual prices for the state commissions to use" under section 251(b)(5).⁷⁵ At the time of that decision, under the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, section 251(b)(5) applied only to local traffic. Thus, the Eighth Circuit merely held that the Commission could not set reciprocal compensation rates for local traffic. The court did not address the Commission's authority to set reciprocal compensation rates for interstate traffic.⁷⁶ In sum, the Commission plainly has authority to establish pricing rules for interstate traffic, including ISP-bound traffic, under section 201(b), and that authority was preserved by section 251(i).

3. Other Issues

23. Most commenters urge the Commission to maintain the compensation rules governing ISP-bound traffic until the Commission is able to complete comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform.⁷⁷ These parties contend that a higher compensation rate would create new opportunities for arbitrage⁷⁸ and impose substantial financial burdens on wireless companies, incumbent LECs and state

⁷⁴ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434.

⁷⁵ *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC*, 219 F.3d 744, 757 (8th Cir. 2000) (*Iowa Utils. II*), *rev'd in part sub nom. Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. 467.

⁷⁶ Indeed, above, the court expressly confirmed the Commission's independent authority to set rates for CMRS traffic pursuant to section 332 and declined to vacate the Commission's pricing rules as they applied in the context of CMRS service. See *Iowa Utils. I*, 120 F.3d at 800 n.21.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337; CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 10 (filed July 8, 2008) (asking the Commission to maintain the existing compromises reached with respect to ISP-bound traffic); Letter from Gary L. Phillips, Associate General Counsel, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-98, 99-68 at 8 (filed May 9, 2008) (asserting that the public interest would be best served by maintaining the existing transitional rates pending broader intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Sage Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at 6 (Sage Telecom May 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (stating that retaining the ISP rate serves broad policy goals); Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68 at 1 (filed May 7, 2008) (supporting continuation of the compensation rules); Letter from Joshua Seidmann, Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, Independent Telephone & Telecommunications Alliance, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 2 (filed Apr. 28, 2008) (ITTA Apr. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (asking the Commission to retain the current \$0.0007 rate for ISP-bound traffic); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98 (filed Apr. 7, 2008) (urging the Commission to support its earlier finding that \$0.0007 is appropriate compensation for dial-up ISP traffic); Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel to Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, Attach. (filed May 1, 2008) (Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (describing how elimination of the existing ISP rate would create substantial burdens on a number of carriers and state commissions); Letter from Glenn Reynolds, Vice President, Policy, USTelecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-262, WC Docket No. 07-135 at 2 (filed Apr. 29, 2008) (USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (noting that the Commission's existing rules have "largely mitigated the debate around compensation for ISP-bound traffic, but there is every reason to believe the same problems would arise if the Commission were to reverse direction on this issue").

⁷⁸ See, e.g., USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Qwest Communications International, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, WC Docket No. 07-135, Attach. at 3-5 (filed Apr. 25, 2008) (Qwest April 25, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Verizon and BellSouth, Further Supplemental White Paper on ISP Reciprocal Compensation at 20

(continued....)

public utility commissions.⁷⁹ They further claim that the existing regime has simplified interconnection negotiations.⁸⁰

24. In the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission found that the one-way nature of ISP-bound traffic creates significant arbitrage opportunities. Due to the unbalanced nature of ISP-bound traffic, the Commission observed that reciprocal compensation arrangements created enormous incentives for competitive LECs to sign up ISPs as customers.⁸¹ The Commission cited evidence that competitive LECs, on average, terminated eighteen times more traffic than they originated, resulting in annual CLEC reciprocal compensation billings of approximately two billion dollars, 90 percent of which was for ISP-bound traffic.⁸² The Commission concluded that “the record strongly suggests that CLECs target ISPs in large part because of the availability of reciprocal compensation payments.”⁸³ This undermined the operation of competitive markets because competitive LECs were able to recover a disproportionate share of their costs from other carriers.⁸⁴ To limit arbitrage opportunities that arose from “excessively high reciprocal compensation rates,”⁸⁵ the Commission adopted a gradually declining cap on intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic, beginning at \$.0015 per minute of use and declining to \$.0007 per minute of use, the current cap.⁸⁶ The Commission derived the rate caps from contemporaneous interconnection agreements, in which carriers voluntarily agreed to rates comparable to the rate caps adopted by the Commission.⁸⁷ The interconnection agreements included lower rates for unbalanced traffic than for balanced traffic, and the rates declined over time, like the rate caps.⁸⁸ Although the Commission made no specific findings with regard to the actual costs associated with delivering traffic to ISPs, it noted evidence in the record that technological advances were reducing the costs incurred by carriers when handling all forms of traffic.⁸⁹ The Commission also noted that “negotiated reciprocal compensation rates continue to decline as ILECS and CLECs negotiate new agreements.”⁹⁰

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(Verizon/BellSouth Further Supp. ISP White Paper), *attached to* Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68 (filed Sept. 27, 2004).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., *id.* (stating that “the [m]irroring [r]ule simplified wireless-ILEC interconnection negotiations tremendously”); Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless on Intercarrier Payments for ISP-Bound Traffic and the *WorldCom* Remand, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-98, 99-68 at 38–40 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless) (indicating that Verizon entered into multiple agreements using the \$.0007 rate cap established in the *ISP Remand Order*).

⁸¹ *Id.* at 9182-83, para. 68-71.

⁸² *Id.* at 9183, para. 70.

⁸³ *Id.*

⁸⁴ *Id.* at para. 71.

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 9185, para. 75.

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 9187, para. 78.

⁸⁷ *Id.* at 9190-91, para. 85.

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ *Id.* at 9190, para. 84.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

25. On July 14, 2003, Core Communications, Inc. (“Core”) filed a petition pursuant to Section 10 of the Communications Act⁹¹ requesting that the Commission forbear from enforcing the rate caps and certain other provisions set forth in the *ISP Remand Order* with respect to the exchange of ISP-bound traffic between telecommunications carriers. In 2004, the Commission denied the petition with respect to rate caps and the mirroring rule, determining that Core had satisfied none of the three prongs of the statutory test for forbearance.⁹² First, the Commission found that forbearance from enforcement of the rate caps was not consistent with the public interest. To the contrary, the Commission concluded that rate caps remained necessary to prevent regulatory arbitrage and to promote efficient investment in telecommunications services and facilities.⁹³ Second, the Commission found limited potential for discrimination under the rate caps. The caps applied to ISP-bound traffic only to the extent that an incumbent carrier offered to exchange all traffic at the same rate under Section 251(b)(5).⁹⁴ Accordingly, the Commission concluded that Core had not proven that the rate caps resulted in impermissible discrimination against or between competitive carriers or services.⁹⁵ Finally, the Commission found that Core had not demonstrated that enforcement of the rate caps was not necessary for the protection of consumers. Core advanced speculative general claims that the caps caused artificially high rates, had forced competitive carriers from the market, and had deterred investment in telecommunications services, all to consumers’ detriment. The Commission rejected these unsupported claims, explaining that the rate caps were designed to prevent the subsidization of dial-up Internet access customers at the expense of consumers of basic telephone service and to avoid regulatory arbitrage and discrimination between services.⁹⁶ For these reasons, the Commission denied Core’s petition for forbearance insofar as rate caps were concerned.⁹⁷

26. In 2006, the D.C. Circuit affirmed our decision not to forbear from the rate cap (and the mirroring rule).⁹⁸ The Court found reasonable the Commission’s “view that the rate caps are necessary to prevent the subsidization of dial-up Internet access consumers by consumers of basic telephone service”

⁹¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 160(a) (“[T]he Commission shall forbear from applying any regulation or any provision of [the Communications] Act to a telecommunications carrier . . . if the Commission determines that (1) enforcement of such regulation or provision is not necessary to ensure that the charges, practices, classifications or regulations by, for, or in connection with that telecommunications carrier or telecommunications service are just and reasonable, and are not unjustly or unreasonably discriminatory; (2) enforcement of such regulation or provision is not necessary for the protection of consumers; and (3) forbearance from applying such provision or regulation is consistent with the public interest.”).

⁹² See *Petition of Core Communications, Inc. for Forbearance Under 47 U.S.C. § 160(C) From Application of the ISP Remand Order*, 19 FCC Rcd 20179 (2004) (“*Forbearance Order*”).

⁹³ The Commission rejected as an initial matter Core’s argument that the D.C. Circuit’s decision in *WorldCom, Inc. v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429 (2002), *cert. denied*, 538 U.S. 1012 (2003), compelled the agency to grant the petition, observing that the court remanded but did not vacate the rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* and specifically found a “non-trivial likelihood” that the Commission would be able to justify the regime it adopted. See *Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20185 para. 17 (quoting *Worldcom*, 288 F.3d at 434).

⁹⁴ See 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5) (imposing upon local exchange carriers the “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications”).

⁹⁵ See *Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20187 para. 23.

⁹⁶ *Id.* at 20188 para. 25.

⁹⁷ *Id.* at 20189 para. 29.

⁹⁸ *In re Core Communications, Inc.*, 455 F.3d 267 (D.C. Cir. 2006).

that would occur if reciprocal compensation rates applied to one-way ISP-bound traffic.⁹⁹ The Court likewise rejected Core's contention that the rate cap was "unreasonably discriminatory," both because one-way ISP-bound calls were fundamentally different from other forms of traffic and because the mirroring rule ensures that "the caps apply to ISP-bound traffic only if an incumbent LEC offers to exchange all Section 251(b)(5) traffic at the same rate."¹⁰⁰ Finally, the Court concluded that the Commission's concern that the rate cap was necessary to prevent "regulatory arbitrage" and "distorted economic incentives" was reasonable.¹⁰¹

27. The policy justifications provided by the Commission in 2001 for the rules at issue here have not been questioned by any court. In addition, the policy justifications provided by the Commission for refusing to forbear from enforcement of these rules were upheld by the D.C. Circuit in 2006. We therefore disagree with parties who suggest that the Commission, in responding to the D.C. Circuit's remand in *WorldCom*, must offer detailed new justifications for the ISP intercarrier payment regime¹⁰²; We have already offered our justifications for that regime. Moreover, both the *Worldcom* remand and *Core* writ of mandamus focused on the issue of legal authority. We also reject arguments that the Commission unlawfully delegated its authority in the *ISP Remand Order* and arguments that the Commission addressed previously in the *Core Forbearance Order*.¹⁰³

28. The Commission long has stated its intention to move to a more unified intercarrier compensation regime. Progress is difficult due to competing priorities, such as competition, innovation, universal service, and other goals. The Commission recognized in 2001 that ISP-bound traffic represented a unique arbitrage problem that required immediate attention, based on the policy concerns discussed above. The Commission remains committed to moving towards a more unified intercarrier compensation regime, as evidenced by the Further Notice issued in conjunction with this order.

29. In sum, we maintain the \$.0007 cap and the mirroring rule pursuant to our section 201 authority. These rules shall remain in place until we adopt more comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform.

II. REPORT AND ORDER – REFORM OF HIGH-COST UNIVERSAL SERVICE SUPPORT

30. In this report and order, we address the "Recommended Decision" of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board), which was released on November 20, 2007.¹⁰⁴ As

⁹⁹ *Id.* at 278.

¹⁰⁰ *Id.* (citing *Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20187, para. 23).

¹⁰¹ *Id.* at 279.

¹⁰² See Letter from Michael B. Hazzard, Counsel to Core Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at 20–26 (May 14, 2008).

¹⁰³ See Core May 14, 2008 Response at 18 & n.8, 19–20. The Commission did not delegate its authority in the *ISP Remand Order*, but rather provided options that were not mandatory. See, e.g., *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9193, para. 89. Additionally, Core argues that the Commission provided no reasoned explanation for the growth cap and new markets rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* and never provided notice or an opportunity for comment on those specific rules. These rules, as applicable to all carriers, were forborne from in the *Core Forbearance Order*. See *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20186–87, paras. 20–21. As such, this argument is moot.

¹⁰⁴ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (JB 2007) (*Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*).

discussed below, we appreciate the great efforts expended by the Joint Board and its staff in considering how best to reform the current high-cost support mechanism and in developing its recommendations. We choose not to implement the recommendations contained in the *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* at this time, however.

A. Background

31. The 1996 Act amended the Communications Act of 1934 with respect to the provision of universal service.¹⁰⁵ In the 1996 Act, Congress sought to preserve and advance universal service, while at the same time opening all telecommunications markets to competition.¹⁰⁶ Section 254(b) of the Act directs the Joint Board and the Commission to base policies for the preservation and advancement of universal service on several general principles, plus other principles that the Commission may establish.¹⁰⁷ Among other things, section 254(b) directs that there should be specific, predictable, and sufficient federal and state universal service support mechanisms; quality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates; and access to advanced telecommunications and information services should be provided in all regions of the nation.¹⁰⁸

32. The Commission implemented the universal service provisions of the 1996 Act in the 1997 *Universal Service First Report and Order*.¹⁰⁹ Among other things, the Commission adopted rules to create explicit universal service support mechanisms for customers living in rural and high cost areas. Pursuant to section 254(e) of the Act, an entity must be designated as an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) to receive high-cost universal service support.¹¹⁰ ETCs may be incumbent LECs, or non-incumbent LECs, which are referred to as “competitive ETCs.”¹¹¹ Under the existing high-cost support distribution mechanism, incumbent LEC ETCs receive high-cost support for their intrastate services based on their costs.¹¹² Competitive ETCs receive support for each line based on the support the incumbent LEC would receive for that line in the service area.¹¹³ This support to competitive ETCs is known as “identical support.” The Commission’s universal service high-cost support rules do not distinguish between primary and secondary lines; therefore, high-cost support may go to a single end user

¹⁰⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254 (added by the 1996 Act).

¹⁰⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254.

¹⁰⁷ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b).

¹⁰⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1), (2), (5).

¹⁰⁹ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8780–88, paras. 1–20.

¹¹⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 254(e). The statutory requirements for ETC designation are set out in section 214(e) of the Act. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e).

¹¹¹ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (“A ‘competitive eligible telecommunications carrier’ is a carrier that meets the definition of ‘eligible telecommunications carrier’ below and does not meet the definition of an ‘incumbent local exchange carrier’ in § 51.5 of this chapter.”).

¹¹² Non-rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support for their intrastate supported services based on the forward-looking economic cost of providing the services. 47 C.F.R. § 54.309. Rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support based on their loop costs, as compared to a national average. 47 C.F.R. Part 36, sbpt. F; 47 C.F.R. § 54.305. Incumbent LEC ETCs that serve study areas with 50,000 or fewer lines receive support based on their local switching costs. 47 C.F.R. § 54.301. Additionally, incumbent LEC ETCs that are subject to price cap or rate-of-return regulation receive interstate access support based on their revenue requirements. 47 C.F.R. Part 54, sbpts. J, K.

¹¹³ 47 C.F.R. § 54.307(a).

for multiple connections.¹¹⁴ Further, the Commission's rules result in subsidizing multiple competitors in the same high-cost area.

33. High-cost support for competitive ETCs has grown rapidly over the last several years, placing extraordinary pressure on the federal universal service fund.¹¹⁵ In 2001, high-cost universal service support totaled approximately \$2.6 billion.¹¹⁶ By 2007, the amount of high-cost support had grown to approximately \$4.3 billion per year.¹¹⁷ In recent years, this growth has been due mostly to increased support provided to competitive ETCs, which receive high-cost support based on the per-line support that the incumbent LECs receive pursuant to the identical support rule. Competitive ETC support, in the six years from 2001 through 2007, has grown from under \$17 million to \$1.18 billion—an annual growth rate of over 100 percent.¹¹⁸ This “funded competition” has grown significantly in a large number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas; in some study areas more than 20 competitive ETCs currently receive support.¹¹⁹

34. To address the growth in competitive ETC support, the Joint Board recommended an interim cap on the amount of high-cost support available to competitive ETCs, pending comprehensive high-cost universal service reform.¹²⁰ The Commission adopted this recommendation on May 1, 2008.¹²¹

35. For the past several years, the Joint Board and the Commission have been exploring ways

¹¹⁴ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8828–30, paras. 94–96.

¹¹⁵ Support for the fund derives from assessments paid by providers of interstate telecommunications services and certain other providers of interstate telecommunications. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706. Fund contributors are permitted to, and almost always do, pass those assessments through to their end-user customers. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.712. Fund assessments paid by contributors are determined by applying the quarterly contribution factor to the contributors' contribution base revenues. In the second quarter of 2007, the contribution factor reached 11.7 percent, which is the highest level since its inception. See *Proposed Second Quarter 2007 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 5074, 5077 (OMD 2007). The contribution factor has since declined to 11.4 % in the fourth quarter of 2008. *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD 2008).

¹¹⁶ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 3.2 (2007) (2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-279226A1.pdf.

¹¹⁷ UNIVERSAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPANY, 2007 ANNUAL REPORT 43 (2007) (USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT), available at http://www.usac.org/_res/documents/about/pdf/usac-annual-report-2007.pdf.

¹¹⁸ 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 3.2; USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 45.

¹¹⁹ See USAC Quarterly Administrative Filings for 2008, Fourth Quarter (4Q) Appendices, HC03—Rural Study Areas with Competition—4Q2008, available at <http://www.usac.org/about/governance/fcc-filings/2008/Q4/HC03%20-%20Rural%20Study%20Areas%20with%20Competition%20-%204Q2008.xls> (showing 24 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom North (study area code 351167), and 22 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom Systems (study area code 351170)).

¹²⁰ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 8998, 8999–9001, paras. 4–7 (JB 2007) (*Interim Cap Recommended Decision*).

¹²¹ *Interim Cap Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 8999–9001, paras. 4–7; *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8834. As recommended by the Joint Board, the Commission capped competitive ETC support for each state. *Interim Cap Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 9002, para. 9; *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8846, paras. 26–28. The Commission set the cap at the level of support competitive ETCs were eligible to receive during March 2008. *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8850, para. 38.

to reform the Commission's high-cost program. In the most recent high-cost support comprehensive reform efforts, the Joint Board issued a recommended decision on November 20, 2007.¹²² The Universal Service Joint Board's recommended decision included several recommendations to address the growth in high cost support and to reform the high cost mechanisms.¹²³ Specifically, the Universal Service Joint Board recommended that the Commission should: (1) deliver high-cost support through a provider of last resort fund, a mobility fund, and a broadband fund;¹²⁴ (2) cap the high-cost fund at \$4.5 billion, the approximate level of 2007 high-cost support;¹²⁵ (3) reduce the existing funding mechanisms during a transition period;¹²⁶ (4) add broadband and mobility to the list of services eligible for support under section 254 of the Act;¹²⁷ (5) eliminate the identical support rule;¹²⁸ and (6) "explore the most appropriate auction mechanisms to determine high-cost universal service support."¹²⁹

36. On January 29, 2008, the Commission released the *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, seeking comment on the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*.¹³⁰ Pursuant to section 254(a)(2), the Commission "shall complete any proceeding to implement subsequent recommendations from any Joint Board on universal service within one year after receiving such recommendations."¹³¹

B. Discussion

37. We have carefully reviewed the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* and the comments that were filed in response to the Commission's *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*. We thank the Joint Board and its staff for their hard work in studying these difficult issues and in developing their recommendations. We choose not to implement these recommendations at this time, however.

III. FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

38. In enacting the Act, Congress sought to introduce competition into local telephone service, which traditionally was provided through regulated monopolies. Recognizing that in introducing such competition, it was threatening the implicit subsidy system that had traditionally supported universal service, it directed the Commission to reform its universal service program to make support explicit and sustainable in the face of developing competition.

¹²² *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd 20477.

¹²³ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 1.

¹²⁴ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20480–81, para. 11.

¹²⁵ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26.

¹²⁶ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 27.

¹²⁷ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20481–82, paras. 12–18.

¹²⁸ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20486, para. 35.

¹²⁹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, paras. 1–6.

¹³⁰ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1467 (2008) (*Identical Support NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1495 (2008) (*Reverse Auctions NPRM*); *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd 1531 (collectively the *High-Cost Reform NPRMs*).

¹³¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(a)(2).

39. The communications landscape has undergone many fundamental changes that were scarcely anticipated when the 1996 Act was adopted. The Internet was only briefly mentioned in the 1996 Act,¹³² but now has come into widespread use, with broadband Internet access service increasingly viewed as a necessity. Consistent with this trend, carriers are converting from circuit-switched networks to IP-based networks. These changes have benefited consumers and should be encouraged. Competition has resulted in dramatically lower prices for telephone service, and the introduction of innovative broadband products and services has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, work, and obtain our education, news, and entertainment. At the same time, however, these developments have challenged the outdated regulatory assumptions underlying our universal service and intercarrier compensation regimes, forcing us to reassess our existing approaches. We have seen unprecedented growth in the universal service fund, driven in significant part by increased support for competitive ETCs. The growth of competition also has eroded the universal service contribution base as the prices for interstate and international services have dropped. Finally, we have seen numerous competitors exploit arbitrage opportunities created by a patchwork of above-cost intercarrier compensation rates.

40. We seek comment today on three specific proposals. The first, attached as Appendix A, is the Chairman's Draft Proposal circulated to the Commission on October 15, 2008, which was placed on the Commission's agenda for a vote on November 4, 2008. This item subsequently was removed from the Agenda on November 3, 2008.¹³³ The second, attached as Appendix B, is a Narrow Universal Service Reform Proposal circulated to the Commission on October 31, 2008. The third, attached as Appendix C, is a draft Alternative Proposal first circulated by the Chairman on the evening of November 5, 2008. Appendix C incorporates changes proposed in the *ex parte* presentations attached as Appendix D. We note that members of industry, Congress, and the general public have urged the Commission to seek comment on these proposals.

41. We seek particular comment on two questions. First, should the additional cost standard utilized under § 252(d)(2) of the Act be: (i) the existing TELRIC standard; or (ii) the incremental cost standard described in the draft order? Second, should the terminating rate for all § 251(b)(5) traffic be set as: (i) a single, statewide rate; or (ii) a single rate per operating company?

IV. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A. *Ex Parte* Presentations

42. The rulemaking this Further Notice initiates shall be treated as a "permit-but-disclose" proceeding in accordance with the Commission's *ex parte* rules.¹³⁴ Persons making oral *ex parte* presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentations must contain summaries of the substance of the presentations and not merely a listing of the subjects discussed. More than a one or two sentence description of the views and arguments presented generally is required.¹³⁵ Other requirements pertaining to oral and written presentations are set forth in section 1.1206(b) of the Commission's rules.¹³⁶

B. Comment Filing Procedures

¹³² See 47 U.S.C. § 230; 47 U.S.C. § 157 nt.

¹³³ See http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-286532A1.pdf.

¹³⁴ 47 C.F.R. § 1.200 *et seq.*

¹³⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206(b)(2).

¹³⁶ 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206(b).

43. Pursuant to sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules,¹³⁷ interested parties may file comments and reply comments regarding the Further Notice on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this document. **All filings should refer to CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 96-98, 99-68, 99-200, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 03-109, 04-36, 05-337, and 06-122.** Comments may be filed using: (1) the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS); (2) the Federal Government's e-Rulemaking Portal, or; (3) by filing paper copies. *See* Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings, 63 FR 24121 (1998).

44. Electronic Filers: Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the ECFS: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/> or the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Filers should follow the instructions provided on the website for submitting comments.

45. ECFS filers must transmit one electronic copy of the comments for CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 96-98, 99-68, 99-200, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 03-109, 04-36, 05-337, and 06-122, respectively. In completing the transmittal screen, filers should include their full name, U.S. Postal Service mailing address, and the applicable docket number. Parties may also submit an electronic comment by Internet e-mail. To get filing instructions, filers should send an e-mail to ecfs@fcc.gov, and include the following words in the body of the message, "get form." A sample form and directions will be sent in response.

46. Paper Filers: Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and four copies of each filing. Filings can be sent by hand or messenger delivery, by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail (although we continue to experience delays in receiving U.S. Postal Service mail). All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Marlene H. Dortch, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554.

47. The Commission's contractor will receive hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary at 236 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Suite 110, Washington, D.C. 20002. The filing hours at this location are 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. All hand deliveries must be held together with rubber bands or fasteners. Any envelopes must be disposed of before entering the building.

48. Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9300 East Hampton Drive, Capitol Heights, MD 20743.

49. U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail should be addressed to 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington D.C. 20554. Parties should send a copy of their filings to Victoria Goldberg, Pricing Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A266, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, and to Jennifer McKee, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A423, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

50. Documents in CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 96-98, 99-68, 99-200, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 03-109, 04-36, 05-337, and 06-122 will be available for public inspection and copying during business hours at the FCC Reference Information Center, Portals II, 445 12th Street S.W., Room CY-A257, Washington, D.C. 20554. The documents may also be purchased from BCPI, telephone (202) 488-5300, facsimile (202) 488-5563, TTY (202) 488-5562, e-mail fcc@bcpiweb.com.

¹³⁷ 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.415, 1.419.

C. Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

51. As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980,¹³⁸ the Commission has prepared an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on small entities of the policies and rules addressed in this document. The IRFA is set forth as Appendix E. Written public comments are requested on this IRFA. Comments must be identified as responses to the IRFA and must be filed by the deadlines for comments on the Notice provided on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this Notice.

D. Paperwork Reduction Act

52. This document contains proposed new or modified information collection requirements. The Commission, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork burdens, invites the general public and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to comment on the information collection requirements contained in this document, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13. In addition, pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107-198,¹³⁹ we seek specific comment on how we might “further reduce the information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees.”

E. Accessible Formats

53. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice) or 202-418-0432 (TTY). Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations for filing comments (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by e-mail: FCC504@fcc.gov; phone: 202-418-0530 or TTY: 202-418-0432.

F. Congressional Review Act

54. The Commission will include a copy of this **ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING** in a report to be sent to Congress and the Government Accountability Office pursuant to the Congressional Review Act. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 801(a)(1)(A).

V. ORDERING CLAUSES

55. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that, pursuant to Sections 1–4, 201–209, 214, 218–220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, and 503 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and Sections 601 and 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151–154, 157 nt, 201–209, 214, 218–220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, 503, and sections 1.1, 1.411–1.429, and 1.1200–1.1216 of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.1, 1.411–1.429, 1.1200–1.1216, the ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING ARE ADOPTED.

56. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, in light of the opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in *WorldCom v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429 (D.C. Cir. 2002), we consider our obligations met from the writ of mandamus issued in *In re Core Communications, Inc. on Petition for Writ of Mandamus to the Federal Communications Commission*, D.C. Cir. No. 07-1446 (decided July 8, 2008).

¹³⁸ *See* 5 U.S.C. § 603.

¹³⁹ *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(4).

57. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING SHALL BECOME EFFECTIVE on the date of publication of the text of a summary thereof in the Federal Register, pursuant to 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.4, 1.13.

58. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER SHALL BE EFFECTIVE upon release.

59. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Commission's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, SHALL SEND a copy of this ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING, including the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary

APPENDIX A

Chairman’s Draft Proposal

In the Matter of)	
)	
High-Cost Universal Service Support	)	WC Docket No. 05-337
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service	)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Lifeline and Link Up	)	WC Docket No. 03-109
)	
Universal Service Contribution Methodology	)	WC Docket No. 06-122
)	
Implementation of the Local Competition	)	CC Docket No. 96-98
Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996)	
)	
Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation	)	CC Docket No. 01-92
Regime)	
)	
Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic	)	CC Docket No. 99-68
)	
IP-Enabled Services	)	WC Docket No. 04-36
)	
Numbering Resource Optimization	)	CC Docket No. 99-200

**ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER
AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING**

Adopted: "Insert Adopted Date"

Released: "Insert Release Date"

Comment Date: [XX days after date of publication in the Federal Register]

Reply Comment Date: [XX days after date of publication in the Federal Register]

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In enacting the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act),¹ Congress sought to introduce competition into local telephone service, which traditionally was provided through regulated monopolies. Recognizing that in introducing such competition, it was threatening the implicit subsidy system that had traditionally supported universal service, it directed the Commission to reform its universal service program to make support explicit and sustainable in the face of developing competition.

2. For the most part, Congress's vision has been realized. Competition in local telephone markets has thrived. At the same time, the communications landscape has undergone many fundamental changes that were scarcely anticipated when the 1996 Act was adopted. The Internet was only briefly mentioned in the 1996 Act,² but now has come into widespread use, with broadband Internet access service increasingly viewed as a necessity. Consistent with this trend, carriers are converting from circuit-switched networks to Internet Protocol (IP)-based networks. These changes have benefited consumers and should be encouraged. Competition has resulted in dramatically lower prices for telephone service, and the introduction of innovative broadband products and services has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, work, and obtain our education, news, and entertainment. At the same time, however, these developments have challenged the outdated regulatory assumptions underlying our universal service and intercarrier compensation regimes, forcing us to reassess our existing approaches. We have seen unprecedented growth in the universal service fund, driven in significant part by increased support for competitive eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs). The growth of competition also has eroded the universal service contribution base as the prices for interstate and international services have

¹ Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996) (1996 Act).

² See 47 U.S.C. § 230; 47 U.S.C. § 157 nt.

dropped. Finally, we have seen numerous competitors exploit arbitrage opportunities created by a patchwork of above-cost intercarrier compensation rates. Although the Commission has attempted to address many of these issues on a case-by-case basis, it has become increasingly clear that piecemeal efforts to respond to these developments are inadequate—only comprehensive reform can address the fundamental challenges that they present.³

3. Today we adopt a comprehensive approach to addressing these difficult, but critical issues. First, we spur widespread deployment of broadband by ensuring that carriers receiving universal service high-cost support offer broadband throughout their service areas. Second, we help Lifeline/Link Up customers participate in this new broadband world by creating a pilot program to provide discounted access to broadband services. Third, we broaden and stabilize our universal service contribution base through equitable and non-discriminatory contributions. Fourth, having placed our universal service fund on solid footing, we now take the long-overdue step of moving toward uniform intercarrier compensation rates that provide efficient incentives for the investment in and use of broadband networks. Finally, our approach minimizes disruptions to carriers and safeguards universal service for consumers by adopting sensible transition plans and ensuring that universal service is used to support service in high-cost areas, not carriers' dividends.

II. REFORM OF HIGH-COST UNIVERSAL SERVICE SUPPORT

4. Today we take a monumental step toward our goal of ensuring that broadband is available to all Americans. We do this by requiring that all recipients of high-cost support offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within their supported areas as a condition of receiving future support. Taking this action will promote the deployment of broadband Internet access service to all areas of the nation, including high-cost, rural, and insular areas where customers may not currently have access to such services. In particular, as a condition of receiving continued high-cost support, we will require all incumbent local exchange carriers (LECs) to commit to offer broadband Internet access service within five years to all customers in study areas where the incumbent LECs receive high-cost support. Competitive eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) likewise will be required to commit to offer broadband Internet access services to all customers in their service areas within five years to continue to receive high-cost support, which will be distributed based on the competitive ETCs' own costs. Competitive ETCs that do not make this commitment will not be eligible to receive high-cost support; incumbent LECs that do not make this commitment will gradually lose their high-cost support, as this support will be awarded via reverse auction to an ETC who will meet carrier of last resort obligations and will commit to offering broadband Internet access to all customers in the entire study area within ten years. With these reforms, we take great strides toward ensuring that all Americans, regardless of where they live, will have broadband Internet access service available to them, without increasing the size of the high-cost fund.

³ We thus conclude that there is a compelling need to proceed with comprehensive reform at this time, as we describe below. *See, e.g., infra* Parts II.A, III.A, IV.A, and V.B. Given that we have notice and an extensive record, going back in some cases seven years, we are unpersuaded by commenters proposing that we delay reform to seek further comment, or that we issue a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on questions beyond those raised in Part VI. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Ray Baum, Chairman, NARUC Communications Committee, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, et al., FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 80-286, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 04-32, 06-122, WT Docket No. 05-194 at 2 (filed Oct. 21, 2008) (NARUC Oct. 21, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Jeffery S. Lanning, Embarq, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, et al., FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (Embarq Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Eric N. Einhorn, Windstream, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 07-135, 08-152 at 1 (filed October 27, 2008) (Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

A. Background

5. The 1996 Act amended the Communications Act of 1934 (the Act) with respect to the provision of universal service.⁴ Congress sought to preserve and advance universal service, while at the same time opening all telecommunications markets to competition.⁵ Section 254(b) of the Act directs the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) and the Commission to base policies for the preservation and advancement of universal service on several general principles, plus other principles that the Commission may establish.⁶ Among other things, section 254(b) directs that there should be specific, predictable, and sufficient federal and state universal service support mechanisms; quality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates; and access to advanced telecommunications and information services should be provided in all regions of the nation.⁷

6. The Commission implemented the universal service provisions of the 1996 Act in the 1997 *Universal Service First Report and Order*.⁸ In considering methods to determine universal service support in rural, insular, and high-cost areas, the Commission examined the use of competitive bidding, and identified several advantages of competitive bidding as a method for allocating high-cost universal service support.⁹ First, the Commission found that “a compelling reason to use competitive bidding is its potential as a market-based approach to determining universal service support, if any, for any given area.”¹⁰ Second, “by encouraging more efficient carriers to submit bids reflecting their lower costs, another advantage of a properly structured competitive bidding system would be its ability to reduce the amount of support needed for universal service.”¹¹ Despite these advantages, the Commission determined that the record at the time was insufficient to support adoption of a competitive bidding mechanism.¹² Moreover, the Commission found it unlikely that competitive bidding mechanisms would be useful at that time because there likely would be no competition in a significant number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas in the near future.¹³ The Commission, therefore, declined to adopt a competitive bidding mechanism at that time, but found that competitive bidding warranted further consideration as a potential

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254 (added by the 1996 Act).

⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254.

⁶ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b).

⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1), (2), (5).

⁸ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, 8780–88, paras. 1–20 (1997) (*Universal Service First Report and Order*) (subsequent history omitted).

⁹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320.

¹⁰ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320 (agreeing with the Joint Board). The Commission also agreed with the Joint Board that “competitive bidding is consistent with section 254, and comports with the intent of the 1996 Act to rely on market forces and to minimize regulation.” *Id.* at 8951, para. 325.

¹¹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320 (“In that regard, the bidding process should also capture the efficiency gains from new technologies or improved productivity, converting them into cost savings for universal service.”).

¹² See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8949–50, paras. 322–23. Only GTE had proposed a detailed competitive bidding plan, which it characterized as an outline rather than a final proposal. See GTE’s Comments in Response to Questions, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. 1 (filed Aug. 2, 1996).

¹³ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8950, para. 324.

mechanism for determining levels of high-cost support in the future.¹⁴

7. Pursuant to section 254(e) of the Act, an entity must be designated as an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) to receive high-cost universal service support.¹⁵ ETCs may be incumbent LECs, or non-incumbent LECs, which are referred to as “competitive ETCs.”¹⁶ Under the existing high-cost support distribution mechanism, incumbent LEC ETCs receive high-cost support for their intrastate services based on their costs.¹⁷ Competitive ETCs, on the other hand, receive support for each of their lines based on the per-line support the incumbent LEC receives in the service area.¹⁸ This support to competitive ETCs is known as “identical support.” The Commission’s universal service high-cost support rules do not distinguish between primary and secondary lines; therefore, high-cost support may go to a single end user for multiple connections.¹⁹ Further, the Commission’s rules may result in multiple competitors in the same high-cost area receiving identical per-line support.

8. High-cost support for competitive ETCs has grown rapidly over the last several years, which has placed extraordinary pressure on the federal universal service fund.²⁰ In 2001, high-cost universal service support totaled approximately \$2.6 billion.²¹ By 2007, the amount of high-cost support had grown to approximately \$4.3 billion per year.²² In recent years, this growth has been due mostly to increased support provided to competitive ETCs, which pursuant to the identical support rule receive

¹⁴ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320.

¹⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(e). The statutory requirements for ETC designation are set out in section 214(e) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (Communications Act or Act). 47 U.S.C. § 214(e).

¹⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (“A ‘competitive eligible telecommunications carrier’ is a carrier that meets the definition of ‘eligible telecommunications carrier’ below and does not meet the definition of an ‘incumbent local exchange carrier’ in § 51.5 of this chapter.”).

¹⁷ Non-rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support for their intrastate supported services based on the forward-looking economic cost of providing the services. 47 C.F.R. § 54.309. Rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support based on their loop costs, as compared to a national average. 47 C.F.R. Part 36, sbpt. F; 47 C.F.R. § 54.305. Incumbent LEC ETCs that serve study areas with 50,000 or fewer lines receive support based on their local switching costs. 47 C.F.R. § 54.301. Additionally, incumbent LEC ETCs that are subject to price cap or rate-of-return regulation receive interstate access support based on their revenue requirements. 47 C.F.R. Part 54, sbpts. J, K.

¹⁸ 47 C.F.R. § 54.307(a).

¹⁹ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8828–30, paras. 94–96.

²⁰ Support for the fund derives from assessments paid by providers of interstate telecommunications services and certain other providers of interstate telecommunications. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706. Fund contributors are permitted to, and almost always do, pass those assessments through to their end-user customers. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.712. Fund assessments paid by contributors are determined by applying the quarterly contribution factor to the contributors’ contribution base revenues. In the second quarter of 2007, the contribution factor reached 11.7%, which is the highest level since its inception. See *Proposed Second Quarter 2007 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 5074, 5077 (OMD 2007). The contribution factor has since declined to 11.4% in the fourth quarter of 2008. *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD 2008).

²¹ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 3.2 (2007) (2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-279226A1.pdf.

²² UNIVERSAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPANY, 2007 ANNUAL REPORT 43 (2007) (USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT), available at <http://www.usac.org/res/documents/about/pdf/usac-annual-report-2007.pdf>.

high-cost support based on the incumbent LEC's per-line support. Competitive ETC support, in the six years from 2001 through 2007, has grown from under \$17 million to \$1.18 billion—an annual growth rate of over 100 percent.²³ This “funded competition” has grown significantly in a large number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas; in some study areas, more than 20 competitive ETCs currently receive support.²⁴

9. To address the growth in competitive ETC support, the Joint Board recommended an interim cap on the amount of high-cost support available to competitive ETCs, pending comprehensive high-cost universal service reform. The Commission adopted this recommendation in 2008.²⁵

10. For the past several years, the Joint Board and the Commission have been exploring ways to reform the Commission's high-cost program. In the most recent high-cost support comprehensive reform efforts, the Joint Board issued a recommended decision on November 20, 2007.²⁶ The Joint Board recommended that the Commission address reforms to the high-cost program and make “fundamental revisions in the structure of existing Universal Service mechanisms.”²⁷ Specifically, the Joint Board recommended that the Commission should: (1) deliver high-cost support through a provider of last resort fund, a mobility fund, and a broadband fund²⁸; (2) cap the high-cost fund at \$4.5 billion, the approximate level of 2007 high-cost support²⁹; (3) reduce the existing funding mechanisms during a transition period³⁰; (4) add broadband and mobility to the list of services eligible for support under section 254 of the Act³¹; (5) eliminate the identical support rule³²; and (6) “explore the most appropriate auction mechanisms to determine high-cost universal service support.”³³

²³ 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 3.2; USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 45.

²⁴ See USAC Quarterly Administrative Filings for 2008, Fourth Quarter (4Q) Appendices, HC03—Rural Study Areas with Competition—4Q2008, available at <http://www.usac.org/about/governance/fcc-filings/2008/Q4/HC03%20-%20Rural%20Study%20Areas%20with%20Competition%20-%204Q2008.xls> (showing 24 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom North (study area code 351167), and 22 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom Systems (study area code 351170)).

²⁵ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 8998, 8999–9001, paras. 4–7 (JB 2007) (*Interim Cap Recommended Decision*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 8834 (2008) (*Interim Cap Order*). As recommended by the Joint Board, the Commission capped competitive ETC support for each state. *Interim Cap Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 9002, para. 9; *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8846, paras. 26–28. The Commission set the cap at the level of support competitive ETCs were eligible to receive during March 2008. *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8850, para. 38.

²⁶ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (JB 2007) (*Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*).

²⁷ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 1.

²⁸ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20480–81, para. 11.

²⁹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26.

³⁰ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 27.

³¹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20481–82, paras. 12–18.

³² *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20486, para. 35.

³³ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, paras. 1–6.

11. On January 29, 2008, the Commission released three notices of proposed rulemaking addressing proposals for comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service support.³⁴ In the *Identical Support NPRM*, the Commission sought comment on the Commission's rules governing the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to competitive ETCs.³⁵ It tentatively concluded that the Commission should eliminate the identical support rule.³⁶ The Commission also tentatively concluded that support to a competitive ETC should be based on the competitive ETC's own costs of providing the supported services, and it sought comment on how the support should be calculated, the reporting obligations to be applied, and whether the Commission should cap such support at the level of the incumbent LEC's support.³⁷ In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, the Commission tentatively concluded that reverse auctions offer several potential advantages over current high-cost mechanisms and sought comment on whether they should be used as the disbursement mechanism to determine the amount of high-cost universal service support for ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas, and it sought comment on how to implement reverse auctions for this purpose.³⁸ The Commission also sought comment on a number of specific issues regarding auctions and auction design.³⁹ The Commission also released the *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, seeking comment on the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* and incorporating by reference the *Identical Support NPRM* and the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*.⁴⁰ The discussion that follows represents our response to the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, pursuant to section 254(a)(2).⁴¹

B. Discussion

12. Today we comprehensively reform the high-cost universal service support mechanism, and take steps to ensure that broadband Internet access service is deployed quickly to all areas of the country, including rural and insular areas. The steps we take today will provide certainty to providers as to the levels of support available to them in providing supported services and broadband Internet access service to all customers within the supported areas. This will assist providers in creating business plans to deploy services in currently unserved areas and will ensure efficiency in the deployment of services to these areas. Specifically, we are defining the level of high-cost support available to providers that commit to offer broadband to all customers within a service area. Support in incumbent LEC service areas will be

³⁴ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1467 (2008) (*Identical Support NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1495 (2008) (*Reverse Auctions NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1531 (2008) (*Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*) (collectively the *High-Cost Reform NPRMs*).

³⁵ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1468, para. 1.

³⁶ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1468, para. 1.

³⁷ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1473–78, paras. 12–25.

³⁸ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1495, para. 1.

³⁹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500–12, paras. 10–50.

⁴⁰ *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1531, para. 1.

⁴¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(a)(2). Pursuant to that section, the Commission shall complete any proceeding to implement a Joint Board recommendation within one year after receiving it. The Commission has acted on the *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* prior to the November 20, 2008 one-year statutory deadline.

set at the total amount of high-cost support disbursed to the incumbent LEC ETC in December 2008 on an annualized basis. Incumbent LEC ETCs will continue to receive this level of support if they commit to offer broadband Internet access services to all customers within the service area within five years. If an incumbent LEC does not make this broadband commitment for a particular service area, the support will be transitioned to the winning bidder of a reverse auction that will commit to deploy broadband throughout the service area within ten years, and to take on carrier of last resort obligations. Competitive ETCs will receive high-cost support, based on their own costs as compared to the relevant high-cost support thresholds, so long as they, too, commit to offer broadband Internet access service to all customers in their service areas within five years. While ensuring that broadband Internet access service is made available to customers in rural and high-cost areas, we also cap the overall size of the high-cost mechanism to protect customers in all areas of the nation from increasing universal service contribution assessments.

13. The requirements that we adopt for disbursement of high-cost universal service support do not apply to providers operating in Alaska, Hawaii, or any U.S. Territories and possessions.⁴² We find that these areas have very different attributes and related cost issues than do the continental states.⁴³ For this reason, we are exempting providers in Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. Territories or possessions from the high-cost support requirements and rules adopted herein, and we will address them in a subsequent proceeding.⁴⁴

1. Controlling the Growth of the High-Cost Fund

14. Consistent with the recommendation of the Joint Board, we cap the total amount of high-

⁴² Providers operating in U.S. Territories and possessions, such as Puerto Rico and Guam, are not subject to the high-cost support requirements adopted in this order. See Letter from Earl Comstock, Comstock Consulting LLC, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-377 at 1 (dated Oct. 15, 2008) (asking the Commission to recognize the higher costs and lower income levels in Puerto Rico in any reform efforts it may take); Letter from Eric N. Votaw, Vice President-Marketing & Regulatory, GTA Telecom, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (asking the Commission to recognize that Guam’s costs are higher than the continental United States and that Guam should be treated separately, along with Alaska and Hawaii, for reform purposes).

⁴³ E.g., *Verizon Commc’ns, Inc., Transferor, and América Móvil, S.A. de C.V., Transferee*, WT Docket No. 06-113, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Declaratory Ruling, 22 FCC Rcd 6195, 6211, para. 36 (2007) (*Verizon/América Móvil Transfer Order*) (describing “difficult to serve terrain and dramatic urban/rural differences” in Puerto Rico); *Integration of Rates and Services for Provision of Communications by Authorized Common Carriers between the Contiguous States and Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands*, CC Docket No. 83-1376, Supplemental Order Inviting Comments, 4 FCC Rcd 395, 396, paras. 7–8 (1989) (*Rates and Services Integration Order*) (describing the unique market conditions and structure in Alaska); Letter from Brita D. Strandberg, Counsel for General Communication, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 2 (Oct. 3, 2008) (discussing Alaska’s particular service needs and network architecture).

⁴⁴ Cf. *The Establishment of Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service at the 17.3-17.7 GHz Frequency Band and at the 17.7-17.8 GHz Frequency Band Internationally, and at the 24.75-25.25 GHz Frequency Band for Fixed Satellite Services Providing Feeder Links to the Broadcasting-Satellite Service and for the Satellite Services Operating Bi-directionally in the 17.3-17.8 GHz Frequency Band*, IB Docket No. 06-123, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 8842, 8860, para. 47 (2007) (*Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service Order*) (“The Commission is committed to establishing policies and rules that will promote service to all regions in the United States, particularly to traditionally underserved areas, such as Alaska and Hawaii, and other remote areas.”).

cost universal service support.⁴⁵ As the Joint Board recognized, high-cost support currently accounts for more than half of total federal universal service support.⁴⁶ Since 1997, when the Commission implemented the universal service requirements of section 254 of the Act, high-cost support has increased by 240 percent.⁴⁷ Although, earlier this year, we took an initial step to address high-cost fund growth by capping support to competitive ETCs, that cap was an interim, emergency measure, pending a closer examination of the steps necessary to achieve comprehensive reform.⁴⁸ Many commenters have urged the Commission to cap the overall amount of high-cost support, rather than limiting the cap only to competitive ETCs.⁴⁹ Although other commenters oppose the adoption of a cap on the total amount of high-cost support or on the amount of support available to incumbent LEC ETCs,⁵⁰ we find that, to manage the high-cost support mechanism effectively, we must control its growth, and that capping support in the manner discussed below will provide specific, predictable, and sufficient support to preserve and advance universal service.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, 20481, 20484, paras. 2, 11, 26.

⁴⁶ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26. In 2007, total federal universal service disbursements amounted to approximately \$6.95 billion. Of that amount, approximately \$4.29 billion, 62%, was disbursed as high-cost support. USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 51.

⁴⁷ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at 3-14, tbl. 3.1 (high-cost support in 1997 was approximately \$1.26 billion, compared with approximately \$4.29 billion in 2007). Even taking into account the fact that additional interstate support mechanisms, Interstate Access Support (IAS) and Interstate Common Line Support (ICLS), were created in 2000 and 2001, respectively, high-cost support has still increased by more than 45%, from approximately \$2.94 billion in 2002 to its current level of approximately \$4.29 billion. *Id.*

⁴⁸ See *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8834, para. 1.

⁴⁹ See CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 18 (existing high-cost support mechanisms should be frozen at the study area level or on a statewide basis to provide funding certainty and encourage investment); Chinook *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments, Attach. at 5-6 (any cap on universal service support should apply to all ETCs, including incumbent LECs); Connecticut Dep't of Pub. Util. Control *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5 (supporting a cap on high-cost support set at the 2007 level); Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2 (supporting the recommendation to cap the overall size of the high-cost fund); Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (an overall cap should be applied to control the size of the high-cost mechanism); NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19 (the Joint Board's proposal to cap the overall size of the high-cost mechanism is "a welcome dose of fiscal responsibility"); National Consumer Law Center *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 2-3 (supporting the Joint Board's proposal to cap the overall high-cost fund); Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2-3, 6-9 (Commission should cap the overall high-cost fund).

⁵⁰ See Frontier *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 6-7; JSI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 6; Montana Telecommunications Ass'n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21-22; NECA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 17-20; TCA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10-11; TDS *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8-9; Missouri Small Telephone Company Group (MSTC) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5-7; Utah Rural Telecom Ass'n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5.

⁵¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5); see CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 18; Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3, 11; Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8-9; National Consumer Law Center *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 2; NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4-6; New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 52-54; Oregon PUC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2-3; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7; New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 64-65; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 8-9; State Commissioners *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 2; Texas Office of Public Utility Counsel

(continued....)

15. We find it necessary to cap the high-cost mechanism as a first step toward fulfilling our statutory obligation to create specific, predictable and sufficient universal service support mechanisms.⁵² As the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held in *Alenco*: “[t]he agency’s broad discretion to provide sufficient universal service funding includes the decision to impose cost controls to avoid excessive expenditures that will detract from universal service.”⁵³ The *Alenco* court also found that “excessive funding may itself violate the sufficiency requirements,”⁵⁴ and the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit has stated that “excessive subsidization arguably may affect the affordability of telecommunications services, thus violating the principle in [section] 254(b)(1).”⁵⁵ Given the excessive growth in high-cost support, we find it necessary to cap this mechanism to ensure that unsubsidized users who contribute to the fund are not harmed by excessive subsidization.

16. Therefore, we take several steps to limit the growth of high-cost support. First, we cap the overall high-cost fund at the total amount of high-cost support disbursed by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) for December 2008 on an annualized basis, net of any prior or past period adjustments. Although we agree with the Joint Board’s recommendation to cap the high-cost mechanism, rather than set such a cap at the 2007 level of high-cost support as the Joint Board recommended, we find it is more appropriate to set the cap at the level of support disbursed by USAC in December 2008 on an annualized basis. Furthermore, we freeze each incumbent LEC ETC’s individual, annual high-cost support at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, that the ETC received in December 2008 annualized, net of any prior or past period adjustments, on a study area or service area basis.⁵⁶

17. As discussed below, we also eliminate the identical support rule for competitive ETCs. Competitive ETCs’ support levels will be based on their costs as compared to the relevant high-cost support mechanism benchmarks, and frozen at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, that the competitive ETC received in 2008 on a study area basis.⁵⁷

18. Consistent with section 254(b)(5) of the Act, we find that capping high-cost support in this manner will enable ETCs to predict the specific level of support that they will receive should they

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Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM Reply at 2; *Virgin Mobile High-Cost Reform NPRMs Reply* at 3–4. The Commission has already implemented caps on the schools and libraries and rural health care universal service mechanisms. *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9054, 9140, paras. 529, 704 (establishing a \$2.25 billion annual cap for the schools and libraries mechanism and a \$400 million annual cap for the rural health care mechanism); *see also* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.507(a), 54.623(a).

⁵² 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5); *see also Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9054, 9140, paras. 529, 704.

⁵³ *Alenco Commc’ns, Inc. v. FCC*, 201 F.3d 608, 620–21 (5th Cir. 2000) (*Alenco*).

⁵⁴ *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620.

⁵⁵ *Qwest Commc’ns Int’l Inc. v. FCC*, 398 F.3d 1222, 1234 (10th Cir. 2005).

⁵⁶ Pursuant to section 214(e)(5) of the Act, the term “service area” is used to refer to the geographic area established by a state commission or this Commission for the purpose of determining universal service obligations and support mechanisms. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(5). For a rural telephone company, section 214(e)(5) states that “service area” shall mean the rural company’s “study area” unless and until the Commission and the states establish a different definition of service area for such company. *Id.* In this order, we use the terms “service area” and “study area” interchangeably. Nothing in this order is meant to change any redefinitions of service area previously established by the Commission and/or the state commissions.

⁵⁷ *See infra* paras. 53–56.

choose to participate in the program.⁵⁸ To the extent that an incumbent LEC ETC determines that it cannot offer broadband Internet access service throughout its service area at the specified level of support, as discussed below, that particular study area will be deemed an “Unserved Study Area,” and we will conduct a reverse auction to determine the entity capable of meeting our service requirements and the amount of support to provide for that area. In fact, through the reverse auction process, it will be the bidders, not the Commission, that determine how much support they would need to offer service. Finally, as discussed below, if the reverse auction process does not yield a winning bidder, the Commission will reexamine whether it needs to take further action with regard to this situation, should it arise.

2. Conditioning Support on Offering Broadband Internet Access Service

19. The broadband era is here. Those of us who have broadband Internet access service use it to communicate, to work, to get vital information, to be educated, and to be entertained. Broadband Internet access service—a novelty at the time of the passage of the 1996 Act—is now mainstream. Yet some Americans still lack access to this vital service, and as Commissioner Copps has said, “does America at the beginning of the 21st century become technologically stagnant or the leader of the Digital Age? For me, the answer to that question depends in some significant measure upon whether we succeed in bringing high-speed, high-value broadband and an open Internet to all Americans . . . rural as well as urban folks”⁵⁹

20. Today, we modify our high-cost support system fundamentally to spur deployment and ensure that all Americans have access to broadband. Specifically, we make offering broadband Internet access service a condition of being eligible to receive high-cost support. As we explain below, we will require all incumbent LECs to certify whether or not they will commit to offering broadband Internet access throughout their supported study areas in five years.⁶⁰ Those who make that commitment will continue to receive their current levels of support. Existing competitive ETCs likewise will have the opportunity to commit to offering broadband Internet access service throughout their supported service areas, and will be eligible to receive high-cost support based on their actual costs. Auction winners, as well, must commit to offering broadband Internet access service throughout their supported areas as a

⁵⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5).

⁵⁹ Remarks of Commissioner Michael J. Copps, Pike & Fischer’s Broadband Policy Summit IV, Washington, DC (June 12, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-282890A1.pdf.

⁶⁰ See *supra* note 56 (explaining use of the terms “study area” and “service area” in this order). We understand the concern of commenters who point out the need for more granular information on broadband availability. See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20481, para. 13; see also *Comcast High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 13–16; *GCI High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 34–36; *NCTA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 20; *New Jersey Rate Counsel High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 21–22; *New York State PSC Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM Comments* at 1, 5–6; *TCA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 11–12; *USTelecom High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 36; *Embarq High-Cost Reform NPRMs Reply* at 8–10. The Commission has recently undertaken a major effort to gather more specific and granular data about broadband subscribership and availability. See *Development of Nationwide Broadband Data to Evaluate Reasonable and Timely Deployment of Advanced Services to All Americans, Improvement of Wireless Broadband Subscribership Data, and Development of Data on Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Subscribership*, WC Docket No. 07-38, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 9691, 9708–09, paras. 34–35 (2008) (*Broadband Data Gathering Order*) (seeking comment on, among other things, adopting a national broadband mapping program). We believe our refined broadband data gathering program will help all of us better assess where our broadband availability needs are greatest. For purposes of implementing the broadband deployment program of this order, we ask incumbent LECs to identify where they will and will not commit to broadband availability, thus identifying where we need to proceed to a reverse auction.

condition of receiving even initial support. In other words, all ETCs are subject to the same basic obligation—to offer broadband Internet access throughout their supported service areas. We also explain the obligations related to this condition, including carrier-of-last-resort-type obligations.

21. We believe that imposing this condition on the receipt of high-cost support is fully consistent with and indeed promotes Congress’s overall objectives as stated in section 254 of the Communications Act and section 706 of the 1996 Act.⁶¹ Section 254(b)(2) of the Act instructs the Commission to base policies for the advancement of universal service on the principle that “[a]ccess to *advanced telecommunications and information services* should be provided in all regions of the Nation.”⁶² Similarly, section 254(b)(3) states that “[c]onsumers . . . in rural, insular, and high-cost areas, should have access to . . . *advanced telecommunications and information services*, that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates charged for similar services in urban areas.”⁶³ Indeed, Congress even established the definition of universal service as “an *evolving* level of telecommunications services . . . taking into account advances in telecommunications and information technologies and services.”⁶⁴ We believe that imposing a broadband condition on receipt of high-cost support advances the general purposes of section 254 of the Act as just described and also advances Congress’s objective stated in section 706 of the 1996 Act to “encourage the deployment on a reasonable and timely basis of advanced telecommunications capability to all Americans.”⁶⁵ We also see no reason why conditioning the receipt of high-cost support on offering broadband Internet access service is not permissible under the Commission’s authority to promulgate general rules related to universal service.⁶⁶

22. *Broadband Internet Access As a Condition to Receiving High-Cost Support.* Consistent

⁶¹ 47 U.S.C. §§ 157 nt, 254. Some commenters suggest that adding broadband Internet access service to the list of “supported services” would be inconsistent with section 254(c)(1) of the Act because broadband Internet access service is an information service, not a telecommunications service. See SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30–31; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 31–32; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 42–43; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 16–17. Using the universal service program to ensure universal broadband availability, however, is fully consistent with the statute as explained above. In addition, section 254(c)(2) provides that “[t]he Joint Board may, from time to time, recommend to the Commission modifications in the definition of the services that are supported by Federal universal service support mechanisms.” 47 U.S.C. § 254(c)(2). The Joint Board did just that in the *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, in which it recommended that we add broadband Internet access service to the list of services eligible for support under section 254. See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20491, para. 56. In this order, we achieve the Joint Board’s goal by conditioning receipt of federal high-cost support on an ETC’s commitment to offer broadband Internet access service throughout its service area, but we do not add broadband Internet access service to the list of universal service supported services.

⁶² 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(2) (emphasis added).

⁶³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3) (emphasis added).

⁶⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254(c)(1) (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ 47 U.S.C. §§ 157 nt, 254.

⁶⁶ The Commission has previously considered imposing conditions on the receipt of high-cost support. See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8831, para. 98. And of course, today’s recipients of high-cost support must comply with many obligations that are not explicitly spelled out in the statute. For example, to be designated as an ETC, an applicant must demonstrate that it has back-up power. See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 20 FCC Rcd 6371, 6382, para. 25 (2005) (*ETC Designation Order*).

with the objectives of sections 254 and 706 as just described, all ETCs must offer broadband Internet access service to all customers in their supported service areas as a condition of receiving universal service high-cost support. Since the Commission adopted universal service rules in response to the 1996 Act, broadband Internet access service has evolved into a critical service for American consumers. The importance of this evolution is reflected in Congress's recent finding that "[t]he deployment and adoption of broadband technology has resulted in enhanced economic development and public safety for communities across the Nation, improved health care and education opportunities, and a better quality of life for all Americans, [and] [c]ontinued progress in the deployment and adoption of broadband technology is vital to ensuring that our Nation remains competitive and continues to create business and job growth."⁶⁷ The majority of consumers who use broadband Internet access service today rely on it for telework, access to banking services, interaction with government, entertainment, shopping, access to news and other information, and so many other uses.⁶⁸ Broadband Internet access plays a special role in rural areas, reducing the burdens of distance.⁶⁹ For example, high-speed connections to the Internet allow children in rural areas to have access to the same information as school children in urban areas. Telemedicine networks made possible by broadband Internet access service also save lives and improve the standard of healthcare in sparsely populated, rural areas that may lack access to the breadth of medical expertise and advanced medical technologies available in other areas.⁷⁰ Broadband service also enables the sharing of critical, time-sensitive information with first responders, government officials, and health care providers, thereby improving the government's ability to provide a comprehensive and cohesive response to a public health crisis in coordination.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Broadband Data Improvement Act, Pub. L. No. 100-385, 122 Stat. 4096, § 102(1)–(2) (2008).

⁶⁸ A recent survey finds that, compared to Internet users with dial-up service at home, those with broadband service at home are far more likely to engage in 14 different types of Internet-related activities on a typical day. These activities include using an online search engine, checking for weather reports, getting news, visiting a state or local government Web site, obtaining job information, watching a video, and downloading a podcast. The daily use of a search engine, for example, is reported by 57% of the broadband users as compared to only 26% of the dial-up users. See JOHN B. HERRIGAN, PEW INTERNET & AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT, HOME BROADBAND ADOPTION 2008 at 19 (2008) (2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY), available at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband_2008.pdf.

⁶⁹ For example, the California Broadband Task Force Report finds broadband service critical to expanding job opportunities for rural residents. It observes, for example, that broadband has facilitated the use of "homeshoring," or the use of home-based workers for providing customer service, instead of requiring employees to adhere to a strict work schedule at a centralized location. This report also finds that broadband offers farmers better access to market information and allows them to expand their potential customer base. See FINAL REPORT OF THE CALIFORNIA BROADBAND TASK FORCE at 13 (Jan. 2008) (CALIFORNIA 2008 BROADBAND REPORT), available at <http://www.calink.ca.gov/taskforcereport/>.

⁷⁰ See *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60, Order, 21 FCC Rcd 11111, 11112, para. 5 (2006); see also SUSANNAH FOX, PEW INTERNET & AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT, THE ENGAGED E-PATIENT POPULATION at 1 (2008) (finding that home broadband users are twice as likely as home dial-up users to do health research on a typical day), available at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Health_Aug08.pdf.

⁷¹ A recent report to Congress concludes that "[m]odern broadband communications networks and applications present an enormous opportunity to radically improve the manner in which emergency information is shared by health officials. Broadband services enable bandwidth intensive information such as video, pictures, and graphics to be transmitted faster and in a more reliable and secure manner." JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITIES OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH CARE FACILITIES, REPORT TO CONGRESS 2 (Feb. 4, 2008), available at http://energycommerce.house.gov/Press_110/JAC.Report_FINAL%20Jan.3.2008.pdf.

23. Despite the advances in broadband technology and the deployment of infrastructure to accommodate higher bandwidth speeds, ubiquitous broadband availability does not exist throughout the nation—especially for those consumers in rural areas.⁷² In March 2008, the Commission’s most recent data revealed that more than half of the households in the United States now subscribe to a high-speed service provider and at least one high-speed service provider is providing service in excess of 200 kbps in at least one direction in 99.9 percent of zip codes in the country.⁷³ The broadband subscription rate is much lower in rural areas, however. A 2008 survey finds that the percentage of rural households subscribing to broadband service is only 38 percent—well below the 57 percent and 60 percent subscription rates found in urban and suburban areas, respectively.⁷⁴ This survey concludes that the lack of broadband availability very likely accounts for some of this disparity.⁷⁵ Moreover, this conclusion is consistent with the results of residential surveys in several states.⁷⁶ We find that making the offering of broadband Internet access service a condition of receiving universal service high-cost support can bring this critical service to the remainder of Americans who await its deployment.⁷⁷ In addition, doing so will further the objective of section 254(b)(3) that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access

⁷² See, e.g., Cellular South *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10; see also generally 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 11–12.

⁷³ See FCC, HIGH-SPEED SERVICES FOR INTERNET ACCESS: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2006, tbl. 15 (2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-280906A1.pdf.

⁷⁴ See 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 3–4. The survey was conducted by phone from April 8, 2008 to May 11, 2008 among 2,251 American adults, 1,153 of whom were broadband users. *Id.*

⁷⁵ Pew acknowledges that the participants in its 2008 survey may report incorrectly as to whether broadband service is available where they live. 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 11. Pew nonetheless concludes that “the fact that rural residents are more likely to report that broadband isn’t available where they live indicates that infrastructure availability comes into play in broadband adoption. Some 28% of rural adult Americans without home high-speed say broadband isn’t available where they live, in contrast to 22% of non-rural Americans without broadband who say this. Moreover, 24% of dial-up users in rural areas say having the service available where they live would prompt a switch to broadband; this compares to the 14% figure for all respondents.” *Id.* at 11–12.

⁷⁶ In Ohio, a March 2008 survey of 1,200 residents found broadband service available in 96% of urban homes but in only 79% of rural homes. See CONNECT OHIO TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY at 2 (June 27, 2008), available at http://connectoh.org/documents/Res_OHExecutiveSummary06252008_FINAL.pdf. In California, a state-commissioned task force recently found that approximately 500,000 California households, or almost 1.4 million California residents, are unable to subscribe to broadband service with a speed of at least 500 kbps. The task force identified 1,975 communities without broadband service and concluded that many California communities do not have access to the higher broadband speeds. See CALIFORNIA 2008 BROADBAND REPORT at 33. In Tennessee, a July 2007 survey of 1,787 residents having dial-up service at home found that 36% of them did not subscribe to broadband service because it was unavailable to their homes. See CONNECTED TENNESSEE, TENNESSEE RESIDENTIAL CONSUMERS at 22 (2007), available at <http://www.connectedtn.org/documents/CTResidentialSurvey100107.FINAL.pdf>.

⁷⁷ We disagree with commenters who suggest that it is premature or ill-advised to require all ETCs to offer broadband because, as discussed below, we do so in a manner that does not increase the size of the high-cost fund. See, e.g., SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 16–17; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 33–34; Western Telecomms. Alliance (WTA) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 73; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 41. Similarly, we disagree with commenters who argue that government action at the current time would be wasteful as the market is already taking steps to reach currently underserved areas. See, e.g., NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19–20; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 42. We cannot wait indefinitely for the benefits of broadband to reach all Americans.

to advanced telecommunications and information services that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates charged for similar services in urban areas.⁷⁸

a. Definition of Broadband Internet Access Service

24. For purposes of satisfying the condition to receive high-cost support, we adopt a definition of broadband Internet access service that focuses on the end user's experience, without regard to the types of facilities, protocols, or other technologies used to deliver that experience. Broadband Internet access service is therefore defined as an "always on" service that combines computer processing, information provision, and computer interactivity with data transport, enabling end users to access the Internet and use a variety of applications, at speeds discussed elsewhere in this order.⁷⁹ We refer specifically to broadband Internet access service—an information service—and not to broadband transmission alone because our goal is to ensure that all Americans have access to the Internet.⁸⁰

b. Broadband Internet Access Service Obligations

25. Section 254(b)(1) instructs the Commission to base policies for the advancement of universal service on the principle that quality services should be offered at just, reasonable, and affordable rates.⁸¹ Below we provide requirements for offering broadband Internet access service as a condition of receiving universal service high-cost support. In sum, all ETCs must offer broadband Internet access service, along with all supported services, to all customers throughout their service areas by the end of a five- or ten-year build-out period consistent with the requirements of this order.

26. Except as described just below, an ETC may offer broadband Internet access service using any technology, or combination of technologies, that meets the requirements for speed set forth in this order. An ETC may also combine services provided over its own facilities with those provided over another provider's facilities pursuant to agreement. Indeed, there may be service areas where it is more economic to offer broadband Internet access service via one technology than another and we explicitly provide for even a single provider to take advantage of the inherent benefits of different technologies for different areas.⁸² Furthermore, an ETC can combine a common carrier offering of broadband transmission⁸³ with the information processing capabilities described above,⁸⁴ so long as what the end user receives is in fact broadband Internet access service.

⁷⁸ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3).

⁷⁹ See *infra* paras. 28, 45, 52; see also *Appropriate Framework for Broadband Access to the Internet over Wireline Facilities*, CC Docket No. 02-33, Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 14853, 14860–61, para. 9 (2005) (*Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*), *aff'd sub nom. Time Warner Telecom, Inc. v. FCC*, 507 F.3d 205 (3d Cir. 2007).

⁸⁰ As explained below, nothing in this order changes the choice that providers have today to offer broadband transmission on a common carrier basis. See *infra* para. 26.

⁸¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1).

⁸² Thus, we are not favoring wireline technology over another. *But see* Virgin Mobile *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5–6.

⁸³ See *Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 14900–01, paras. 89–90 (giving providers of wireline broadband Internet access the choice to offer broadband transmission on a common carrier basis or a non-common carrier basis).

⁸⁴ See *supra* para. 24.

27. An ETC cannot use satellite broadband technology to meet its obligations under this order, however, absent a waiver from the Commission. We are concerned that broadband Internet access service provided via satellite differs from broadband Internet access provided over other technologies in two important ways. First, satellite-provided broadband Internet access service is subject to latency due to the amount of time it takes a signal to travel between the satellite and the user.⁸⁵ Latency ranges from a quarter of a second to almost a second, making the use of applications that require a very fast response difficult or impossible, and substantially degrading the quality of other applications like voice over Internet protocol.⁸⁶ Second, satellite-provided broadband Internet access service is subject to degradation due to weather events (“rain fade”) to a greater degree than other wireless technologies.⁸⁷ For these reasons, we find that satellite-provided broadband Internet access service cannot be the primary means by which we serve rural America. We recognize, however, that for certain customers, satellite-provided broadband may be the only economic means of reaching them. Therefore, ETCs may apply to the Commission for a waiver to be able to meet their commitments under this order by offering broadband Internet access service via satellite to certain customers, based on a specific, detailed showing that there is no other economic option for serving those customers.⁸⁸ If the Commission grants such a waiver with regard to particular customers, that waiver may be transferred if a different ETC becomes subject to the obligation to offer broadband to those customers.

3. Incumbent LECs’ Commitment to Offer Broadband

28. As discussed above, as a condition of receiving federal high-cost universal service support, all ETCs must offer broadband Internet access service.⁸⁹ Therefore, incumbent LECs receiving

⁸⁵ See, e.g., COMPUTER SCIENCE AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS BOARD, NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, BROADBAND: BRINGING HOME THE BITS 145 (2002) (BRINGING HOME THE BITS); BroadbandInfo.com, Inside the World of Satellite Broadband, BroadbandInfo.com, <http://www.broadbandinfo.com/satellite/intro-to-satellite.html> (last visited Nov. 3, 2008) (stating that because the satellites providing broadband signals orbit the earth approximately 22,300 miles above the surface, there is a lag time between the sending and receiving of the satellite broadband signal).

⁸⁶ See BRINGING HOME THE BITS 145 (explaining that for Internet telephony, the delay can cause a real degradation in usability); Jon Norwood, Overview of Satellite Internet—Comparing the Main Features of Broadband Satellite (Oct. 17, 2006), available at <http://www.velocityguide.com/satellite/satellite-internet-comparison.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (stating that signal delay to a satellite ranges from around 500 to 900 milliseconds, and that this latency can render any software that requires real-time user input problematic at best); BroadbandInfo.com, Inside the World of Satellite Broadband, available at <http://www.broadbandinfo.com/satellite/intro-to-satellite.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (stating that for certain broadband Internet real-time applications, such as e-gaming, the latency is enough to cause severe interference with the application).

⁸⁷ See, e.g., *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps To Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 98-146, Second Report, 15 FCC Rcd 20913, 20938, para. 59 (2000) (explaining that areas subject to extreme rain or snow may have difficulty receiving satellite signals in those conditions, and describing it as a limitation to satellite Internet last-mile facilities); see also Howstuffworks.com, How Does Satellite Internet Operate?, <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/question606.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (explaining that, as for satellite TV, heavy rains can affect reception of Internet signals); Skycasters, Broadband Satellite Internet: 99.44% System Reliability, <http://www.skycasters.com/satellite-internet-service-specs/system-reliability.html> (last visited Oct. 31, 2008) (explaining that rain fade is a short duration period during which the loss of satellite service occurs when intense storm cells are located directly between the satellite and the satellite dish).

⁸⁸ If the Commission grants a waiver allowing the use of satellite service, the ETC may not charge a higher price to customers served by satellite than it charges to customers served by another broadband technology.

⁸⁹ See *supra* paras. 19–27.

high-cost support must certify to the Commission, for each study area⁹⁰ for which they receive high-cost support, whether or not they will offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within that study area, consistent with the requirements of this order, within five years of the due date of their commitment.⁹¹ This certification must include a commitment to offer broadband Internet access service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.⁹²

29. Incumbent LECs that file a certification for a particular study area indicating that they will offer broadband Internet access service under the terms specified in this order will continue to receive their current levels of high-cost support for that study area, which will be deemed a “Committed Study Area.” We specify the precise benchmarks that the incumbent LEC must meet over the five-year build-out period, and the consequences for failure to do so, below.⁹³

30. As discussed above, we freeze each incumbent LEC ETC’s individual high-cost support at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, the ETC received in December 2008 annualized, net of any prior or past period adjustments, on a study area or service area basis.⁹⁴ Incumbent LEC ETCs committing to offer broadband Internet access service within a study area consistent with the requirements of this order will continue to receive the frozen high-cost support amount for that study area.⁹⁵

31. Study areas for which incumbent LECs either certify that they will not offer broadband in five years as described herein, or for which the incumbent LECs fail to file any certification at all, will be deemed “Unserved Study Areas.” For these areas, the Commission will conduct a reverse auction as

⁹⁰ See *supra* note 56 (explaining the use of the terms “study area” and “service area” in this order).

⁹¹ The Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) will release a public notice at a future date specifying the manner and due date of the certification. Other reporting, monitoring, and milestone requirements are set forth below. See *infra* paras. 57–63.

⁹² This tier of broadband is similar to the tier described as “Basic Broadband Tier 1” in our *Broadband Data Gathering Order*. See *Broadband Data Gathering Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 9700–01, para. 20 & n.66.

⁹³ See *infra* paras. 57–63.

⁹⁴ See *supra* para. 16.

⁹⁵ Some incumbent LECs assert that they will not be able to commit to provide broadband Internet access service to all customers within their study areas at the frozen level of support. See, e.g., Letter from Eric N. Einhorn, V.P. Federal Government Affairs, Windstream, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122, 08-152, 07-135, at 3 (filed Oct. 27, 2008); Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337, at 2 (filed Oct. 20, 2008); Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President Legal & Industry, NTCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 04-36, at 1-2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008). First, to the extent incumbent LECs cannot build out their networks to provide broadband to all customers in their study areas, they may seek a waiver to provide service via satellite technology, as discussed above. Second, universal service support is not meant to subsidize high-cost carriers, but rather it is meant to support customers in high-cost areas. See *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620 (“The Act only promises universal service, and that is a goal that requires sufficient funding of customers, not providers. So long as there is sufficient and competitively-neutral funding to enable all customers to receive basic telecommunications services, the FCC has satisfied the Act and is not further required to ensure sufficient funding of every local telephone provider as well.”). Therefore, if an incumbent LEC cannot provide broadband service at the frozen support levels, support will go to a reverse auction winning bidder who can provide such service at or below that level on a more efficient basis. Finally, as discussed below, to the extent that a reverse auction does not produce a winning bidder, the Commission will reexamine support to that study area.

described below, awarding high-cost support to a bidder that will commit to take on carrier of last resort obligations and to offer broadband Internet access service throughout the study area.

4. Reverse Auctions for Study Areas Unserved by Broadband

32. The Joint Board recommended that the Commission's universal service goals include universal availability of broadband Internet service at affordable and comparable rates for all rural and non-rural areas.⁹⁶ While we are not adopting the Joint Board's recommendation to create a separate broadband fund, we agree with the Joint Board's goal that broadband Internet access service should be universally and affordably available. We are therefore allowing incumbent LECs and competitive ETCs receiving high-cost support to continue to receive such support if they commit to offer broadband services throughout their supported service areas by the end of a five-year build-out period. We anticipate, however, that in some study areas, the incumbent LEC may decline to make that commitment. For these Unserved Study Areas, we will conduct a reverse auction for the right to receive high-cost support.⁹⁷

33. We sought comment in our *Reverse Auctions NPRM* on the merits of using reverse auctions, a form of competitive bidding, to decide how much high-cost support to provide to ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas.⁹⁸ In a reverse auction, support generally would be determined by the lowest bid to serve the auctioned area.⁹⁹ We conclude that using a reverse auction method for identifying both the recipient of high-cost support for an Unserved Study Area, as well as the amount of support, is appropriate because the winning bid should approach the minimum level of subsidy required to achieve our universal service goals.¹⁰⁰ In contrast, a support mechanism based on cost or on a cost model provides no incentive for an ETC to provide supported services at the minimum possible cost.¹⁰¹ In addition, a reverse auction provides a fair and efficient means of eliminating or reducing the subsidization of multiple ETCs in a given region.¹⁰² For these reasons, we find that a reverse auction offers advantages over the current high-cost support distribution mechanisms and we adopt a reverse

⁹⁶ See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20491-92, paras. 56-62.

⁹⁷ Many commenters, in particular those representing rural telephone companies, opposed the use of reverse auctions to award high-cost support to carriers of last resort in rural areas. See, e.g., *OPASTCO Reverse Auctions Comments* at 16-21; *NTCA Reverse Auctions Comments* at 30-46. Under the measures we adopt today, reverse auctions will be conducted only in study areas for which the incumbent LEC receiving high-cost support has not committed to offer broadband Internet access service.

⁹⁸ See *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 10.

⁹⁹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11; see Connecticut Dep't of Pub. Util. Control *High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 7 (supporting reverse auctions as a means of controlling and reducing the size of the universal service fund, while putting the burden on providers to estimate bid amounts); Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 7 (noting that the use of reverse auctions could reduce the size of the high-cost fund significantly).

¹⁰¹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11; see Letter from Grover Norquist, Americans for Tax Reform, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 1 (filed Apr. 14, 2008) (arguing that reverse auctions will create incentives to invest in rural communities and will not finance and subsidize wasteful carriers).

¹⁰² *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11.

auction plan, as discussed below.¹⁰³

34. To implement the reverse auctions, there are several issues that must be addressed. We describe in this part: (1) the geographic area to be auctioned; (2) the reserve price for the reverse auction; (3) what a winning bidder will receive; (4) how the winning bidder will be selected; and (5) the qualifications a bidder must demonstrate before it may participate in a reverse auction.

a. Geographic Area

35. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we sought comment on whether we should use the study area¹⁰⁴ as the geographic area for reverse auctions.¹⁰⁵ We observed that high-cost support today is generally based on the wireline incumbent LEC's study area.¹⁰⁶ We tentatively concluded that the wireline incumbent LEC's study area would be the appropriate geographic area on which to base reverse auctions.¹⁰⁷ We adopt our tentative conclusion that the study area is the best geographic area to use for several reasons. First, if we allowed bidders to bid to provide service in smaller geographic areas, we would encourage bidders to bid on areas that are easier or cheaper to serve, leaving our most difficult-to-serve populations still without broadband service.¹⁰⁸ Conversely, if we required bidders to bid on even larger geographic areas, we might discourage bidders from entering the auction because of the difficulty in committing to serve an even larger area. Although some commenters oppose using the incumbent LEC's study area,¹⁰⁹ use of the study area is consistent with the area we ask incumbent LECs to consider in making their commitments. Finally, selecting smaller geographic areas for auction would increase the number of auctions to be held, potentially delaying the conduct of the auction and, therefore, the

¹⁰³ Although several rural LEC commenters oppose the use of reverse auctions to distribute high-cost support, as discussed above, incumbent LECs will not be required to participate in a reverse auction to receive support, so long as they commit to deploy broadband throughout their study areas. See, e.g., *ATA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 13–15 (opposing the use of reverse auctions); *Alexicon Reverse Auctions NPRM Comments* at 2–3 (opposing reverse auctions for rural LECs).

¹⁰⁴ A study area is a geographic segment of an incumbent LEC's telephone operations. Generally, a study area corresponds to an incumbent LEC's entire service territory within a state. *Direct Communications Cedar Valley, LLC and Qwest Corporation Joint Petition for Waiver of the Definition of "Study Area" of the Appendix-Glossary of Part 36 of the Commission's Rules, Petition for Waiver of Section 69.2(hh) and 69.605(c) of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 19180, 19181, para. 2 (WCB 2005). Section 54.207 of the Commission's rules provides that a rural telephone company's service area will be its study area "unless and until the Commission and the states, after taking into account recommendations of a Federal-State Joint Board instituted under section 410(c) of this Act, establish a different definition of service area for such company." 47 C.F.R. § 54.207(b); 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(5). As discussed above, we use the terms "study area" and "service area" interchangeably in this order. See *supra* note 56.

¹⁰⁵ See *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1503, para. 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1503, para. 20

¹⁰⁷ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1504, para. 21.

¹⁰⁸ Thus, we disagree with commenters' arguments that we should hold auctions for small geographic areas, such as counties, census block groups, or zip codes. See, e.g., *Comcast High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 9; *NCTA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 16; *SouthernLINC High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 24–25; *TracFone High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 6.

¹⁰⁹ See, e.g., *Comcast High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 8–9; *NCTA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 16; *SouthernLINC High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 25; *TracFone High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 5.

deployment of broadband to unserved areas.¹¹⁰ For these reasons, we conclude that the study area is the best available geographic area to consider for the auction. We will conduct a reverse auction for each study area for which the incumbent LEC receiving high-cost support has not committed to offer broadband Internet access service pursuant to the requirements explained above (Unserved Study Areas).¹¹¹

b. Reserve Price

36. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we noted that we should establish a reserve price—a maximum level of high-cost support that participants in the auction would be allowed to place as a bid.¹¹² We observed that a reserve price that is set too low is likely to discourage bidders from participating, while one that is set too high raises the possibility of providing too much support.¹¹³ We conclude that the reserve price should be the amount of high-cost support that the incumbent LEC would have been entitled to receive had it committed to offer broadband Internet access service within the study area.¹¹⁴

37. We set the reserve price in each study area at the incumbent LEC's current level of high-cost support for several reasons. First, we are capping the overall high-cost fund at its current level. Setting a reserve price will help ensure that overall high-cost funding remains within this amount, because the high-cost funding for each Unserved Study Area will merely be transferred to another ETC, not increased. In addition, setting a reserve price at this level will ensure that, even in reverse auctions for particular Unserved Study Areas that do not garner many bids, those bids will be made by providers who are confident that they can assume all the obligations of the carrier of last resort,¹¹⁵ as well as the new broadband service obligations, and provide service more efficiently than the incumbent LEC.¹¹⁶ Indeed, we expect that bidders frequently will offer to provide service using newer and more efficient technologies than the incumbent LEC uses today. For these reasons, we set the reserve price at the level described above.

¹¹⁰ See Ohio PUC *Reverse Auctions NPRM* Comments at 6–7 (generally agreeing that the incumbent LEC's study area is the appropriate geographic area on which to base reverse auctions because further disaggregation could add cost and delays, and increase the opportunity for creamskimming).

¹¹¹ See *supra* paras. 19–31.

¹¹² *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1509, para. 36.

¹¹³ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1509, para. 36.

¹¹⁴ See SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 22 n.63 (“The Commission would start bidding at current support levels.”). As discussed above, each incumbent LEC ETC's individual high-cost support is frozen at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, the ETC received in December 2008 annualized, net of any prior or past period adjustments, on a study area basis. See *supra* paras. 16, 30.

¹¹⁵ Carrier of last resort obligations for incumbent LECs are a matter of state law. Under section 214(e)(6), when the state lacks jurisdiction, the Commission shall make the public interest determination on whether to designate a carrier an ETC. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6). The ETC requirements include a requirement to provide supported services throughout the service area. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1).

¹¹⁶ Some commenters oppose setting the reserve price at current incumbent LEC levels, or setting any reserve price. See OPASTCO *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19–20; MSTC Group *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 17–18; North Dakota PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5. We find that setting the reserve price at the incumbent LEC support level will provide certainty to bidders and enable bidders with more efficient technologies to provide broadband in areas where incumbent LECs do not commit to do so. Furthermore, as discussed below, if a reverse auction provides no winner, the Commission will examine the need for further action. See *infra* para. 47.

c. Auctioned Support

38. For Unserved Study Areas, we will auction the award of high-cost support to provide all supported services to the entire Unserved Study Area, on a carrier of last resort basis, consistent with the requirements of this order. The maximum annual award amount will be equal to the amount of the winning bid (Award Amount), paid out as described in more detail below as certain geographic areas are built out.¹¹⁷

39. The Award Amount is conditioned on the winning bidder providing all supported services as a carrier of last resort, as the incumbent LEC does today under state law, and meeting the ETC requirements set forth in the *ETC Designation Order*.¹¹⁸ Competitive ETCs are currently required to provide supported services throughout their service area, even though they may not be, under state law, the carrier of last resort.¹¹⁹ In the *ETC Designation Order*, the Commission adopted additional requirements for ETC designation proceedings in which the Commission acts pursuant to section 214(e)(6).¹²⁰ The Commission requires that applicants seeking ETC designation from this Commission demonstrate the following: (1) a commitment and ability to provide services, including providing service to all customers within its proposed service area; (2) that it will remain functional in emergency situations; (3) that it will satisfy consumer protection and service quality standards; (4) that it offers local usage comparable to that offered by the incumbent LEC; and (5) an understanding that it may be required to provide equal access if all other ETCs in the designated service area relinquish their designations pursuant to section 214(e)(4).¹²¹ We find that the universal service obligations in the *ETC Designation Order* will apply to all competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions; in addition, the auction winner must accept all of the carrier of last resort obligations of the incumbent LEC for that study area, whether such obligations are imposed on the LEC pursuant to state or federal law.

40. In addition to the *ETC Designation Order* requirements, we add two additional requirements to competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions. First, they must, as a condition of receiving the Award Amount, offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within the Unserved Study Area. Second, competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions must offer supported services at a retail price comparable to the retail price charged by the incumbent LEC in that same study area for the same or equivalent service.¹²² In this manner, we ensure that competitive ETCs receiving high-cost support will continue to make supported services at least as affordable and available as they are today.

¹¹⁷ A competitive ETC that currently serves all or a portion of an Unserved Study Area will not receive high-cost support for the same service area as both a winning bidder and based upon a showing of its own costs. If a competitive ETC that already receives high-cost support within this study area wins the auction, it will lose its existing high-cost support for particular geographic areas as it begins to receive its Award Amount for those areas.

¹¹⁸ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 6371. Section 214(e)(6) of the Act gives the Commission authority to designate carriers as ETCs when those carriers are not subject to the jurisdiction of a state commission. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6). The requirements in the *ETC Designation Order* currently apply only to Commission-designated ETCs, although the Commission, in that order, encouraged state commissions to adopt similar requirements. *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6372, 6379, paras. 1, 19.

¹¹⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1).

¹²⁰ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6380, para. 20.

¹²¹ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6380, para. 20; 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4).

¹²² In adopting this requirement, we are not setting any specific rates, nor does this requirement conflict with the states' jurisdiction over intrastate rates. Instead, we are conditioning the receipt of federal universal service support on an ETC's provision, on a voluntary basis, of rates comparable to the incumbent LEC's for equivalent services.

41. We recognize that a transition mechanism is needed to shift high-cost support from the incumbent LEC currently receiving it to another ETC that wins an Award Amount. A flash cut would be harmful in at least two ways. First, the incumbent LEC would immediately lose support upon which it may rely to maintain supported services as a carrier of last resort to consumers today. It is possible that removing support from the incumbent LEC would, in some cases, jeopardize its provision of services to some users. In addition, granting a full Award Amount immediately to a winning ETC would provide little incentive for the competitive ETC to build out new facilities to difficult-to-serve areas until the last possible moment, as in many cases those areas will be the most expensive to serve. As a result, we conclude that, prior to the initiation of an auction, the incumbent LEC for the Unserved Study Area will be required to identify the distribution of support by geographic area for purposes of the auction and the transfer of support to the winning bidder. As the winning ETC builds out to those geographic areas and certifies that it complies with all its obligations under this order for that area, it will receive high-cost support for that portion of the Unserved Study Area, and the incumbent LEC will no longer receive such support for that area.¹²³ As the winning bidder takes on carrier of last resort obligations and obtains high-cost support for an area, the incumbent LEC will no longer receive high-cost support for that area and will be relieved of its carrier of last resort obligations at both the state and federal levels. We require winning auction bidders to comply fully with all the requirements of this order by the end of a ten-year build-out period.

42. Finally, we address the question of transferability of the Award Amount. We conclude that auction winners may transfer their right to the Award Amount. This transfer could take one of several forms—an auction winner could be purchased by another entity, the winner could sell assets used to provide the supported services, or the auction winner could transfer just the right to the Award Amount itself. The transferee will, in all events, step into the shoes of the auction winner and will be responsible for meeting all obligations as if it had been the original auction winner. Any such transfer, however, must be authorized by the Commission before it is consummated.

d. Selecting a Winning Bid

43. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we sought comment on whether the reverse auction should award high-cost support to a single winner or to multiple winners.¹²⁴ We observed that if only one winner receives support, this could provide a fair and efficient means of eliminating the subsidization of multiple ETCs in a region, particularly in areas in which costs are prohibitive.¹²⁵ We tentatively concluded that universal service support auctions should award high-cost support to a single winner.¹²⁶ We now conclude that the single winner format will provide the most effective mechanism for determining the support amount sufficient to meet the universal service goals in any given area.¹²⁷ We

¹²³ The amount of support to be awarded to the winning bidder could be less than the amount of support received by the incumbent LEC for that same area. The transfer of support will be based on the amount of support, relative to support for the entire study area, received by the incumbent LEC for the area to be transferred; that same relative percentage will be used to calculate the amount of award support the auction winner should receive for the same area. In no event will an incumbent LEC who is not an auction winner continue to receive support for an area once an auction winner begins to receive support for that same area.

¹²⁴ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 13.

¹²⁵ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 14.

¹²⁶ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 14.

¹²⁷ See, e.g., Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4–5; New York PSC *Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 2–3; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21–22, App. at 12. We disagree with commenters who support multiple winner auctions. See, e.g., Alltel *High-Cost*

(continued...)

therefore adopt our tentative conclusion to select one winner in each reverse auction.

44. As we have explained above, in requiring the offering of broadband Internet access service as a condition of receiving high-cost support, one of our main goals is to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, quality broadband services.¹²⁸ Achieving this goal will require careful selection of the winning bidder for a particular Unserved Study Area. As explained in more detail below, the winning bidder will be the one who commits to offer the highest speed of broadband service—throughout the entire Unserved Study Area—at a bid amount that is equal to or less than the reserve price (the incumbent LEC’s current high-cost support amount). In so doing, we work towards making quality, technologically advanced broadband services available to all Americans, including those in difficult- or expensive-to-serve areas, rather than settling for lesser broadband service for those Americans who live in high-cost areas. We acknowledge that, in many cases, the winning bid will not be the cheapest one. But we believe that encouraging bidders to offer better broadband services at or below a set reserve price will help us achieve our broadband goals, while keeping an appropriate limit on the amount of high-cost support disbursed to achieve that goal.

45. For purposes of our reverse auction, we establish three tiers of broadband service. We will use the term “Basic Broadband Tier 1” to refer to service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps but less than 1.5 mbps, and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps. We will use the term “Broadband Tier 2” to refer to service with download speeds equal to or greater than 1.5 mbps and less than 3 mbps, and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps. We will use the term “Broadband Tier 3” to refer to service with download speeds equal to or greater than 3 mbps, and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.¹²⁹

46. We will evaluate bids as follows: for any Unserved Study Area, a bidder will submit a bid to commit to offering a service falling within Basic Broadband Tier 1, Broadband Tier 2, or Broadband Tier 3 to all customers in the Unserved Study Area. To qualify for an award, the bid must be equal to or less than the reserve price—that is, equal to or less than the amount of high-cost support received by the incumbent LEC for that Unserved Study Area.¹³⁰ The bidder need not specify a specific speed to which it will commit in any of the three tiers, but it must disclose in which tier its proposed service will fall. The bid amount will be an amount of high-cost support to provide all supported services in the Unserved Study Area as carrier of last resort, subject to all the requirements of this order, including the condition to offer broadband throughout the Unserved Study Area. The winning bid will be selected through a two-step process. First, we will identify the highest speed tier for which there is a valid bid. If there is only one bid for that tier, then that is the winning bid. If there are multiple bids within that tier, then the winning bid will be the lowest price bid within that tier.¹³¹

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Reform NPRMs Comments at 40–41; *Atlantic Tele-Network Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 13. We find that supporting a single auction winner is a more efficient means of ensuring the provision of broadband Internet access in areas where the incumbent LEC has determined that the costs of serving all customers in the area is prohibitive.

¹²⁸ See *supra* paras. 19–23.

¹²⁹ These terms are similar, but not identical, to terms used in our latest *Broadband Data Gathering Order*. See *Broadband Data Gathering Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 9700–01, para. 20 & n.66.

¹³⁰ See *supra* paras. 16–36.

¹³¹ For example, assume the Commission conducted a reverse auction for an Unserved Study Area with a reserve price of \$5 and received four bids: \$1 to offer Basic Broadband Tier 1, \$2 to offer Broadband Tier 2, \$3 to offer Broadband Tier 3, and \$4 to offer Broadband Tier 3. In that scenario, the winning bid amount would be \$3 to offer Broadband Tier 3.

47. If a particular reverse auction produces no winner, the study area will be identified as a truly high-cost study area. The fact that there is no winning bidder may indicate that the reserve price was set at too low an amount of support. The Commission will reexamine any such study area to determine whether the frozen high-cost support amount is sufficient, and, if it is not, the Commission will determine what further actions should be taken to ensure that the study area is served by a provider that will meet the broadband commitment and carrier of last resort requirements. For example, the Commission may consider disaggregating the study area on a wire center basis for reverse auction purposes, or increasing the amount of high-cost support set as the reserve price for the study area.¹³² To ensure continued service to customers during the limited period of time in which the Commission examines these issues, the existing incumbent LEC will continue to have all carrier of last resort and ETC obligations, and will continue to receive high-cost support frozen at its current level pending transfer of such support to the winning bidder of the reverse auction.

e. Bidder Qualifications

48. We adopt a number of conditions that bidders must meet before they can participate in any auction. We adopt these requirements to help ensure that any bidder who wins an auction will be capable of meeting the commitments that flow from being a winning bidder.

49. First, we require that a bidder be an ETC, certified by the Commission or by a state. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we tentatively concluded that an auction bidder must be an ETC covering the relevant geographic area prior to participating in the auction.¹³³ We hereby adopt that tentative conclusion. Winning bidders must be designated as ETCs before receiving high-cost support pursuant to sections 214 and 254 of the Act; therefore, requiring bidders to receive this designation prior to participating in an auction entails only a small additional burden. This burden is offset by the potential delay in deploying broadband Internet access service that would result while a non-ETC winning bidder seeks and obtains ETC designation.¹³⁴ We note that ETCs are not required to provide all supported services with their own facilities.¹³⁵ ETCs may enter into contracts with other entities to provide some supported services in part or all of the study area.

50. As a general matter, in our spectrum auctions we require an upfront payment to deter frivolous or insincere bidding.¹³⁶ In the reverse auctions we adopt today, we are not requiring an upfront payment. Instead, we are requiring participants to demonstrate to the Commission a capability to meet

¹³² See Free Press Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 12 (arguing that, if a study area receives no winning bidder in a reverse auction, then the study area should be disaggregated).

¹³³ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500–01, para. 12; see also, e.g., Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5; Indiana Util. Reg. Comm’n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 12; MSTC Group *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 12; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments, App. at 8.

¹³⁴ For this reason, we disagree with commenters who argue that we should not require bidders to be ETCs. See GCI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 89; Consumers Union (CU) et al. *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 17.

¹³⁵ Pursuant to section 214(e)(1)(A) of the Act, a common carrier designated as an ETC must offer the services supported by the federal universal service mechanisms throughout the designated service area either by using its own facilities or by using a combination of its own facilities and resale of another carrier’s services (including the services offered by another ETC). 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1)(A).

¹³⁶ See, e.g., *Auction of LPTV and TV Translator Digital Companion Channels Scheduled for November 5, 2008*, AU Docket No. 08-22, Public Notice, DA 08-1944, para. 53 (WTB 2008).

the milestone requirements. This showing will include, for example, evidence of financial resources with which to undertake the construction or upgrading of facilities necessary to offer broadband Internet access service. In addition, in areas where the bidder does not currently offer telecommunications services, we will require the bidder to submit a plan demonstrating the timetable for building the necessary facilities and obtaining any required permits.

5. Competitive Eligible Telecommunications Carriers

a. Background

51. In the *Identical Support NPRM*, the Commission tentatively concluded that it should eliminate the current identical support rule for competitive ETCs, because the rule bears no relationship to the amount of money competitive ETCs have invested in rural and other high-cost areas of the country.¹³⁷ In that notice, the Commission tentatively concluded that a competitive ETC should receive high-cost support based on its own costs, which better reflect real investment in rural and other high-cost areas of the country, and which create greater incentives for investment in those areas.¹³⁸ Because a competitive ETC's per-line support is based solely on the per-line support received by the incumbent LEC, rather than its own network investments in an area, the competitive ETC has little incentive to invest in, or expand, its own facilities in areas with low population densities, thereby contravening the Act's universal service goal of improving the access to telecommunications services in rural, insular and high-cost areas.¹³⁹ Instead, competitive ETCs have a greater incentive to expand the number of subscribers, particularly those located in the lower-cost parts of high-cost areas, rather than to expand the geographic scope of their networks. As discussed above, the Joint Board recommended elimination of the identical support rule; we agree with the Joint Board and adopt this recommendation and our tentative conclusion.¹⁴⁰ Under the new high-cost support mechanism that we adopt today, competitive ETCs will be eligible to receive support based on their own costs as compared to the relevant support benchmarks, contingent upon a commitment to offer broadband Internet access service to all customers in a service area within five years.¹⁴¹

b. Certification by Existing Competitive ETCs

52. As discussed above, as a condition of continuing to receive federal high-cost universal

¹³⁷ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5; see, e.g., *Embarq High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10 (“It is logically inconsistent to compensate a carrier for serving ‘high-cost’ areas when there is no evidence—in the form of cost studies, filings, or model results—that the areas being supported are indeed ‘high-cost’ for that carrier.”); *Frontier High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4 (asserting that identical support is merely a subsidy to competitive ETCs, “and there is no basis to tell whether consumers are getting any [u]niversal [s]ervice benefits whatsoever” from subsidizing competitive ETCs in this manner).

¹³⁸ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5.

¹³⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3); *Alabama PSC High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3 (“The identical support rule provides little incentive for ETCs to invest in building their own facilities in rural areas with low population densities because their support currently is based solely on the per-line support received by the incumbent, instead of investment in the network.”).

¹⁴⁰ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 5 (recommending elimination of the identical support rule, which “bears little or no relationship to the amount of money competitive ETCs have invested in rural and other high-cost areas of the country”).

¹⁴¹ The calculation of support provisions in this Part apply to competitive ETCs that do not receive high-cost support as the result of winning a reverse auction. Support for winning auction bidders, including competitive ETCs, will be based on the bid amount, as discussed above. See *supra* paras 43–47.

service support, incumbent LEC ETCs must offer broadband Internet access service to all customers in their service areas within five years.¹⁴² Similarly, to be eligible to receive high-cost support on a going-forward basis, competitive ETCs must also certify that they will offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within a supported service area, consistent with the requirements of this order, within five years of the due date of their commitment.¹⁴³ Consistent with the certification required of incumbent LEC ETCs, competitive ETC certifications must include a commitment to offer broadband Internet access service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.¹⁴⁴ Failure to make this commitment or to meet the milestones and requirements established herein shall result in loss of ETC status for the service area.

c. Calculation of Support

53. We adopt our tentative conclusion in the *Identical Support NPRM* that competitive ETCs should receive high-cost support based on their own costs.¹⁴⁵ We are not persuaded by arguments that, by requiring competitive ETCs to demonstrate that their own costs exceed a high-cost threshold as a condition of receiving universal service support, we will be placing undue administrative burdens on the competitive ETCs and providing incentives for them to maximize their costs.¹⁴⁶ Instead, we find that competitive ETCs should demonstrate eligibility for high-cost support in the same manner as incumbent LEC ETCs, based on their costs, as this will better reflect competitive ETCs' investment in their service areas.¹⁴⁷ Specifically, we require competitive ETCs to file cost information for the total costs of a service area, from which will be developed a cost per line. Spectrum costs are not included for purposes of

¹⁴² See *supra* para. 28.

¹⁴³ The Bureau will release a public notice at a future date specifying the manner and due date of the certification. Other reporting, monitoring, and benchmark requirements are set forth below. See *infra* paras. 57–63.

¹⁴⁴ This tier of broadband is similar to the tier described as “Basic Broadband Tier 1” in our *Broadband Data Gathering Order*. See *Broadband Data Gathering Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 9700–01, para. 20 & n.66.

¹⁴⁵ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5.

¹⁴⁶ See GCI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5, 40, 65–67; Oregon PUC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5; Rural Cellular Ass'n (Rural Cellular) *Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 2; USCellular *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7, 38–40; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 16; Wyoming Office of Consumer Advocate (Wyoming OCA) *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 2; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 13.

¹⁴⁷ Many commenters favor basing competitive ETCs' support on their own costs. See ATA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3; Alexicon *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 3–4; CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21–22; Connecticut Dept. of Pub. Util. Control *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2–3; Embarq *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10; Iowa Telecomm. Ass'n (ITA) *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 3–4; Independent Tel. and Telecomms. Alliance (ITTA) *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 23–24; John Staurulakis, Inc. (JSI) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3; Kansas Rural Indep. Tel. Companies *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 4; Missouri PSC *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 5; Montana Telecomm. Ass'n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 12; NECA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 22–26; NTCA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19–23; OPASTCO *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 12–13; PetroCom License Corp. *Identical Support NPRM* Comments at 2–3; Qwest *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7; Rural Indep. Competitive Alliance (RICA) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 13–15; Rural Iowa Independent Tel. Ass'n (RIITA) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2–3; Telcom Consulting Assoc., Inc. (TCA) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 13–15; Texas Statewide Tel. Coop., Inc. (Texas Statewide) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10; Utah Rural Telecom Ass'n (URTA) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8; WTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 22–26.

calculating a cost per line.¹⁴⁸ We will then apply the same benchmarks that are applied to incumbent LECs' costs to determine whether the competitive ETCs qualify to receive high-cost support. In the case of a competitive ETC providing service in a non-rural service area, the cost per line would be compared to the benchmark threshold for support calculated by the High-Cost Proxy Model.¹⁴⁹ For a competitive ETC providing service in a rural service area, support will be determined by comparing the competitive ETC's cost per loop incurred to provide the supported services to the same national average cost per loop used to determine incumbent LEC support for the same service area.¹⁵⁰

54. Because a competitive ETC may have few or no lines when it first receives its ETC designation, performing a calculation of per-line costs at the initial time of market entry likely would result in a considerable upward bias in the resulting amount. Similarly, a competitive ETC that has not gained customers in high-cost areas would have low line counts, skewing upward its costs per line. Conversely, a competitive ETC that has successfully gained customers will have lower costs per line due to the larger number of lines over which to spread its costs. To correct this issue, rather than relying on the competitive ETCs' line counts to determine per-line costs, we will use the same line counts used to determine the incumbent LEC cost per line for the same service area.

55. Consistent with the freeze on incumbent LEC high-cost support based on December 2008 support levels, we will use December 2008 as the base period for both the incumbent LEC lines used to determine the competitive ETCs' per-line costs, and for the benchmarks against which the competitive ETCs' costs will be compared for high-cost support purposes. Once the competitive ETC has demonstrated that its costs exceed the relevant benchmark, that competitive ETC will be entitled to continue to receive support for the relevant service area, frozen at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, that the competitive ETC received in 2008. If a competitive ETC does not commit to the broadband build-out requirements set forth herein, or does not demonstrate that its costs exceed the relevant benchmark, it shall no longer be entitled to receive support.

56. If no competitive ETC elects to show its own costs in a particular study area, we will conduct a reverse auction to award support to a broadband mobility provider. The reserve price for such auction shall be the largest amount of high-cost support received by a competitive ETC in the study area in 2008. There shall be no interim support in such study area to an existing competitive ETC that does not commit to the broadband requirements pending the completion of the reverse auction.¹⁵¹

6. Build-Out Milestones and Monitoring, Compliance, and Enforcement

57. We find that a rigorous monitoring, compliance and enforcement program is necessary to ensure that all ETCs receiving high-cost support adhere to their obligation to offer broadband Internet access service throughout their supported service areas by the end of their respective build-out periods. We therefore establish build-out requirements to monitor providers' progress toward their build-out commitment. Specifically, and as described in detail below, we require each provider receiving high-cost

¹⁴⁸ We agree with ITA that such costs do not represent a direct investment in facilities and infrastructure for purposes of providing supported services in high-cost areas. *See ITA Identical Support NPRM Comments at 3* (spectrum costs represent investment in an intangible asset with an indefinite life rather than a direct investment in facilities with a limited useful life).

¹⁴⁹ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.309.

¹⁵⁰ *See* 47 C.F.R. §§ 36.613, 36.622(c).

¹⁵¹ We also note that, consistent with our capping the high-cost fund and the provisions herein freezing both incumbent LEC and competitive ETC support at the study area level, we keep in place the interim cap on competitive ETC support adopted in the *Interim Cap Order*.

support to meet specific milestones with regard to broadband deployment in the years preceding completion.

58. *Applicability of Requirements.* As an initial matter, we find that the monitoring, compliance and enforcement requirements we adopt today will apply equally to all recipients of high-cost support that commit to offer broadband Internet access service as a condition of receiving support. Consumers should expect to receive the benefits of today's order, irrespective of whether an incumbent LEC, competitive ETC, or winning auction bidder receives high-cost support in their area. We find that the milestone obligations we impose today will not unduly burden any company; rather, they represent efforts we believe carriers would undertake in the normal course of constructing a broadband network. We therefore apply the monitoring, compliance, and enforcement requirements below to all recipients of high-cost support.

59. *Milestones for Committed Incumbent LECs and Existing Competitive ETCs.* To ensure that incumbent LECs that commit to offering broadband and competitive ETCs other than auction winners make steady progress towards offering broadband Internet access service throughout their entire service areas as required in this order, we adopt milestones based on customer locations where the incumbent LEC or competitive ETC is not yet offering broadband Internet access service (Unserved Customers).¹⁵² Specifically, we require incumbent LECs and competitive ETCs to be capable of providing broadband Internet access service to an additional 20 percent of their Unserved Customers by the end of each year of the five-year build-out period. This requirement means that, of the total number of Unserved Customers in the service area, these carriers must offer broadband to 20 percent by the end of year one, 40 percent by the end of year two, 60 percent by the end of year three, 80 percent by the end of year four, and 100 percent by the end of year five. This five-year period starts from the due date of the incumbent LEC or competitive ETC commitment.

60. *Milestones for Auction Winners.* To ensure that auction winners make good progress toward meeting their obligation to become fully compliant with the requirements of this order, we require every auction winner to be capable of serving 10 percent of the potential customers in the service area by the end of year two, 25 percent by the end of year three, 50 percent by the end of year four, 65 percent by the end of year five, 75 percent by the end of year six, 85 percent by the end of year seven, 90 percent by the end of year eight, 95 percent by the end of year nine, 100 percent by the end of year ten. The absence of a milestone at the end of year one is intended to allow new service providers sufficient time to plan their network and to start deploying and marketing it within some parts of the service area. Similarly, the ascending milestones in the remaining years are intended to permit the auction winner a reasonable time in which to build its network and services while ensuring that it does not delay in reaching customers who need this vital service. The ten-year build-out period starts on the date on which that carrier wins the auction.

61. *Consequences of Not Meeting Milestones.* For all ETCs receiving high-cost support, failure to achieve any milestone will result in loss of eligibility for support (and, where this Commission has jurisdiction over the designation of ETC status, loss of ETC status) for that service area. If the ETC that loses its eligibility for support is an incumbent LEC or an auction winner, the study area will be subject to re-auction. If at the end of the build-out period, the ETC is not fully compliant with all its obligations under this order, including its obligation to offer broadband Internet service throughout the service area, the ETC will forfeit its eligibility for support and, if its ETC designation was made by this Commission, lose its ETC status.

62. *Milestone Audits.* All milestone data will be subject to audit by the Commission's Office

¹⁵² Customer locations include both residential and business locations within the ETC's service area.

of Inspector General and, if necessary, investigated by the Office of Inspector General, to determine compliance with the build-out requirements, the Act, and Commission rules and orders.¹⁵³ Service providers will be required to comply fully with the Office of Inspector General's audit requirements, including, but not limited to, providing full access to all accounting systems, records, reports, and source documents of the service providers and their employees, contractors, and other agents, in addition to all other internal and external audit reports that are involved, in whole or in part, in the administration of this program.¹⁵⁴ Such audits or investigations may provide information showing that a service provider failed to comply with the Act or the Commission's rules, and thus may reveal instances in which universal service support was improperly distributed or used.

63. We emphasize that we retain the discretion to evaluate the uses of monies disbursed through the high-cost program and to determine on a case-by-case basis whether waste, fraud, or abuse of program funds occurred and whether recovery is warranted. We remain committed to ensuring the integrity of the universal service program and will aggressively pursue instances of waste, fraud, and abuse under the Commission's procedures and in cooperation with law enforcement agencies. In doing so, we intend to use any and all enforcement measures, including criminal and civil statutory remedies, available under law.¹⁵⁵

III. BROADBAND FOR LIFELINE/LINK UP CUSTOMERS

64. In this Part, pursuant to section 254(b) of the Act, we establish a Broadband Lifeline/Link Up Pilot Program (Pilot Program) to examine how the Lifeline and Link Up universal service support mechanism can be used to enhance access to broadband Internet access services for low-income Americans.¹⁵⁶ Specifically, we conclude that we will make available \$300 million each year for the next three years to enable ETCs to support broadband Internet access service and the necessary access devices. In particular, if an ETC provides Lifeline service to an eligible customer, the Pilot Program will support 50 percent of the cost of broadband Internet access installation, including a broadband Internet access device, up to a total amount of \$100. In addition, if an ETC provides Lifeline service to an eligible household, the Pilot Program will double, up to an additional \$10, the household's current monthly subsidy to offset the cost of broadband Internet access service.

¹⁵³ See *Comprehensive Review of the Universal Service Fund Management, Administration, and Oversight, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Lifeline and Link-Up, Changes to the Board of Directors for the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.*, WC Docket No. 03-109, Report and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 16372, 16383-84, para. 24 (*Comprehensive Review Report and Order*) (requiring "recipients of universal service support for high-cost providers to retain all records that they may require to demonstrate to auditors that the support they received was consistent with the Act and the Commission's rules, assuming that the audits are conducted within five years of disbursement of such support."). The term "service provider" includes any participating subcontractors.

¹⁵⁴ This includes presenting personnel to testify, under oath, at a deposition if requested by of the Office of Inspector General.

¹⁵⁵ See, e.g., 41 U.S.C. §§ 51-58 (Anti-Kickback Act of 1986); 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (False Claims Act).

¹⁵⁶ The Commission has established a similar universal service pilot program under the Rural Health Care support mechanism. See *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60, Order, 21 FCC Rcd 11111(2006) (*2006 Rural Health Care Pilot Program Order*) (establishing a Rural Health Care pilot program to examine how the Rural Health Care funding mechanism can be used to enhance public and non-profit health care providers' access to advanced telecommunications and information services); *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60, Order, 22 FCC Rcd 20,360 (2007) (selecting Rural Health Care pilot program participants eligible to receive up to 85% of the costs associated with the construction of state or regional broadband health care networks and with the advanced telecommunications and information services provided over those networks).

A. Background

65. Since 1985, the Commission, pursuant to its general authority under sections 1, 4(i), 201, and 205 of the Act and in cooperation with state regulators and local telephone companies, has administered two programs designed to increase subscribership by reducing charges to low-income consumers.¹⁵⁷ The Commission's Lifeline program reduces qualifying consumers' monthly charges, and Link Up provides federal support to reduce eligible consumers' initial connection charges by up to one half.¹⁵⁸

66. Under the Commission's current rules, states and territories have the authority to establish their own Lifeline/Link Up programs that provide additional support to low-income consumers that incorporate the unique characteristics of each state or territory.¹⁵⁹ For example, in establishing eligibility criteria, states have the flexibility to consider federal and state-specific public assistance programs with high rates of participation among low-income consumers in the state. State certification procedures and outreach efforts can also take into account existing state laws and budgetary limits. Some states and territories, however, have elected to use the federal criteria as their default standard. These "federal default states" include not only states and territories with their own Lifeline/Link Up programs that have adopted the federal default criteria, but also states and territories that have not adopted their own Lifeline/Link Up program. In April 2004, the Commission released an order expanding the federal default eligibility criteria to include an income-based criterion and additional means-tested programs.¹⁶⁰

67. *Eligibility for Lifeline and Link Up.* In states that provide state Lifeline and Link Up support, Lifeline and Link Up are available to all subscribers who meet state eligibility requirements. Although states have some latitude in selecting means tests, state commissions must establish narrowly targeted qualification criteria that are based solely on income or factors directly related to income for low-income residents to be eligible for Lifeline and Link Up. In addition, states with eligible residents of tribal lands must ensure that their qualification criteria are reasonably designed to apply to residents of tribal lands, if applicable.¹⁶¹ To receive Lifeline and Link Up in a state that does not mandate state Lifeline support, consumers must certify that their household income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or that they participate in one of the following seven federal programs:

¹⁵⁷ 47 U.S.C. §§ 151, 154(i), 201, 205.

¹⁵⁸ Lifeline currently provides low-income consumers with discounts of up to \$10.00 off of the monthly cost of telephone service for a single telephone line in their principal residence, though this amount adjusts, in part, to reflect the carrier's tariffed federal subscriber line charge. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.403. Link Up provides low-income consumers with discounts of up to \$30.00 off of the initial costs of installing telephone service. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.411(a). Under the Commission's rules, there are four tiers of federal Lifeline support. All eligible subscribers receive Tier 1 support which provides a discount equal to the ETC's subscriber line charge. Tier 2 support provides an additional \$1.75 per month in federal support, available if all relevant state regulatory authorities approve such a reduction. (All fifty states have approved this reduction.) Tier 3 of federal support provides one half of the subscriber's state Lifeline support, up to a maximum of \$1.75. Only subscribers residing in a state that has established its own Lifeline/Link Up program may receive Tier 3 support, assuming that the ETC has all necessary approvals to pass on the full amount of this total support in discounts to subscribers. Tier 4 support provides eligible subscribers living on tribal lands up to an additional \$25 per month towards reducing basic local service rates, but this discount cannot bring the subscriber's cost for basic local service to less than \$1. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.403.

¹⁵⁹ *See* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.409(a), 54.415(a).

¹⁶⁰ *See Lifeline and Link Up*, WC Docket No. 03-109, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 19 FCC Rcd 8302 (2004).

¹⁶¹ 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(a).

Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the National School Lunch Program's free lunch program, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).¹⁶² Subscribers living on tribal lands qualify to receive federal Lifeline support if: (1) they qualify under state criteria in a state that provides Lifeline support; (2) they certify that their household income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; (3) they certify that they receive benefits from one of the seven federal programs listed above; or (4) they certify that they participate in one of the following additional federal assistance programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance (GA), Tribally administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF), or Head Start (meeting the income-qualifying standard).¹⁶³

68. *TracFone and Computer and Communications Industry Association Petitions.* On October 9, 2008, TracFone Wireless, Inc. (TracFone) submitted a petition requesting that the Commission establish a trial basis program to support broadband Internet access service and the devices that support this service.¹⁶⁴ Citing data demonstrating that a significant amount of low-income families are unable to afford broadband Internet access, TracFone proposes that the Commission, on a temporary basis, provide affordable access to low-income consumers by supporting broadband Internet access service and the devices used to access these services.¹⁶⁵ TracFone proposes limiting the program to 500,000 to 100,000 low-income households in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia.¹⁶⁶ Doing so, according to TracFone, will enable to the Commission to examine how to better make available broadband Internet access service to low-income consumers throughout the Nation.¹⁶⁷

69. On October 7, 2008, the Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA) filed a petition requesting the Commission revise the definition of universal service supported services to allow low-income consumers receive support for broadband Internet access services.¹⁶⁸ CCIA states that, despite a critical need for broadband Internet access service, low-income consumers still have a considerably low broadband Internet access deployment rate. Accordingly, CCIA argues the definition of supported services for purposes of universal service should be revised to provide support for broadband Internet access service to low-income consumers.¹⁶⁹

70. In recent proceedings, other parties have also urged the Commission to provide low-income consumers with support for broadband services. For example, Windstream argues that the Commission should direct broadband support to low-income consumers where such support is most

¹⁶² 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(b).

¹⁶³ 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(a)–(d).

¹⁶⁴ See *Lifeline and Link Up, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 03-109, CC Docket No. 96-45, Petition to Establish A Trial Broadband Lifeline/Link Up Program (filed Oct. 9, 2008) (*TracFone Petition*).

¹⁶⁵ See *TracFone Petition* at 3–4.

¹⁶⁶ See *TracFone Petition* at 3.

¹⁶⁷ See *TracFone Petition* at 5.

¹⁶⁸ See Petition for Rulemaking to Enable Low-Income Consumers to Access Broadband Through the Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up Programs, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (*CCIA Petition*).

¹⁶⁹ See *CCIA Petition* at 7.

needed.¹⁷⁰ AARP also concludes that the Commission should provide Lifeline/Link Up support for broadband services and urges the Commission to conduct a proceeding to examine the matter.¹⁷¹ AARP proposes that in addition to examining supporting broadband services, the Commission should also examine how to increase low-income consumers' access to devices that support broadband services and education on how to use such devices.¹⁷² Many consumer groups and service providers have also commented in support of TracFone and CCIA's proposals to support the provision to low-income consumers of broadband Internet access service and the devices used to access these services.¹⁷³

B. Discussion

71. Consistent with the Commission's authority under sections 1, 4(i), 201, 205, and 254 of the Act, we establish a Lifeline and Link Up pilot program to support the provision of broadband Internet access service and the devices used to access this service to low-income consumers.¹⁷⁴ In doing so, we explain the justification for establishing this program and provide criteria and obligations applicants must satisfy for selection to participate in this program. Further, we establish requirements for oversight and administration of the Pilot Program.

¹⁷⁰ See Letter from Eric Einhorn, Vice President Governmental Affairs, Windstream Communications Inc., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 99-68, 08-122, 05-337, 08-152 (Sept. 24, 2008) (Windstream Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

¹⁷¹ AARP *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 55.

¹⁷² AARP *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 55.

¹⁷³ See, e.g., Letter from Dale R. Schmick, CEO, YourTel America, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 03-109, 05-337, at 2 (filed Oct. 21, 2008) (YourTel Oct. 21, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Thomas J. Sugrue, Vice President Government Affairs, T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109, WT Docket Nos. 04-356, 07-195 at 3 (filed Oct. 17, 2008) (urging the Commission to adopt quickly TracFone's and CCIA's proposals); Letter from Karyne Jones, President & CEO, National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 at 1 (filed Oct. 29, 2008) (NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Donnie Ruby, Staff Associate, Telecommunications Research and Action Center, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); Letter from Bill Newton, Executive Director, Florida Consumer Action Network, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 27, 2008); Letter from Robert D. Atkinson, Chair Public Policy Committee, Alliance for Public Technology, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (APT Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from John Breyault, Vice President of Public Policy Telecommunications and Fraud, National Consumers League, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 23, 2008) (NCL Oct. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Mark Richert, Director, Public Policy, American Foundation for the Blind, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (AFB Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

¹⁷⁴ To the extent that our adoption of the Pilot Program adds broadband to the list of universal service supported services, we clarify that this inclusion is limited only to the Pilot Program—broadband is not a supported service for other low-income or high-cost support purposes. Pursuant to section 254(c)(1) of the Act, the Joint Board has recommended adding broadband as a supported service, and we do so for the limited purpose of the Pilot Program. See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 4 (“The Joint Board now recommends that the nation’s communications goals include achieving . . . universal availability of broadband Internet services”). Furthermore, the Commission’s authority to provide universal service support to low-income consumers pre-dates the adoption in 1996 of section 254 of the Act, and arises out of sections 1, 4(i), 201, and 205 of the Act. 47 U.S.C. §§ 151, 154, 201, 205; *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8956–57, paras. 338–40. Pursuant to our authority to regulate low-income support under these sections, as well as under section 254, we provide universal service support for broadband Internet access services through the Pilot Program.

72. *Broadband Internet Access Service and Devices Eligible for Low Income Support.* In the *Universal Service First Report and Order*, consistent with its statutory obligations, the Commission maintained the authority to adopt changes to the Lifeline program to make it more consistent with Congress's mandates in the 1996 Act if such changes would serve the public interest.¹⁷⁵ We believe that a Lifeline and Link Up pilot program comports with the goals of universal service, and advances the public interest by providing new technologies and services to low-income consumers. Section 254(b)(2) of the Act instructs the Commission to base policies for the advancement of universal service on the principle that "[a]ccess to *advanced telecommunications and information services* should be provided in all regions of the Nation."¹⁷⁶ Similarly, section 254(b)(3) states that "low-income consumers . . . should have access to . . . *advanced telecommunications and information services*, that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates charged for similar services in urban areas."¹⁷⁷

73. Since the Commission first adopted its universal service rules in response to the 1996 Act, broadband Internet access service has evolved into a critical service for American consumers.¹⁷⁸ The majority of consumers who use broadband Internet access service today rely on it for telework, access to banking services, interaction with government, entertainment, shopping, access to news and other information, and many other uses. Access to broadband Internet access service is especially important to low-income consumers for purposes of education, public health and public safety.¹⁷⁹ High-speed connections to the Internet allow children in low-income families access to distance learning and research.¹⁸⁰ Telemedicine networks made possible by broadband Internet access service also save lives and improve the standard of healthcare to low-income families living in areas that may lack access to the breadth of medical expertise and advanced medical technologies available in other areas.¹⁸¹ Broadband Internet access service also enables the sharing of critical, time-sensitive information with first responders, government officials, and health care providers, thereby improving the government's ability to provide a comprehensive and cohesive response to a public health crisis.

74. Despite the advances in broadband technology, broadband availability still lags for low-

¹⁷⁵ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8956, para. 339.

¹⁷⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(2) (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁷ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3) (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁸ See APT Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1; NCL Oct. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1.

¹⁷⁹ According to the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, older low-income Americans have difficulty affording broadband services and many do not have Internet access. NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (citing Older Americans, Broadband and the Future of the Net, SeniorNet, 2008). Commenters also assert that broadband connections are particularly necessary for consumers who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing. See APT Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (citing ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC TECHNOLOGY, ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL BROADBAND: POLICIES FOR STIMULATING DEPLOYMENT AND DEMAND 27 (2007)); AFB Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

¹⁸⁰ See *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps to Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, GN Docket No. 07-45, Notice of Inquiry, 22 FCC Rcd 7816, 7817, para. 3 (2007) (706 Fifth NOI).

¹⁸¹ See 2006 *Rural Health Care Pilot Program Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 11112, para. 5; 706 Fifth NOI, 22 FCC Rcd at 7817, para. 4.

income consumers.¹⁸² The Commission's most recent data reveal that where the median income is under \$21,000, approximately 99.5 percent of households have high-speed service available with speeds in excess of 200 kbps in at least one direction.¹⁸³ Yet, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, only 25 percent of households with annual incomes below \$20,000 have broadband service.¹⁸⁴ In contrast, among those living in households with annual incomes in excess of \$100,000, broadband adoption is approximately 85 percent.¹⁸⁵

75. According to the Commission's data, there are approximately 6.9 million consumers participating in the Lifeline universal service program.¹⁸⁶ Providing an additional \$300 million in annual support through the low-income universal service support mechanisms over a three-year period should increase the broadband subscribership for low-income customers to over fifty percent.¹⁸⁷

76. We therefore find that this Pilot Program furthers the universal service objectives of section 254 of the Act and serves the public interest by making this critical service available to the low-income Americans who cannot otherwise afford it. In addition, the Pilot Program will provide the Commission with a more complete and practical understanding of how to ensure the best use of Lifeline and Link Up universal service support to deploy advanced services to low-income consumers.¹⁸⁸

1. Available Funding

77. We establish a maximum annual funding level for this broadband Lifeline and Link Up Pilot Program at \$300 million for each of the next three years. In its petition, TracFone proposes that a pilot program should fund up to either \$180 million or \$360 million per year for Lifeline broadband Internet access service support, and up to \$125 million or \$250 million for the Link Up portion of the program, for a total of either \$305 million or \$610 million, depending on whether the program would

¹⁸² See Cellular South *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10.

¹⁸³ See FCC, HIGH-SPEED SERVICES FOR INTERNET ACCESS: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2006, tbl. 19 (2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-277784A1.pdf.

¹⁸⁴ See 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY ii.

¹⁸⁵ See 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 2.

¹⁸⁶ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT.

¹⁸⁷ Desktop computers can be purchased for as low as \$200. See Walmart Consumer Products, <http://www.walmart.com/catalog/catalog.gsp?cat=3951&fromPageCatId=14503> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008). For \$267, a consumer can purchase a new ASUS Eee PC 2G Surf laptop. See Amazon ASUS Eee PC 2G Surf Product Page, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00114T9WY/ref=noref?ie=UTF8&s=pc> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008). Personal computers and wireless devices will continue to become available at even lower rates. Throughout the world, there are \$100 laptops and wireless devices. See Michael Trucano, InfoDev.org, Quick guide: Low-cost computing devices and initiatives for developing world (Apr. 2008), <http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.107.html> (last visited Oct. 25, 2008). For example, Candlebox, being developed for use in India by Qualcomm, is a low-cost, low-power device that uses mobile technology to provide wireless Internet access and supports e-mail, social networking, e-commerce and distance learning applications. RICHARD P. ADLER & MAHESH UPPAL, ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA, M-POWERING INDIA: MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH at 21 (2008), available at <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7Bdeb6f227-659b-4ec8-8f84-8df23ca704f5%7D/2008INDIA.pdf>.

¹⁸⁸ See NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2 (suggesting that the Pilot Program should be modeled after the existing Lifeline program and can be studied and evaluated to develop future broadband Lifeline/Link Up support programs).

support 500,000 participants or one million participants.¹⁸⁹

78. While we recognize the importance of making sufficient funds available for this Pilot Program to enable us to determine whether and, if so, how to make broadband Internet access service funding a permanent part of the Lifeline and Link Up programs, we find that the levels of funding proposed by TracFone are not sufficiently tied to a specific improvement in the adoption of broadband by Lifeline subscribers, as discussed above. In 2007, the overall size of the universal service fund's disbursement mechanisms was approximately \$7.0 billion.¹⁹⁰ Of that amount, approximately \$823 million went to fund the universal service low-income program.¹⁹¹ TracFone's proposal represents a potential 74 percent increase over existing low-income program disbursements, and would be limited to targeting low-income consumers in only three states and the District of Columbia.¹⁹² We are concerned that such a large funding commitment for a limited geographic area would not provide the Commission with sufficient information to assess the benefits of expanding the low-income support mechanisms upon the conclusion of the Pilot Program. When extrapolated to all states and territories, the low-income pilot program proposed by TracFone could potentially double the size of the \$7 billion universal service fund.¹⁹³ We find it more appropriate to fund a pilot program that better correlates with providing broadband Internet access service to all eligible low-income support recipients as this provides better information regarding the permanent adoption of such support.

79. Instead, we set the size of the Lifeline and Link Up Pilot Program at up to \$300 million per year over the next three years. We find that this amount provides benefits to low-income consumers while not overly increasing the amount of low-income support disbursed from the universal service fund. Specifically, this level of funding should enable the program to increase the broadband subscribership for these customers to over fifty percent.¹⁹⁴

2. Eligible Services and Equipment

80. For the broadband Lifeline/Link Up Pilot Program we adopt today, we limit support to one subsidy per household. For purposes of this order, we define "household" as one adult and his/her dependants, living together in the same residence.¹⁹⁵ Participating households who remain eligible for the program will be entitled to remain in the program beyond the first year, subject to the requirement that participating ETCs verify their customers' continued eligibility under the applicable income-based or program-based criteria, as they are required to do for their current voice Lifeline customers. We do not require state or carrier matching requirements. The Pilot Program is exempt from fees and taxes to the same degree as the current Lifeline programs.

¹⁸⁹ See *TracFone Petition* at 5.

¹⁹⁰ See USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 51. USAC's administrative expenses for 2007 were \$104,073,000. *Id.* at 3.

¹⁹¹ USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 3.

¹⁹² See *TracFone Petition* at 3.

¹⁹³ Assuming \$250 is provided to each consumer, the total cost of the TracFone proposal could reach almost \$7 billion.

¹⁹⁴ See *supra* para. 75.

¹⁹⁵ *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Lifeline and Link-up*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 02-6 and WC Docket Nos. 02-60, 03-109, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 16883, 16890, para. 12 (2005) (*Hurricane Katrina Order*). Also, service agreements of longer than the lesser of one year or the remaining Pilot Program funding period are prohibited.

81. Under the Link Up portion of the Pilot Program we adopt today, we seek to overcome barriers that low-income households might face in subscribing to broadband services, such as lacking the equipment necessary to connect to broadband services. Therefore, if an ETC currently provides or seeks to provide Lifeline voice service to an eligible customer, the Pilot Program will support 50 percent of the cost of broadband Internet access service installation, including a broadband Internet access device, up to a total amount of \$100. The device can be a laptop computer, a desktop computer, or a handheld device, so long as the equipment has the capability to access the Internet at the speeds established per this order, and the equipment carries at least a warranty.¹⁹⁶ The device subsidy is a one-time subsidy and is limited to one unit per qualified household.¹⁹⁷ The subsidy amount will be paid by USAC to the participating ETC that provides the device and the service to the customer, utilizing the same process that USAC uses for the current Link Up program.¹⁹⁸

82. Once low-income households have the ability to connect to the Internet, we seek to ensure that they can afford to subscribe to broadband Internet access service. Under the Lifeline portion of the program, if an ETC currently provides or seeks to provide Lifeline voice service to an eligible household, and that ETC provides broadband Internet access service, the Pilot Program will double the current monthly subsidy for the Lifeline subscriber up to \$10 per month to offset the cost of broadband Internet access service.¹⁹⁹ As defined in this order, broadband Internet access service is an “always on” service that combines computer processing, information provision, and computer interactivity with data transport, enabling end users to access the Internet and use a variety of applications, at speeds discussed below.²⁰⁰ This monthly support provided to participating customers under the Pilot Program is separate from and in addition to their monthly Lifeline support for voice telephone service.²⁰¹

83. All ETCs participating in the existing low-income programs are eligible to participate, provided that they notify the Commission and USAC of their election to participate at least a month in advance and certify that they will comply with all program requirements, including those set forth herein. Such certification must identify the service area in which the ETC plans to offer such Lifeline/Link Up broadband services, the costs of such service and broadband device, and all costs, both recurring and nonrecurring, to the customer participating in the program. The ETC must offer the services supported in the Pilot Program throughout the entire service area. The Wireline Competition Bureau will release a public notice establishing a deadline by which ETCs must notify the Commission of their intention to participate.

84. The program we adopt today is technologically and competitively neutral; however, we

¹⁹⁶ Where such device costs \$100 or less, the Pilot Program will support 90% of the cost of the broadband Internet access device.

¹⁹⁷ 47 C.F.R. § 54.411(b).

¹⁹⁸ See USAC, Low Income: Overview of the Process, <http://www.universalservice.org/li/about/overview-process.aspx> (last visited Oct. 11, 2008).

¹⁹⁹ Because \$10 is the maximum federal support under Tier 1 to Tier 3 of the existing Lifeline program, we find this to be the appropriate support amount for purposes of the Pilot Program. See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 2.3. Ten dollars is also above the average Lifeline support amount of \$8.46, which includes both tribal and non-tribal recipients. See *id.*, tbl. 2.12.

²⁰⁰ See *infra* para. 84.

²⁰¹ Pilot Program participants may not receive support for the same services from both the Pilot Program and the existing universal service programs—which consist of the rural health care, E-rate, high-cost, and low-income programs.

establish minimum speeds at which participating ETCs must be able to provide broadband service. ETCs participating in the Pilot Program must offer broadband Internet access service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.²⁰²

3. Selection Criteria

85. TracFone suggests that all ETCs notifying the Commission of their intent to participate in the Pilot Program should be allowed to provide the broadband Internet access service and devices under the Pilot Program.²⁰³ TracFone also argues that the Commission should limit the Pilot Program to 500,000 to 100,000 low-income households in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee and the District of Columbia.²⁰⁴ We agree with TracFone that all ETCs should be allowed to provide services under the Pilot Program, but we disagree that the consumers who are eligible to participate should be limited to three states and the District of Columbia.²⁰⁵ Instead, it is consistent with the public interest to allow all ETCs and consumers that meet the criteria discussed in this order to participate in the Pilot Program, limited only by the availability of funds. Support will be disbursed on a “first come, first served basis” where priority is established according to ETCs’ submission of reimbursement requests to USAC and compliance with program eligibility.

86. *Consumer Qualifications.* To receive reimbursement under the Pilot Program, an ETC must provide support to a consumer eligible for support under the current Lifeline and Link Up programs. Specifically, the consumer must meet the eligibility criteria specified in section 54.409 of the Commission’s rules.²⁰⁶ We agree with TracFone that only one connection and device per household should be funded. Accordingly, we limit Pilot Program support to one new connection and device per household. Lifeline consumers who currently have a broadband connection and related Internet device are excluded from participation in this Pilot Program. In addition to their obligations under section 54.409 of our rules, consumers must demonstrate that they do not currently have a broadband Internet access service subscription or broadband Internet access device.²⁰⁷

87. *ETC Obligation to Offer Pilot Program Services.* Prior to participation, ETCs must notify the Commission and USAC of their intention to participate. A participating ETC must offer the services and supported devices to all qualifying low-income consumers throughout its service areas. It must also follow the carrier obligations identified in section 54.405, as applicable, of the Commission’s rules.²⁰⁸ Consumers and ETCs must follow the framework and requirements of the existing Lifeline and Link Up program.²⁰⁹

4. Implementation and Reporting Requirements

²⁰² See *supra* para. 52.

²⁰³ *TracFone Petition* at 4.

²⁰⁴ *TracFone Petition* at 3.

²⁰⁵ See, e.g., YourTel Oct. 21, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2 (urging the Commission to allow low-income consumers living in Missouri to be eligible for Pilot Program support).

²⁰⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.409.

²⁰⁷ As discussed above, for purposes of this Pilot Program we define “household” as one adult and his/her dependants living together in the same residence. See *supra* paras 80–84; *Hurricane Katrina Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 16890, para. 12.

²⁰⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.405.

²⁰⁹ 47 C.F.R. § 54.400–417.

88. To be eligible for support, ETCs must submit a reimbursement request to USAC 30 days from the date a customer subscribes to service or purchases a device. We require participating each ETC to file with USAC on a monthly basis the number of Pilot Program consumers it is serving, the types and prices of devices offered, the type of technology used (including make and model of equipment used) and the speeds at which it is providing service to each of those consumers. ETCs in their monthly submission must also report the number of subscribers served for the past month and projections for the number of subscribers for the next 2 months. Such monthly reporting is required to allow USAC to monitor availability of funds under the Pilot Program and notify participating ETCs when funds may no longer be available for additional customers. In determining and/or projecting funds availability, USAC should consider the recurring costs of existing customers; we decline to specifically allocate the available funding between Lifeline and Link Up, relying instead on the certification and reporting requirements herein to enable USAC to properly administer the Pilot Program.

89. Similar to current recordkeeping requirements, we also require ETCs to maintain records to document compliance with all Commission requirements governing this Pilot Program for the three full preceding calendar years and provide that documentation to the Commission or USAC upon request.²¹⁰ Additionally, ETCs must maintain documentation for as long as the consumer is receiving broadband Lifeline service from that ETC pursuant to the Pilot Program, and for three additional years after the consumer stops receiving service pursuant to the Pilot Program.

90. ETCs may receive reimbursement for the revenue they forego in reducing the price of any qualified consumers' broadband Internet access service and related device. As a condition of participation, it is the ETC's responsibility to make available a wide array of cost efficient broadband Internet access devices capable of providing the speeds described above to qualified consumers under this program. ETCs must also comply with the self-certification procedures, and submit certifications with their monthly submissions, consistent with sections 54.410 and 54.416 of the Commission's rules.²¹¹ Any services or equipment supported under this order are non-transferable and the devices must be returned to the ETC if they are not used in compliance with the terms of this order or other applicable laws or regulations. We delegate to the Wireline Competition Bureau the authority to disqualify an ETC or consumer from the Pilot Program and seek recovery of support not used in a manner consistent with this order.

5. Program Oversight

91. We are committed to guarding against waste, fraud, and abuse, and ensuring that funds disbursed through the Pilot Program are used for appropriate purposes. In particular, each Pilot Program participant shall be subject to audit by the Office of Inspector General and, if necessary, investigated by the Office of Inspector General, to determine compliance with the Pilot Program, Commission rules and orders, as well as section 254 of the Act.²¹² The Pilot Program participant will be required to comply fully with the Office of Inspector General's audit requirements including, but not limited to, providing full access to all accounting systems, records, reports, and source documents of itself and its employees, contractors, and other agents in addition to all other internal and external audit reports that are involved, in whole or in part, in the administration of this Pilot Program.²¹³ Such audits or investigations may

²¹⁰ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.417(a).

²¹¹ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.410, 54.416.

²¹² See 47 C.F.R. § 54.619; *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, para. 26.

²¹³ This includes presenting personnel to testify, under oath, at a deposition if requested by the Office of Inspector General.

provide information showing that a Pilot Program participant or vendor failed to comply with the Act or the Commission rules, and thus may reveal instances in which Pilot Program awards were improperly distributed or used. To the extent the Commission finds that funds were distributed and/or used improperly, the Commission will require USAC to recover such funds through its normal processes, including adjustment of support amounts in other universal service programs from which Pilot Program participants receive support.²¹⁴ If any participant fails to comply with Commission rules or orders, or fails to timely submit filings required by such rules or orders, the Commission also has the authority to assess forfeitures for violations of such Commission rules and orders. In addition, any participant or service provider that willfully makes a false statement can be punished by fine or forfeiture under sections 502 and 503 of the Act,²¹⁵ or by fine or imprisonment under Title 18 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) including, but not limited to, criminal prosecution pursuant to section 1001 of Title 18 of the U.S.C.²¹⁶ We emphasize that we retain the discretion to evaluate the uses of monies disbursed through the Pilot Program and to determine on a case-by-case basis whether waste, fraud, or abuse of program funds occurred and whether recovery is warranted. We remain committed to ensuring the integrity of the universal service program and will aggressively pursue instances of waste, fraud, and abuse under the Commission's procedures and in cooperation with law enforcement agencies. In doing so, we intend to use any and all enforcement measures, including criminal and civil statutory remedies, available under law.²¹⁷ The Commission will also monitor the use of awarded monies and develop rules and processes as necessary to ensure that funds are used in a manner consistent with the goals of this Pilot Program. Finally, we remind participants that nothing in this order relieves them of their obligations to comply with other applicable federal laws and regulations.

IV. REFORM OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE CONTRIBUTIONS

92. In this Part, we adopt a telephone numbers-based methodology under which contributors will pay a constant, flat-rate assessment based on the number of telephone numbers they have assigned to residential end users. We set this per-number assessment at the fixed rate of \$1.00 per residential number per month. We conclude that providers of business services should contribute to the universal service fund on a connection basis, and we seek comment on implementation of that methodology. In the interim, providers of business services will continue to contribute based on interstate and international revenues for these services. The separate contribution methodologies for residential and business services will be implemented beginning on January 1, 2010.

A. Background

93. In implementing the universal service requirements of the 1996 Act, the Commission

²¹⁴ We intend that funds disbursed in violation of a Commission rule that implements section 254 or a substantive program goal will be recovered. Sanctions, including enforcement action, are appropriate in cases of waste, fraud, and abuse, but not in cases of clerical or ministerial errors. *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16388–89, para. 30.

²¹⁵ 47 U.S.C. §§ 502, 503(b).

²¹⁶ 18 U.S.C. § 1001. Further, the Commission has found that “debarment of applicants, service providers, consultants, or others who have defrauded the USF is necessary to protect the integrity of the universal service programs.” *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC at 16390, para. 32. Therefore, the Commission intends to suspend and debar parties from the Pilot Program who are convicted of or held civilly liable for the commission or attempted commission of fraud and similar offenses arising out of their participation in the Pilot Program or other universal service programs. *See id.* paras. 31–32.

²¹⁷ *See, e.g.*, 41 U.S.C. §§ 51–58 (Anti-Kickback Act of 1986); 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (False Claims Act).

established a method for collecting funds to be disbursed through the various universal service support mechanisms. Specifically, the Commission determined that contributions to the universal service fund would be assessed on telecommunications providers based on their interstate and international end-user telecommunications revenues.²¹⁸ The Commission concluded that basing providers' universal service contributions on their revenues would be competitively neutral, easy to administer, and explicit.²¹⁹

94. When the Commission adopted the revenue-based contribution system, assessable interstate revenues were growing. The total assessable revenue base has declined in recent years, however, from about \$79.0 billion in 2000 to about \$74.5 billion in 2006,²²⁰ while universal service disbursements grew over that same time period from approximately \$4.5 billion in 2000 to over \$6.6 billion in 2006.²²¹ Declines in assessable contribution revenues combined with growth in universal service disbursements have increased the contribution factor applied to determine universal service contribution amounts.²²² This upward pressure jeopardizes the stability and sustainability of the support mechanisms, demonstrating the need for long-term fundamental reform of the contribution methodology.²²³

95. In addition, interstate end-user telecommunications service revenues are becoming increasingly difficult to identify as customers migrate to bundled packages of interstate and intrastate telecommunications and non-telecommunications products and services.²²⁴ The integration of local and

²¹⁸ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206–07, paras. 843–44; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Access Charge Reform*, Sixteenth Order on Reconsideration and Eighth Report and Order in CC Docket No. 96-45 and Sixth Report and Order in CC Docket No. 96-262, 15 FCC Rcd 1679, 1685, para. 15 (1999) (*Fifth Circuit Remand Order*) (establishing a single contribution for all universal service support mechanisms based on interstate and international revenues).

²¹⁹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206–08, 9211, paras. 843, 845–48, 854.

²²⁰ Compare JIM LANDE & KENNETH LYNCH, FCC, 2000 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY REVENUES, tbl. 4 (2002), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/IAD/telrev00.pdf with JIM LANDE & KENNETH LYNCH, FCC, 2006 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY REVENUES, tbl. 4 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284929A1.pdf. But see Letter from David C. Bergmann, Chair, NASUCA Telecommunications Committee, to Chairman Kevin Martin et al., FCC, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 06-122, 05-337, 05-195, 04-36, 03-109, 02-60, CC Docket Nos. 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 99-68, 96-262, 96-45, 80-286, at 7 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (arguing that the growth in the contribution factor is “almost entirely” due to the growth in universal service disbursement requirements).

²²¹ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 1.2a (2001) (2001 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/Monitor/mrs01-0.pdf; 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 1.11; see also USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 3, 51 (detailing universal service disbursements for 2007 at approximately \$6.9 billion).

²²² The contribution factor grew from 5.9% in the first quarter of 2000 to 11.3% for the fourth quarter of 2008. See *Proposed First Quarter 2000 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 15 FCC Rcd 3660 (WCB 1999); *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD Sept. 12, 2008) (*Fourth Quarter 2008 Contribution Factor Public Notice*).

²²³ See 47 U.S.C. §§ 254(b), (d).

²²⁴ Although the Commission has established safe harbors for the reporting of interstate telecommunications revenues derived from interstate telecommunications services bundled with customer premises equipment (CPE) or information services, it has not established guidelines for reporting interstate telecommunications service revenues for flat-rated bundles of wireline interstate and intrastate services. See *Policy and Rules Concerning the Interstate, Interexchange Marketplace; Implementation of Section 254(g) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended; 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review—Review of Customer Premises Equipment and Enhanced Local Exchange*

(continued....)

long-distance wireline services into packages that allow customers to purchase buckets of long distance minutes and local service for a single price blurs the distinction between revenue derived from intrastate telecommunications service and interstate telecommunications service. Similarly, the availability of mobile wireless calling plans that allow customers to purchase buckets of minutes on a nationwide network without incurring roaming or long-distance charges also makes it difficult for providers and the Commission to identify the amount of revenue derived from interstate telecommunications service.²²⁵ Further, migration to interconnected VoIP services complicates the distinctions that serve as the basis for current contribution obligations.²²⁶

96. In 2001 and 2002, the Commission sought comment on modifications to the existing revenue-based contribution methodology, and on replacing that methodology with one that assesses contributions on the basis of a flat-fee charge, such as a per-line charge.²²⁷ The Commission also sought comment on other universal service contribution methodologies, including moving to a numbers-based methodology.²²⁸ Finally, in May 2008, the Commission encouraged commenters to refresh the record in several pending intercarrier compensation and universal service reform proceedings, including the contribution methodology proceeding.²²⁹

B. Discussion

97. The system of contributions to the universal service fund is broken. The Commission has repeatedly patched the current system to accommodate decreasing interstate revenues, a trend toward “all-you-can-eat” services that make distinguishing interstate from other revenues difficult if not impossible

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Markets, CC Docket Nos. 96-61, 98-183, Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 7418, 7446–48, paras. 47–54 (2001) (*CPE Bundling Order*).

²²⁵ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 13 FCC Rcd 21252, 21258–59, paras. 13–15 (1998) (*First Wireless Safe Harbor Order*); see also *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 17 FCC Rcd 24952, 24965–67, paras. 21–25 (2002) (*Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*).

²²⁶ See *Universal Service Contribution Methodology*, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 04-36, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 21 FCC Rcd 7518 (2006) (*2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*); *aff'd in part, vacated in part sub nom. Vonage Holdings Corp. v. FCC*, 489 F.3d 1232 (D.C. Cir. 2007).

²²⁷ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 16 FCC Rcd 9892 (2001) (*2001 Contribution NPRM*); see also *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Report and Order, 17 FCC Rcd 3752, 3765, para. 31, 3766–89, paras. 34–83 (2002) (*Contribution First FNPRM*).

²²⁸ *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24983–97, paras. 66–100 (seeking comment on capacity-based proposals that had been developed in the record and on telephone-number proposals advocated by certain parties); *Commission Seeks Comment on Staff Study Regarding Alternative Contribution Methodologies*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Public Notice, 18 FCC Rcd 3006 (2003) (*Contribution Staff Study*) (seeking comment on a Commission staff study that estimated potential contribution assessment levels under the then-newly modified revenue-based method and the three connection-based proposals in the further notice portion of the *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*).

²²⁹ *Interim Cap Clears Path for Comprehensive Reform: Commission Poised to Move Forward on Difficult Decisions Necessary to Promote and Advance Affordable Telecommunications for All Americans*, News Release (May 2, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-281939A1.pdf.

and changes in technology. While the service developments that precipitated these changes have enormous consumer benefits, they have also severely strained the contributions system.²³⁰ We therefore adopt today a system of contributions that will assess a \$1.00 contribution per residential telephone number per month, and we will move to a connections-based system for business services. In this part, we explain our legal authority to move to these new methodologies, why we have decided to move to these methodologies, and how the residential numbers-based system will work.

1. Legal Authority

98. The Commission has ample authority to require contributions from the variety of providers discussed below. The Commission's authority derives from several sections of the Act: section 254(d), Title I, and section 251(e). These sections of the statute provide us authority to require contributions from the kinds of service providers we address below in our discussions of the new numbers-based approach for residential services and the connections-based approach for business services.

99. Section 254 is the cornerstone of the Commission's universal service program. Section 254(d) first provides that "[e]very telecommunications carrier that provides interstate telecommunications services shall contribute, on an equitable and nondiscriminatory basis, to the specific, predictable, and sufficient mechanisms established by the Commission to preserve and advance universal service."²³¹ Under this "mandatory contribution" provision, every provider of telecommunications services²³² must contribute, although the Commission has authority to exempt a carrier or class of carriers if their contributions would be *de minimis*.²³³

100. Section 254(d) also provides that the Commission may require "[a]ny other provider of interstate telecommunications . . . to contribute to the preservation and advancement of universal service if the public interest so requires."²³⁴ The Commission has relied on this "permissive authority" to require various providers of telecommunications,²³⁵ but not necessarily telecommunications *services*,²³⁶ to

²³⁰ We agree with commenters who argue that the contribution methodology requires a comprehensive overhaul. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. 1 at 1 (filed Sept. 11, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Roger C. Sherman, Director, Government Affairs—Wireless Regulatory, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1 (filed June 14, 2006) (Sprint Nextel June 14, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (Verizon Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 1 (filed Oct. 20, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²³¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²³² Section 254(d) refers to "telecommunications carriers," which are defined as "any provider of telecommunications services." 47 U.S.C. § 153(44).

²³³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²³⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²³⁵ "Telecommunications" is defined as "the transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user's choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received." 47 U.S.C. § 153(43).

contribute. For example, the Commission has required entities that provide interstate telecommunications to others on a private contractual basis to contribute to the universal service fund,²³⁷ as well as payphone aggregators.²³⁸ Most recently, we required interconnected VoIP providers to contribute even though the Commission has not determined that they are telecommunications carriers. Specifically, in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, we used our permissive authority under section 254(d) to require interconnected VoIP providers to contribute, and we noted that they “provide” telecommunications to their end users.²³⁹ We also noted that in some cases, the interconnected VoIP provider may be “providing” telecommunications even if it arranges for the end user to have PSTN access through a third party.²⁴⁰

101. The Commission also has authority under Title I to require other service providers to contribute. In general, the Commission can rely on its ancillary jurisdiction under Title I when the Commission has subject matter jurisdiction over the service to be regulated, and the assertion of jurisdiction is “reasonably ancillary to the effective performance of [its] various responsibilities.”²⁴¹ The Commission relied on this authority before section 254 was added by the 1996 Act to establish a high-cost support fund,²⁴² which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit found to be a permissive exercise of Title I authority.²⁴³ And more recently in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, the Commission relied on its ancillary jurisdiction under Title I as an additional source of authority to require contributions from interconnected VoIP providers.²⁴⁴ In that order, the Commission noted that the Act grants subject matter jurisdiction over interconnected VoIP because it involves “transmission” of

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²³⁶ “Telecommunications service” is defined as “the offering of telecommunications for a fee directly to the public, or to such classes of users as to be effectively available directly to the public, regardless of the facilities used.” 47 U.S.C. § 153(46).

²³⁷ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a); *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9183–84, paras. 794–95. We note that private service providers that provide interstate connections solely to meet their internal needs (i.e., self-providers) will not be required to contribute under the new methodology. This is consistent with our current policy. In the *Universal Service First Report and Order*, the Commission reasoned that, for self-providers of interstate telecommunications, the telecommunications is incidental to their primary non-telecommunications business. See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9185, para. 799.

²³⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a); *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9184–85, paras. 796–98. But see Letter from Robert F. Aldrich, Counsel for the American Public Communications Council (APCC), to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. (filed Oct. 23, 2008).

²³⁹ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7538–40, paras. 39–41; 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a).

²⁴⁰ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7539, para. 41 (“To provide this capability [telecommunications], interconnected VoIP providers may rely on their own facilities or provide access to the PSTN through others.”).

²⁴¹ See *United States v. Southwestern Cable Co.*, 392 U.S. 157, 177–78 (1968); *United States v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 406 U.S. 649, 667–68 (1972); *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 440 U.S. 689, 700 (1979); see also *American Library Ass’n v. FCC*, 406 F.3d 689 (D.C. Cir. 2005).

²⁴² See *Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission’s Rules and Establishment of a Joint Board*, CC Docket No. 80-286, Decision and Order, 96 F.C.C.2d 781, (1984), *aff’d sub nom. Rural Tel. Coalition v. FCC*, 838 F.2d 1307 (D.C. Cir. 1988).

²⁴³ *Rural Tel. Coalition*, 838 F.2d at 1315.

²⁴⁴ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7541–43, paras. 46–49.

voice by wire or radio,²⁴⁵ and that imposing contribution obligations on interconnected VoIP providers was “reasonably ancillary” to the effective performance of the Commission’s responsibilities to establish “specific, predictable, and sufficient mechanisms . . . to preserve and advance universal service.”²⁴⁶ In particular, the Commission noted that interconnected VoIP providers “benefit from their interconnection to the PSTN.”²⁴⁷

102. In addition, Congress provided the Commission with “plenary authority” over numbering in section 251(e). Specifically, the Commission has “exclusive jurisdiction over those portions of the North American Numbering Plan that pertain to the United States.”²⁴⁸ The Commission relied on its authority under section 251(e) to support its action to require interconnected VoIP providers to provide E911 services.²⁴⁹ The Commission noted that it exercised its authority under section 251(e) because, among other reasons, “interconnected VoIP providers use NANP numbers to provide their services.”²⁵⁰

103. These sections of the Act provide the Commission ample authority to require contributions from all providers subject to the new numbers-based and connections-based approaches described in more detail below. These methodologies may require some providers to contribute directly to universal service when in the past they may have been contributing only indirectly or not at all. For example, under the numbers-based approach, any provider who assigns an “Assessable Number” to a residential user must contribute \$1.00 per number per month.²⁵¹ Providers such as VoIP providers who are not “interconnected VoIP” providers, electronic facsimile service providers, Internet-based TRS providers, one-way and two-way paging service providers, and telematics providers may assign Assessable Numbers to residential users and maintain the retail relationship with the end users.²⁵² Not all of these providers are “telecommunications carriers” subject to the mandatory contribution obligation of section 254(d). Nonetheless, we have authority to require them to contribute. First, all of these providers provide—directly or indirectly—some amount of interconnection to the public switched telephone network (PSTN), the network that universal service supports. Interconnection to the PSTN benefits the consumers of each of these types of services, facilitating communication (even if just one-way communication) between the end user and PSTN users. As we noted in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, interconnected VoIP providers often provide access to the PSTN via third parties²⁵³ and this is sufficient to permit the Commission to rely on its authority to require contributions from “other provider[s] of interstate telecommunications.”²⁵⁴ And as we explain below, it is in the public interest (as

²⁴⁵ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 47 & n.160 (citing *IP-Enabled Services*, First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 10245 (2005) (*VoIP 911 Order*), *aff’d sub nom. Nuvio Corp. v. FCC*, 473 F.3d 302 (D.C. Cir. 2006); 47 U.S.C. § 152(a)).

²⁴⁶ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 48 (quoting 47 U.S.C. § 254(d)).

²⁴⁷ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 48.

²⁴⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 251(e)(1).

²⁴⁹ See *VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 10265, para. 33.

²⁵⁰ See *VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 10265, para. 33.

²⁵¹ The term Assessable Number is defined below. See *infra* paras. 115–129.

²⁵² This list is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Other providers may also have to contribute to the universal service fund based on the criteria described in this order.

²⁵³ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7539, para. 41.

²⁵⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

required by section 254(d)) that these providers contribute. Furthermore, the prerequisites for the use of our Title I ancillary jurisdiction are unquestionably met here. All the services that rely on assignment of an Assessable Number to a residential end user come within the Commission's broad subject matter jurisdiction because they involve in some manner "interstate . . . communication by wire or radio."²⁵⁵ And similar to our explanation in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, requiring contributions from providers who take advantage of PSTN connectivity whether directly or indirectly makes sense because their end users benefit from the ubiquity of that network and from being somehow interconnected with it.²⁵⁶ Finally, our plenary authority over numbering supports our actions here with regard to a numbers-based methodology for residential services. The purpose of a uniform system of numbering is to facilitate communication on interconnected networks based on a standardized system of identifiers—telephone numbers.²⁵⁷ Those customers who are assigned telephone numbers, whether for plain old telephone service (POTS) or for any other service, are using the numbers to take advantage of some feature of the PSTN, whether it is the capability to be called, to have their locations automatically relayed to emergency call handlers, to be faxed from anywhere, or for some other reason. Because customers are receiving this benefit, it is appropriate that their service providers (and ultimately, likely, the customers themselves) contribute to the ubiquity and support of the network from which they are benefiting.

104. We reject suggestions that we do not have authority to require contributions based on numbers or connections because we lack authority over intrastate services.²⁵⁸ The same number or connection typically is used for both interstate and intrastate services. The Commission and courts have rejected the assertion that simply because a single facility has the capacity to provide both interstate and intrastate services, the Commission lacks authority to regulate any aspect of the facility.²⁵⁹ In fact, the subscriber line charge (SLC) that the Commission established is intended to capture the *interstate* cost of the *local* loop.²⁶⁰ The contribution methodologies we adopt are thus limited to assessments on services that can provide interstate service. We will only require providers to contribute to universal service based on the Assessable Numbers or connections that are capable of originating or terminating interstate or

²⁵⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 152(a); *see also VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 10261–62, para. 28 (providing detailed explanation of why interconnected VoIP falls within the Commission's subject matter jurisdiction).

²⁵⁶ *Compare 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7540, para. 43.

²⁵⁷ *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 96-98, Second Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 19392, 19404, 19407, paras. 19, 25 (1996) (noting that numbering administration ensures the creation of a nationwide, uniform system of numbering essential to the efficient delivery of interstate and international telecommunications services and the development of a competitive telecommunications services market) (subsequent history omitted); *see also Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, CC Docket No. 95-283, Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 2588, 2591, para. 4 (1995) ("Adequate telephone numbers, available through a uniform numbering plan, are essential to provide consumers efficient access to new telecommunications services and technologies and to support continued growth of an economy increasingly dependent upon those services and technologies."); *Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, CC Docket No. 92-237, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 11 FCC Rcd 2068, para. 2 (1994).

²⁵⁸ *See, e.g., American Association of Paging Carriers (AAPC) Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 7; Alaska Communication Systems (ACS) Contribution First FNPRM Reply at 6–7; Allied Personal Communications Industry Association of California (Allied) Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 6–7; National ALEC Association/Prepaid Communications Association (NALA/PCA) Contribution First FNPRM Reply at 3.*

²⁵⁹ *See, e.g., NARUC v. FCC*, 737 F.2d 1095, 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1984) ("The same loop that connects a telephone subscriber to the local exchange necessarily connects that subscriber into the interstate network as well.")

²⁶⁰ *NARUC v. FCC*, 737 F.2d at 1113–14.

international communications.²⁶¹

2. The New Numbers-Based Assessment Methodology for Residential Services

105. As discussed above, we adopt a new contribution methodology for residential services based on assessing telephone numbers, rather than interstate and international services revenue. We find that this change will benefit contributors and end users by simplifying the contribution process and providing predictability as to the amount of universal service contributions and pass-through charges for residential services. For residential services, we set the contribution amount at a flat \$1.00 per month charge for each number associated with residential services.

a. Benefits of a Numbers-Based Contribution Methodology

106. We find that adoption of a telephone number-based methodology for residential services will help preserve and advance universal service by ensuring a specific, predictable, and sufficient funding source, consistent with the universal service principles of section 254(b) of the Act.²⁶² Changes in technology and services have made the revenue-based contribution mechanism difficult to administer. As commenters have noted, the distinction between intrastate and interstate revenues is blurring as providers move from their traditional roles as pure LECs or interexchange carriers (IXCs) to businesses that offer consumers the choice of purchasing their telecommunications needs from a single source.²⁶³ Additionally, these providers are offering consumers greater flexibility, such as bundling of local and long distance service at a flat rate.²⁶⁴ Moreover, technologies such as wireless and interconnected VoIP have emerged that provide voice and data services that know no jurisdictional boundaries.²⁶⁵ Consumers benefit from the opportunity to obtain bundled services, and the universal service contribution mechanism should reflect and complement those marketplace and technological developments as much as possible. Our decision to use numbers as the basis for assessing contributions for residential services will enhance the specificity and predictability of entities' contributions.

107. Our adoption of a numbers-based contribution methodology will benefit both residential consumers and contributors by simplifying the basis for assessments and stabilizing assessments at a set amount of \$1.00 per month per residential telephone number.²⁶⁶ Contributors are allowed, and in most cases do, recover their universal service contribution costs from fees assessed on their end-user customers.²⁶⁷ Under the revenue-based contribution mechanism, a provider's contribution costs fluctuated

²⁶¹ Services that provide only intrastate communications and do not traverse a public interstate network will not be required to contribute under the new assessment methodology.

²⁶² 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5).

²⁶³ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1.

²⁶⁴ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1; see also Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 5 (filed Nov. 19, 2007) (Ad Hoc Nov. 19, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter) (discussing the convergence of different applications for business and residential customers onto a single integrated network with bundled pricing).

²⁶⁵ See *Vonage Holdings Corporation Petition for Declaratory Ruling Concerning an Order of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission*, 19 FCC Rcd 22404, 22412-14, paras. 16-18 (2004) (*Vonage Order*), *aff'd sub nom. Minnesota Pub. Utils. Comm'n v. FCC*, 483 F.3d 570 (8th Cir. 2007).

²⁶⁶ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2.

²⁶⁷ Contributors are prohibited from passing through to subscribers more than their contribution cost. 47 C.F.R. § 54.712.

from quarter to quarter, causing consumers' universal service fees to fluctuate as well. These fluctuations did not allow customers to anticipate changes to their fees. A set \$1.00-per-number contribution assessment is simple and predictable for both contributors and for consumers. To the extent a contributor elects to recover its contribution costs through end-user fees, its residential customers will pay the same \$1.00 fee per number each month, making the assessment simple and predictable.²⁶⁸

108. A numbers-based contribution methodology also benefits residential end users because it is technologically and competitively neutral. A consumer will pay the same universal service charge regardless of whether the consumer receives residential service from a cable provider, an interconnected VoIP provider, a wireless provider, or a wireline provider. This will enable residential consumers to choose the providers and provider types they want without regard to any artificial distortions that would otherwise be caused by differing contribution charges.²⁶⁹ In a marketplace characterized by increased competition within and between different technology platforms, residential consumers will receive the same universal service charge regardless of the type of service the customer chooses.

109. Similarly, by subjecting contributors to the same regulatory framework for assessments on residential services regardless of technology, the numbers-based methodology will eliminate incentives under the current revenue-based system for providers to migrate to services and technologies that are either exempt from contribution obligations or are subject to safe harbors.²⁷⁰ The elimination of such incentives will result in a more competitively and technologically neutral marketplace and a more predictable source of funding for the universal service mechanisms.

110. The adoption of a fixed \$1.00 per residential number per month contribution assessment is specific and predictable and will simplify the administration of universal service contributions.²⁷¹ Interstate end-user telecommunications revenues have become increasingly difficult to identify, particularly for residential services, due to increased bundling of local and long distance service and the growth of consumer interconnected VoIP offerings.²⁷² In contrast, telephone numbers provide an easily

²⁶⁸ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2; see also Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; NCTA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5; Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy (SBA) 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 8; Vonage 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 7-8; Letter from Gregory V. Haledjian, Regulatory and Governmental Relations, Counsel to IDT Corporation and USF By the Numbers Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, Attach. at 3-4 (filed Jan. 30, 2007).

²⁶⁹ See, e.g., NCTA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5; Vonage 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; Letter from Grace E. Koh, Policy Counsel, Cox Enterprises, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 05-337, 01-92, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 96-262 at 2 (filed July 15, 2008).

²⁷⁰ See AT&T 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 4.

²⁷¹ In addition to being easily administrable, the record supports adoption of \$1.00 per month as the residential per-number assessment amount. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszk, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, Attach. at 3 (filed Oct. 25, 2005); See Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 3 (filed Sept. 23, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (estimating a \$1.01 per-number per-month assessment under a numbers-based contribution methodology); see also Letter from Paul Garnett, Assistant Vice President, CTIA-The Wireless Association, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter), Attach. at 5 (supporting the AT&T and Verizon proposal); Letter from David B. Cohen, Vice President, Policy, USTelecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Sept. 25, 2008).

²⁷² See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 1.1.

identifiable basis for contribution.²⁷³ The amount of North American Numbering Plan (NANP) telephone numbers in use has shown steady, stable growth, providing a fairly constant basis for estimating universal service support amounts.²⁷⁴ The new methodology, based on a flat \$1.00 per residential number per month, will be easier to administer, facilitating greater regulatory compliance. A numbers-based contribution methodology will also be readily applicable to emerging service offerings. The new methodology minimizes the potential for providers to avoid contributions by bundling intrastate revenues with interstate revenues or engaging in other bypass activities.²⁷⁵

111. Further, assessing universal service contributions based on residential telephone numbers will promote number conservation.²⁷⁶ Telephone numbers are a finite, public resource. If contributors are assessed based on the residential telephone numbers assigned to them, they will have an incentive to efficiently manage their numbering resources in a manner that minimizes their costs. We expect that this will result in the need for fewer area code splits or overlays due to number exhaust.²⁷⁷

112. Our adoption of a numbers-based contribution methodology for residential services is consistent with the goal of ensuring just, reasonable, and affordable rates.²⁷⁸ The per-number assessment of \$1.00 per number per month will represent a reduction in pass-through charges for many residential customers.²⁷⁹ Although the \$1.00 per number per month assessment may represent an increase in universal service charges for residential customers that make few or no long distance calls, this increase should be slight. Under the current revenue-based contribution mechanism, providers may assess a federal universal service fee on the basis of the customer's SLC. The residential SLC may be as high as

²⁷³ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1; see also ALEXANDER BELINFANTE, FCC, TELEPHONE SUBSCRIBERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, tbl. 1 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284923A1.pdf.

²⁷⁴ See CRAIG STROUP AND JOHN VU, FCC, NUMBERING RESOURCE UTILIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, tbl. 12 (2008) (showing number utilization from December 2000 to December 2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284926A1.pdf.

²⁷⁵ See *Ad Hoc Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 6–7; Coalition for Sustainable Universal Service (CoSUS) *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 38; Sprint *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 8–9. Because residential services will no longer be assessed based on revenues, contributors may not mark-up or otherwise adjust the \$1.00 per Assessable Number per month residential contribution assessment in response to uncollectible revenues.

²⁷⁶ See, e.g., ITI 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 6; Vonage 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 7.

²⁷⁷ See *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket No. 99-200, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 15 FCC Rcd 7574, 7625, para. 122 (2000) (*NRO I Order*) (determining that implementation of thousands-block number pooling is essential to extending the life of the NANP by making the assignment and use of NXX codes more efficient); see also *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 96-98, 95-116, Fourth Report and Order, 18 FCC Rcd 12472, 12474, para. 5 (2003) (*NRO IV Order*) (explaining further that thousands-block number pooling is a numbering resource optimization measure in which 10,000 numbers in an NXX are divided into ten sequential blocks of 1,000 numbers and allocated to different service providers (or different switches) within a rate center).

²⁷⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1).

²⁷⁹ See Letter from Jean L. Kiddoo and Tamar E. Finn, Counsel to IDT Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 5 (filed Aug. 2, 2007) (IDT Aug. 2, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter) (showing that the average residential household paid about \$1.37 in universal service fees in 2006). IDT claims the data show that the lowest-income consumers paid an average of \$1.09 in universal service fees for wireline telephone bills. *Id.* at 6.

\$6.50 per month.²⁸⁰ Based on the most recent contribution factor of 11.4 percent, even a customer who made no long distance calls could thus be assessed \$0.74 per month in universal service charges under the existing revenue-based methodology.²⁸¹ Thus, the potential increase for a customer who makes no long distance calls could be as little as \$0.26 per month under the \$1.00 per number methodology. In addition, we have separate protections to ensure that telephone service remains affordable for low-income subscribers.²⁸²

113. Some commenters assert that assessing a flat universal service charge is inherently unfair because it does not take into account the fact that some people make many interstate and international calls, while others make few if any such calls in a given month.²⁸³ We disagree. We find that imposition of a flat charge is warranted because all contributors and their subscribers receive a benefit from being connected to the public network, enabling them to make and receive interstate calls.²⁸⁴ The *ability* to make or receive interstate calls over a public network is a significant benefit and it is reasonable to assess universal service contributions for residential customers based on access to the network. Customers who do not make any interstate calls still receive the benefit of accessing the network to *receive* interstate calls. The \$1.00 per month per number assessment reflects our finding that it is equitable for providers to contribute a fixed amount based on the ability to access and utilize a ubiquitous public network.

114. Some commenters allege that changing from the current revenue-based methodology to a new mechanism based on telephone numbers would not be equitable because it could reduce contributions from certain industry segments and increase them for others.²⁸⁵ Although the change to a numbers-based contribution methodology for residential services will result in changes in the relative contribution obligations of industry segments, the new contribution methodology is not inequitable or discriminatory. The evolving nature of the telecommunications marketplace and of its participants requires the Commission to periodically review and revise the contribution methodology to ensure that providers continue to be assessed on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis. We find that, given the difficulties in continuing to assess contributions entirely on a revenue-based methodology and the benefit to residential consumers of access to the public network, it is equitable to adopt a numbers-based contribution methodology that assesses a \$1.00 per month per number fee for residential services.

b. Assessable Numbers

115. Below, we describe the telephone numbers for which service providers are obligated to

²⁸⁰ 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1), 69.152(d)(1). The SLC is referred to as the End User Common Line Charge in the Commission's rules.

²⁸¹ The revenue from the \$6.50 SLC would be multiplied by the 11.4% contribution factor, resulting in a contribution amount and corresponding assessment of \$0.74. *See Fourth Quarter 2008 Contribution Factor Public Notice* at 1; AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 3.

²⁸² *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.400 *et seq.*; *infra* para. 141 (describing contribution exemptions for services to low-income consumers).

²⁸³ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Maureen A. Thompson, Executive Director, Keep USF Fair Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 5-7 (filed Mar. 27, 2006) (Keep USF Fair Mar. 27, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); *see also* NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9.

²⁸⁴ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8783, para. 8

²⁸⁵ *See, e.g.*, FW&A *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 13-15; NRTA and OPASTCO *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7-11; SBC *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 18; Verizon *Contribution First FNPRM* Reply at 6; Verizon Wireless *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 5-6.

contribute to the universal service fund. We call these “Assessable Numbers.” The Commission has addressed certain reporting based on telephone numbers in other contexts. In the number utilization context, the Commission requires that each telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA), the Pooling Administrator, or another telecommunications carrier report its numbering resources in each of six defined categories of numbers set forth in section 52.15(f) of our rules.²⁸⁶ In the regulatory fee context, the Commission used the category of “assigned numbers” as the starting point for determining how to assess fees on certain providers, but found it necessary to modify that definition to account for the different regulatory contexts. Specifically, in assessing regulatory fees for commercial mobile radio service (CMRS) providers that report number utilization to NANPA based on the reported assigned number count in their Numbering Resource Utilization and Forecast (NRUF) data, the Commission requires these providers to adjust their assigned number count to account for number porting. The Commission found that adjusting the NRUF data to account for porting was necessary for the data to be sufficiently accurate and reliable for purposes of regulatory fee assessment.²⁸⁷

116. We adopt a new term based on the category of assigned numbers to represent the numbers being assessed for universal service contribution purposes—“Assessable Numbers.” The definition of Assessable Numbers that we adopt focuses on those numbers that are actually in use by end users for services that traverse a public interstate network. Specifically, we define an Assessable Number

²⁸⁶ These six categories of numbers are defined as follows:

- (i) Administrative numbers are numbers used by telecommunications carriers to perform internal administrative or operational functions necessary to maintain reasonable quality of service standards.
- (ii) Aging numbers are disconnected numbers that are not available for assignment to another end user or customer for a specified period of time. Numbers previously assigned to residential customers may be aged for no more than 90 days. Numbers previously assigned to business customers may be aged for no more than 365 days.
- (iii) Assigned numbers are numbers working in the Public Switched Telephone Network under an agreement such as a contract or tariff at the request of specific end users or customers for their use, or numbers not yet working but having a customer service order pending. Numbers that are not yet working and have a service order pending for more than five days shall not be classified as assigned numbers.
- (iv) Available numbers are numbers that are available for assignment to subscriber access lines, or their equivalents, within a switching entity or point of interconnection and are not classified as assigned, intermediate, administrative, aging, or reserved.
- (v) Intermediate numbers are numbers that are made available for use by another telecommunications carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer. Numbers ported for the purpose of transferring an established customer’s service to another service provider shall not be classified as intermediate numbers.
- (vi) Reserved numbers are numbers that are held by service providers at the request of specific end users or customers for their future use. Numbers held for specific end users or customers for more than 180 days shall not be classified as reserved numbers.

47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)

²⁸⁷ See *Assessment and Collection of Regulatory Fees for Fiscal Year 2005, Assessment and Collection of Regulatory Fees for Fiscal Year 2004*, MD Dockets No. 05-59, 04-73, Report and Order and Order on Reconsideration, 20 FCC Rcd 12259, 12271, paras. 39–40 (2005).

as a NANP telephone number or functional equivalent identifier²⁸⁸ in a public or private network that is in use by a residential end user and that enables the residential end user to receive communications from or terminate communications to (1) an interstate public telecommunications network or (2) a network that traverses (in any manner) an interstate public telecommunications network.²⁸⁹ Assessable Numbers include geographic as well as non-geographic telephone numbers (such as toll-free numbers and 500-NXX numbers) so long as they meet the other criteria described in this part for Assessable Numbers.

117. The provider with the retail relationship to the residential end user is the entity responsible for contributing.²⁹⁰ We impose the contribution obligation on the provider with the retail relationship to the end user for several reasons. First, this provider will have the most accurate and up-to-date information about how many Assessable Numbers it currently has assigned to end users. Second, this provider is also in the best position to distinguish residential users from business users, and thus to determine how many of its telephone numbers in use are Assessable Numbers. Finally, this provider, and its users, are benefiting from a supported PSTN, and thus it is sound policy to require them to contribute to its support.²⁹¹ We note that today, providers are permitted to pass through their contribution assessments to end users, and we understand that they typically do so.²⁹² Under the new methodologies, they may continue to do so, subject to the same requirement that they will not pass through more than their contribution amount.²⁹³

118. Next, we specify whether certain types of numbers are included in the definition of Assessable Numbers. First, numbers used for intermittent or cyclical purposes are included in the definition of Assessable Numbers. Numbers used for cyclical purposes are numbers designated for use that are typically “working” or in use by the end user for regular intervals of time. These numbers include, for example, an end user’s summer home telephone number that is in service for six months out of the year.²⁹⁴ In the *NRO III Order*, the Commission clarified that these types of numbers should

²⁸⁸ “Functional equivalent identifier” means an identifier used in place of and with the same PSTN access capability as a NANP number; it is not intended to capture identifiers used in conjunction with NANP numbers, such as internal extensions that cannot be directly dialed from the PSTN. Nor is “functional equivalent identifier” intended to capture routing identifiers used for routing of Internet traffic, unless such identifiers are used in place of a NANP number to provide the ability to make or receive calls on the PSTN.

²⁸⁹ For purposes of the definition of Assessable Numbers, we include only the NANP telephone numbers used in the United States and its Territories and possessions.

²⁹⁰ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206, para. 844; see also, e.g., Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President-Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 7 (filed Sept. 24, 2008) (Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008, *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 1–2; Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel for XO Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket No. 04-36, Attach. at 9 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Letter from Donna N. Lampert, Counsel for Google, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (defining “contributor” as “an entity required to contribute to the universal service support mechanism pursuant to § 54.706 [of the Commission’s rules]”).

²⁹¹ See *supra* para. 103 (discussing the public interest in requiring these entities to support the network).

²⁹² See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2; see also *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24978, para. 50.

²⁹³ 47 C.F.R. § 54.712.

²⁹⁴ See *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 96-98, 95-116, Third Report and Order and Second Order on Reconsideration in CC Docket No. 96-98 and CC Docket No. 99-200, 17 FCC Rcd 252, 303, para. 119 (2001) (*NRO III Order*).

generally be categorized as “assigned” numbers if they meet certain thresholds and that, if they do not meet these thresholds, they “must be made available for use by other customers” (i.e., they are “available” numbers).²⁹⁵ Because these numbers are assigned to end users, we find they should be included in the definition of Assessable Numbers we adopt today.

119. We exclude from our definition of Assessable Numbers those telephone numbers that satisfy the section 52.15 definition of “assigned numbers” solely because the “numbers [are] not yet working but hav[e] a customer service order pending” for five days or less.²⁹⁶ Providers generally do not bill for services that have yet to be provisioned and therefore are not compensated for services during the pendency of the service order. Moreover, such numbers are not yet operational to send or receive calls. Thus, under the existing contribution methodology, providers would not contribute for services they are about to provide (but have not yet provided) under a pending service order. We continue to find it appropriate for contributors not to be required to contribute to the universal service fund for pending service orders.

120. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those telephone numbers that telecommunications providers have transferred or ported to a carrier using resale or the unbundled network element platform. Under prior numbering orders, such telephone numbers would still be included in the NRUF assigned number count of the transferring-out carrier.²⁹⁷ Consistent with our definition of Assessable Numbers, because the underlying provider no longer maintains the retail relationship with the end user, the provider should not include these numbers in its Assessable Number count. Conversely, the receiving provider of such transferred customers would include the associated telephone numbers in their count of Assessable Numbers.

121. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those numbers that meet the definition of an Available Number, an Administrative Number, an Aging Number, or an Intermediate Number as those terms are defined in section 52.15(f) of the Commission’s rules.²⁹⁸ For a particular carrier, the carrier will not have an end user associated with a number in any of these categories of numbers. For example, an intermediate number is a number that is “made available for use by another telecommunications carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer.”²⁹⁹ The receiving provider will be responsible for including the number as an

²⁹⁵ *NRO III Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 304, para. 122 (“With this requirement, we seek to limit the amount of numbers that are set aside for use by a particular customer, but are not being used to provide service on a regular basis. Thus, in order to categorize such blocks of numbers as assigned numbers, carriers may have to decrease the amount [of] numbers set aside for a particular customer. We also clarify that numbers ‘working’ periodically for regular intervals of time, such as numbers assigned to summer homes or student residences, may be categorized as assigned numbers, to the extent that they are ‘working’ for a minimum of 90 days during each calendar year in which they are assigned to a particular customer. Any numbers used for intermittent or cyclical purposes that do not meet these requirements may not be categorized as assigned numbers, and must be made available for use by other customers.”).

²⁹⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(iii).

²⁹⁷ *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7586–87, para. 18. Ported-out numbers, a subcategory of assigned numbers, are not reported to NANPA although NRUF reporting carriers are required to maintain internal records associated with these numbers for five years. *Id.* at 7592, 7601, paras. 36, 62.

²⁹⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f); see also Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 7 (arguing, among other things, that numbers used for administrative purposes and numbers that are not “actively” working, such as aging, unassigned, reserved numbers, and numbers donated back to the industry pool should be excluded from the contributor’s base).

²⁹⁹ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(v).

Assessable Number once it provides the number to an end user.³⁰⁰

122. We exclude non-working telephone numbers from the definition of Assessable Number. Carriers report as assigned numbers for NRUF purposes entire codes or blocks of numbers dedicated to specific end-user customers if at least fifty percent of the numbers in the code or block are working in the PSTN.³⁰¹ Consistent with our definition of Assessable Numbers, carriers should not include the non-working numbers in these blocks in their Assessable Number counts, because the non-working numbers portion of these blocks are not providing service to the end user.

123. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Number those numbers that are used merely for routing purposes in a network, so long as such numbers are always—without exception—provided without charge to the end user, are used for routing only to Assessable Numbers for which a universal service contribution has been paid, and the ratio of such routing numbers to Assessable Numbers is no greater than 1:1. For example, a NANP number used solely to route or forward calls to a residential number, office number, and/or mobile number would be excluded from our definition of Assessable Number if such routing number were provided for free, and such number routes calls only to Assessable Numbers. If, however, such routing or forwarding is provided for a fee, such as with remote call forward service or foreign exchange service, both the routing number and the end user number to which calls are routed or forwarded would be considered Assessable Numbers.

124. In addition, incumbent LECs need not include numbers assigned to wireless providers that interconnect at the end office of an incumbent LEC and have obtained numbers directly from the incumbent LEC.³⁰² Because the incumbent LEC does not have the retail relationship with the end user, it should not include these numbers in its Assessable Number count. The wireless carriers that have the retail relationship with the end users must include these telephone numbers in their Assessable Number count.

125. Finally, we exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those numbers associated with Lifeline services for the reasons described below.³⁰³

126. We do not restrict our definition to numbers that exclusively use the PSTN.³⁰⁴ As noted

³⁰⁰ See *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7587, para. 21 (2000) (“We agree with commenters who opine that [intermediate] numbers should not be categorized as *assigned* numbers because they have not been assigned to an end user. . . . We therefore conclude that numbers that are made available for use by another carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer should be categorized as *intermediate* [numbers].”).

³⁰¹ *NRO III Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 304, para. 122.

³⁰² When a wireless carrier interconnects at an incumbent LEC end office it is known as a Type 1 interconnection. See *Federal Communications Commission Seeks Comment on Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis in Telephone Number Portability Proceeding*, CC Docket No. 95-116, Public Notice, 20 FCC Rcd 8616, 8632, App. B at para. 19 n.53 (2005) (“Type 1 numbers reside in an end office of a LEC and are assigned to a Type 1 interconnection group, which connects the wireless carrier's switch and the LEC's end office switch.”).

³⁰³ See *infra* paras. 140–46.

³⁰⁴ The record is split over whether the definition of an assessable number should be restricted to the PSTN. AT&T and Verizon, for example, do not include such a requirement in their proposed definitions. See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1. Other commenters, however, argue for such a requirement. See Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (the definition of an assessable number should be “premised on a telephone number acting as a proxy for an underlying two-way PSTN connection”). As we explain herein, such a restriction is not warranted.

above, evolution in communications technology away from the PSTN to alternative networks that may only partially (if at all) traverse the PSTN is one of the causes in the erosion of the contribution base under the current revenue-based methodology. As more service providers migrate to alternative networks that partially access the PSTN, continuing to assess universal service contributions based only on traffic that exclusively traverses the PSTN will not account for this migration; nor will it allow us to meet our principle of competitive neutrality.³⁰⁵ Moreover, if a service provider connects a private network to a public network, the service provider and its customers benefit from the connection to the PSTN. Because universal service supports the PSTN and these parties connect to the PSTN, they benefit from universal service.³⁰⁶ Thus, it is increasingly important that we conform our regulatory definitions to recognize this reality. Indeed, the Commission has already begun to recognize the need to create a level regulatory playing field. For example, calls to end users that utilize interconnected VoIP service are not wholly within the PSTN. Indeed, calls between two interconnected VoIP users may not touch the PSTN at all. Yet we found in 2006 that interconnected VoIP providers must contribute to the universal service fund.³⁰⁷ For these reasons, we conclude that our definition must account for public or private interstate networks, regardless of the technology of the network (e.g., circuit-switched, packet-switched) or the transmission medium of the network (e.g., wireline, wireless).

127. Finally, we recognize that, by declining to adopt for contribution purposes verbatim the definition of “assigned numbers” in section 52.15(f) of our rules, which is used by carriers to file NRUF reports,³⁰⁸ we may nominally increase some of the administrative burden associated with universal service contribution filings. We find, however, that any minor administrative cost increases arising from not using the pre-existing definition are outweighed by the benefits of modifying the definition to achieve sound universal service policy. For example, as stated above, the existing definition of assigned numbers would not enable us to meet our universal service contribution goal of ensuring that the provider with the retail relationship to the end user be the one responsible for contributing.³⁰⁹

128. Under our numbers-based approach, certain providers will be required to contribute to the universal service fund based on Assessable Numbers even though they are not today required to submit NRUF data. Section 52.15(f) of the Commission’s rules requires only “reporting carriers” to submit NRUF data to the NANPA.³¹⁰ A “reporting carrier” is defined as a telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the NANPA, the Pooling Administrator, or another telecommunications carrier.³¹¹ In the case of numbers provided by a telecommunications carrier to a non-carrier entity, the carrier providing the numbers to such entities must report NRUF data to the NANPA for those numbers. Thus, non-carrier entities that use telephone numbers in a manner that meets our definition of Assessable Numbers do not report NRUF data yet must contribute.³¹² For example, interconnected VoIP providers may use telephone numbers that meet our definition of Assessable

³⁰⁵ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9207, paras. 845–46.

³⁰⁶ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9184 para. 796.

³⁰⁷ *See 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7536–37, paras. 33-34.

³⁰⁸ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(iii).

³⁰⁹ *See Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206, para. 844.

³¹⁰ 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f).

³¹¹ 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(2).

³¹² *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7587, para. 21.

Numbers even though these providers do not report NRUF data.³¹³ These non-carrier entities that use numbers in a manner that meets our definition of Assessable Number will be required to determine their Assessable Number count based on their internal records (e.g., billing system records) and will be required to report such numbers to USAC.³¹⁴

129. We are mindful that our move to a numbers-based contribution methodology may encourage entities to try to avoid their contribution obligations by developing ways to bypass the use of NANPA-issued numbers.³¹⁵ To the extent, however, these alternative methods are the functional equivalent of numbers and otherwise meet our definition of Assessable Numbers, such entities must report these functional equivalents as Assessable Numbers to the universal service fund administrator.

3. Contribution Assessment Methodology for Business Services

130. Although we find that a numbers-based contribution mechanism is superior to the existing revenue-based mechanism for residential services, applying a numbers-based approach to business services would result in inequitable contribution obligations. Specifically, certain business services that do not utilize numbers, or that utilize them to a lesser extent, would not be contributing to the universal service fund on an equitable basis.³¹⁶ Section 254(d) of the Act requires “every carrier” that provides interstate telecommunications services to contribute to the universal service fund.³¹⁷ Thus, providers of business services, including non-numbers based services, must continue to contribute. We conclude that these services should be assessed based on their connection to the public network.

131. A number of commenters supported moving to a methodology that would assess telephone numbers for those services that are associated with a telephone number and assess based on capacity of the connection to the public switched network those services not associated with a telephone

³¹³ See *Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 2957, 2961–62, para. 9 (2005) (*SBCIS Waiver Order*) (noting that most VoIP providers’ numbering utilization data are embedded in the NRUF data of the LEC). In the *SBCIS Waiver Order*, the Commission granted SBCIS, an Internet service provider, permission to obtain numbering resources directly from the NANPA and/or Pooling Administrator, conditioned on, among other things, SBCIS reporting NRUF data. *Id.* at 2959, para. 4.

³¹⁴ See *infra* paras. 147–53.

³¹⁵ See Letter from Jeanine Poltronieri, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, BellSouth D.C., Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2 (filed July 6, 2005) (“If voice service is provided without using telephone numbers, but with IP address or other identifier, FCC will need to establish a ‘functional equivalency’ test.”).

³¹⁶ Business services such as private line and special access services do not typically utilize telephone numbers in the same manner as residential services, and would not contribute equitably to the universal service fund under a numbers-based approach. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel to Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, at 3 (filed Oct. 9, 2002); Letter from Robert Quinn, Vice President Federal Government Affairs, AT&T, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, at 2 (filed Oct. 22, 2002). Moreover, unlike residential services, which usually have one telephone number assigned per access line, business services do not usually have a number of telephone numbers assigned that aligns with the number of access lines utilized.

³¹⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d). Therefore, we disagree with those parties that continue to support a numbers-only based approach because we find such an approach would be inconsistent with the statutory requirement that every telecommunications carrier must contribute to the universal service fund. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, Attach. at 5 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).

number.³¹⁸ Other commenters supported retaining a revenue-based methodology for these services.³¹⁹ As discussed above, a revenue-based contribution methodology is no longer sustainable in today's telecommunications marketplace.³²⁰ Additionally, a connections-based contribution methodology will provide a basis for assessing services not associated with telephone numbers, and will recognize the greater utility derived by business end users from these high capacity business service offerings.³²¹ Further, in contrast to the revenues on which contributions are currently based, the number and capacity of connections continues to grow over time, providing a contribution base that is more stable than the current revenue-based methodology. Moreover, a connections-based mechanism can be easily applied to all business services. We, therefore, conclude that a connections-based contribution mechanism is the better option for business services. We seek comment below on the implementation of the connections-based contribution mechanism for business services.³²²

132. We find that it is equitable and nondiscriminatory, consistent with the requirements of section 254(d) of the Act, to establish different contribution methodologies for residential and business services.³²³ Although the statute states that “[a]ll providers of telecommunications services should make an equitable and nondiscriminatory contribution to the preservation and advancement of universal service,” it does not require that all contributors or all services be assessed in the same manner.³²⁴ Under the current revenue-based mechanism, the Commission has established different contribution methodologies through the use of proxies for wireless and interconnected VoIP services.³²⁵ As noted above, continuing to use a revenues-based contribution methodology has become increasingly complex, and a numbers-based system would avoid many of those complexities.³²⁶ At the same time, however, if we relied exclusively on a numbers-based contribution methodology, there are some business services—such as private line and special access—that would escape contribution requirements entirely. That result would be inconsistent with the obligation that all providers of interstate telecommunications services contribute to universal service, and would impose an unfair burden on providers that contribute on the

³¹⁸ See *Staff Study*; see also Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee 2003 Staff Study Reply; Letter from John Nakahata, Counsel for the Coalition for Sustainable Universal Service, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Oct. 31, 2002).

³¹⁹ See Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President-Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 6 (filed Mar. 21, 2006) (Qwest Mar. 21, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³²⁰ See *supra* para. 97.

³²¹ Time Warner 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2.

³²² We decline at this time to adopt AT&T and Verizon's proposal for assessing contributions on connections based on flat rate charges that would differ based on the speed of the connection. AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2. Instead, we seek further comment on implementing assessments based on connections.

³²³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

³²⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(4).

³²⁵ The proxies offer an alternative to contributions assessed on actual interstate revenues; they are intended to approximate the portion of revenues derived from the provision of interstate telecommunications services. *First Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 13 FCC Rcd at 21258–60, paras. 13–15 (establishing safe harbors for wireless service providers); *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 14954, para. 1 (modifying the wireless safe harbors); *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7532, 7545, paras. 23, 53 (revising the wireless safe harbor and establishing a safe harbor for interconnected VoIP providers).

³²⁶ See *supra* para. 95.

basis of numbers.³²⁷ We therefore conclude that adopting different contribution assessment methodologies for residential and business services will result in equitable and nondiscriminatory contribution obligations.

133. On an interim basis, while we conduct a proceeding to implement the connections-based contribution methodology, we continue to require providers to contribute to the universal service fund using the current revenue-based methodology for their business services.³²⁸ We find that providers of business services should continue to bear their portion of the universal service contribution obligation to ensure the sufficiency of the fund while the connections-based contribution mechanism is being implemented.³²⁹

134. During the interim period in which the revenue-based contribution assessment for business services remains in place, the contribution factor for providers of business services will be determined based on the funding requirements not covered by the \$1.00 assessment on Assessable Numbers. We will hold constant the contribution assessment on Assessable Numbers and determine the revenue contribution factor based on the quarterly projected demand of the universal service mechanisms divided by the quarterly projected-collected interstate and international end user telecommunications revenues from business services in the same manner in which the current contribution factor is calculated.³³⁰ This approach will ensure a specific, predictable, and sufficient funding source for the Commission's universal service mechanisms.

4. Wireless Prepaid Plans

135. We adopt an alternative methodology for telephone numbers assigned to handsets under a wireless prepaid plan. Some commenters assess prepaid wireless services on a per-minute-of-use basis.³³¹ For example, prepaid wireless providers argue that their customers are typically low-income or low-

³²⁷ 47 U.S.C. §§ 254(b)(4), (d).

³²⁸ Contributors will base their contributions on business service revenues in the same manner as they do currently. We make no change to the *de minimis* exemption or to the Limited International Revenue Exception (LIRE) for business contributions based on revenues. 47 U.S.C. § 254(d); 47 C.F.R. § 54.708; *Fifth Circuit Remand Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 1687-88, para. 19; *Contribution First FNPRM*, 17 FCC Rcd at 3806-07, paras. 125-28. These exceptions do not apply to residential contributions based on numbers.

³²⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(d). Prepaid calling card providers, as well as any other current contributors who provide services to residential consumers but do not assign Assessable Numbers, shall continue to contribute based on their revenues during the interim period until these business services are assessed on the basis of connections and/or numbers. Despite IDT's recent request that its prepaid calling card services be treated as residential for purposes of universal service contribution assessments, we find that, consistent with arguments made over the years by such providers, these calling card services are provided to businesses. See Request for Review of Decision of the Universal Service Administrator by IDT Corporation and IDT Telecom, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 3 (filed June 30, 2008) ("The vast majority of [prepaid calling card sales] are completed through a network of distributors and resellers before being purchased by the ultimate end user consumer."). But see Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel, IDT Corporation, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (asking the Commission to treat prepaid calling cards as residential services if the Commission adopts a numbers-based methodology limited to residential numbers).

³³⁰ The Commission may revise the specific per-number residential assessment amount in the future, if market conditions warrant.

³³¹ AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 4.

volume consumers and, as such, should be subject to a lesser assessment.³³² Verizon and TracFone further assert that prepaid wireless providers may have difficulty administering a per-number assessment.³³³ Verizon, therefore, recommends that any new contribution methodology accommodate prepaid wireless service providers by adopting a per-number assessment that “reflects the unique characteristics of [the] service,” and TracFone similarly agrees.³³⁴ Finally, CTIA essentially argues that the sheer number of prepaid wireless end users—over 44 million—combined with the likelihood that most of these end users would see a rise in their pass-through assessments warrants an exception.³³⁵

136. To accommodate the unique situation of prepaid wireless service providers, we find it appropriate to create a limited modification in contribution assessments for providers of prepaid wireless services and their end users.³³⁶ We agree with commenters that it is considerably more difficult for wireless prepaid providers to pass-through their contribution assessments in light of their “pay-as-you-go” service offerings.³³⁷ Because of this significant practical issue, we will modify the numbers-based assessment for prepaid wireless providers with regard to their offering of these services. Further, we note that, just as with Lifeline customers, many prepaid wireless end users are low income consumers. For example, TracFone states that about half of its customers have incomes of \$25,000 or less.³³⁸

137. We find that TracFone’s “USF by the Minute” proposal best addresses the concerns of prepaid wireless providers within the context of the new numbers-based contribution methodology we adopt today.³³⁹ TracFone’s proposed USF by the Minute Plan would calculate universal service

³³² Letter from Mitchell F. Brecher, Counsel for TracFone, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2 (filed Sept. 17, 2008) (TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; Leap Wireless 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4; Letter from John M. Beahn and Malcolm Tuesley, Counsel to Virgin Mobile USA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 4–7 (filed June 12, 2006) (Virgin Mobile June 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³³³ See, e.g., Verizon Mar. 28, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3; TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2; Virgin Mobile June 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 7.

³³⁴ See Verizon Mar. 28, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3; TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach.; see also Letter from Antoinette Bush, Counsel for Virgin Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 11 (filed Mar. 18, 2005) (Virgin Mobile Mar. 18, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

³³⁵ See CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (raising a concern that current proposals could harm the large number of prepaid wireless customers).

³³⁶ As discussed below, Lifeline customers are exempt from contribution assessments. See *infra* para. 141.

³³⁷ See Letter from Mitchell F. Brecher, Counsel for TracFone, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 3 (filed June 15, 2007) (TracFone June 15 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³³⁸ TracFone June 15, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3. TracFone also asserts that an exception is warranted because it provides service to low volume end users (i.e., end users that do make a small amount of calls, measured in minutes). *Id.* However, as explained below, we decline to provide a contribution exception for low-volume users. See *infra* para. 143.

³³⁹ AT&T and Verizon support the TracFone discount approach for prepaid wireless providers. AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 3; see also Letter from David L. Sieradzki, Counsel to OnStar Corp., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (dated Oct. 28, 2008) (OnStar “strongly supports” the TracFone per-minute of use proposal for prepaid wireless services) (OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

contribution assessments on prepaid wireless services by dividing the residential per-number assessment (the \$1.00 flat fee adopted above) by the number of minutes used by the average postpaid wireless customer in a month. This per-minute number would then be multiplied by the number of monthly prepaid minutes generated by the provider. This amount would be the provider's monthly universal service contribution obligation. The per-minute assessment, however, would be capped at an amount equal to the current per month contribution per Assessable Number, the per-number assessment amount adopted above.³⁴⁰ We illustrate the proposal below.

138. According to CTIA data submitted by TracFone, the average wireless postpaid customer used 826 minutes per month for the period ending December 2007.³⁴¹ The residential per-number assessment of \$1.00 would be divided by 826 minutes to calculate a per-minute assessment of \$0.001210654. The wireless prepaid provider's contribution obligation would be calculated by multiplying the per-minute assessment by the number of prepaid minutes generated for the month. If the wireless prepaid provider generated a billion prepaid minutes in a month, its contribution for that month would be \$1,210,654.³⁴² If the prepaid provider had 10 million prepaid customers that month, the average contribution per customer would be \$0.12 and its contribution obligation would remain at \$1,210,654. If, on the other hand, it had only 1 million customers, the average contribution per-customer would be \$1.20, which exceeds the residential per-number assessment of \$1.00. In this case, because the per-customer contribution amount under the calculation would exceed the residential per-number assessment established by the Commission, the prepaid provider's contribution obligation would be capped at \$1,000,000, which is the residential per-number assessment of \$1.00 multiplied by the 1 million monthly prepaid customers. Under this scenario, the average per-customer contribution for the prepaid wireless provider would be equal to the per-number contribution of \$1.00 for non-prepaid residential numbers.

139. We find the TracFone discount approach superior to other forms of a discount proposed by parties. For example, CTIA proposed a fifty percent discount for prepaid wireless providers.³⁴³ The TracFone approach is based on actual wireless calling data, whereas the CTIA approach represents a more arbitrary half-off discount. Moreover, the CTIA proposal makes no allowance for the type of end user that is using the prepaid wireless service. This contrasts with the TracFone proposal, which would not provide any discount to those end users that use more than the average monthly post-paid number of minutes. As explained above, for those customers whose usage would result in more than the \$1.00 pass-through, the assessment on the provider and the pass-through would be capped at \$1.00 per month per Assessable Number. Thus, high volume users would neither benefit from, nor be penalized by, the discount mechanism. Finally, we make clear that if the prepaid provider is an ETC and is providing service to qualifying Lifeline customers, the provider is exempt from contribution assessments on the qualifying Lifeline customers and we prohibit the provider from assessing any universal service pass-through charges on their Lifeline customers.

5. Exceptions to Contribution Obligations

140. A number of parties have asked for exceptions from the contribution obligation. We find that, in general, providing an exception or exemption to a particular provider or to a particular category of

³⁴⁰ TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 4–5.

³⁴¹ See TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5. We use these data because they are the most recent publicly available data.

³⁴² To the extent that the prepaid wireless subscriber is a Lifeline customer for the prepaid service, the prepaid provider should exclude prepaid minutes associated with the qualifying Lifeline customer. See *infra* para. 141.

³⁴³ CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5.

end users would complicate the administration of the numbers-based methodology we adopt today. The result would unfairly favor certain groups by reducing or eliminating their contribution obligations, while increasing the contribution obligations on providers that are not exempted from contributing. Therefore, we conclude that grant of an exemption from the contribution obligations is only warranted for those who are truly unable to bear the burden of contributing to the universal service fund—low-income consumers. As discussed below, we exempt providers from contribution assessments on their qualifying Lifeline program customers and prohibit contributors from assessing any universal service pass-through charges on their Lifeline customers. Similarly, we exempt providers of stand-alone voice mail services, which are provided to low-income “phoneless” people, from contribution obligations. As explained below, an exception for low-income consumers is consistent with the Commission’s policies underlying the low-income universal service program and targets universal service benefits to those consumers most in need of those benefits.³⁴⁴

141. We conclude that telephone numbers assigned to Lifeline customers should be excluded from the universal service contribution base and providers of Lifeline service may not pass-through contribution assessments to Lifeline customers.³⁴⁵ The Lifeline program provides an opportunity for the Commission to ensure that low-income families are not denied access to telephone service. We find that an exception for Lifeline customers satisfies the high threshold necessary to justify an exception to the new numbers-based contribution methodology we adopt today. Lifeline customers are, by definition, among the poorest individuals in the country. As such, they are in the greatest need of relief from regulatory assessments. Prohibiting recovery of universal service contributions from Lifeline customers helps to increase subscribership by reducing qualifying low-income consumers’ monthly basic local service charges.³⁴⁶ The record, moreover, overwhelmingly supports the creation of an exception for Lifeline customers. Consumer groups, large telecommunications customers, LECs, and wireless providers all support creating an exemption for Lifeline customers, and no commenter opposes an exemption for Lifeline customers.³⁴⁷ We therefore adopt an exemption to our numbers-based contribution methodology for Lifeline customers.

142. Similarly, we find that stand-alone voice mail service providers are exempt from direct contribution obligations of the new methodology we adopt today. Community Voice Mail National (CVM) argues that stand-alone voice mail services consist of free voice mail access to “phoneless” people.³⁴⁸ As in the exemption for Lifeline customers, we find that stand-alone voice mail service of the type provided by CVM benefits low-income consumers who are most in need of access to such services. We therefore exempt providers of this type of stand-alone voice mail service from universal service contribution assessments on numbers associated with stand-alone voice mail services, and we prohibit providers of these services from assessing any universal service contribution pass-through charges on

³⁴⁴ *Alenco v. FCC*, 201 F.3d at 621.

³⁴⁵ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4 (proposing that numbers assigned to Lifeline customers be excluded from the monthly number count for contribution purposes).

³⁴⁶ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24982, para. 62.

³⁴⁷ See, e.g., CTIA 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5; CU et al. *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 58; Ad Hoc Nov. 19, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4; AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 5.

³⁴⁸ Letter from Jennifer D. Brandon, Executive Director, Community Voice Mail National, to Tom Navin, Wireline Competition Bureau, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed May 30, 2006) (Community Voice Mail May 30, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter) (CVM provides “free, personalized voicemail access to people in crisis and transition (homeless, victims of domestic violence, and other ‘phoneless’ people”).

customers of these services.³⁴⁹

143. Although commenters have sought contribution exceptions for other groups of consumers or service providers, we decline to adopt any further exceptions.³⁵⁰ Some parties argue that consumers who make few or no calls, i.e., low-volume users, should be exempt from the numbers-based residential contribution assessment mechanism.³⁵¹ As discussed above, all users of the network, even those who make few or no calls, receive a benefit by being able to receive calls, and therefore it is appropriate for these consumers to contribute to universal service.³⁵² Also as discussed above, to the extent low-volume consumers may see an increase in the amount of their universal service contribution pass-through fee,³⁵³ any such increase should be slight.³⁵⁴

144. We also decline to exempt telematics providers,³⁵⁵ one-way service providers,³⁵⁶ and two-way paging services³⁵⁷ from contributing based on numbers. We disagree with commenters arguing for special treatment for these services.³⁵⁸ Granting exceptions for these services would provide them with an

³⁴⁹ We decline to adopt a reimbursement method, in which contributors would pay the full amount of their contribution assessments and then seek refunds from USAC for any exempted numbers, as recommended by AT&T and Verizon. AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4. We find that adopting such a reimbursement requirements would create a significant administrative burden on contributors that would outweigh any potential benefits. Letter from Matthew A. Brill, Counsel for USA Mobility, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008).

³⁵⁰ We do not prejudge whether additional exceptions should apply if the Commission were to assess contributions based on numbers for business services. We note that certain businesses, such as non-profit health care providers, libraries, and colleges and universities, support such exemptions. We do not address those exemptions at this time.

³⁵¹ See, e.g., CU et al. *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 12; NASUCA *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 14; Keep USF Fair Mar. 27, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 1.

³⁵² See *supra* para. 113; see also Sprint *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7.

³⁵³ But see IDT Aug. 2, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6–7 (arguing that low-volume consumers who make no long distance calls pay about \$1.40 in universal service contribution assessments).

³⁵⁴ See *supra* para. 112.

³⁵⁵ Telematics is a service that is provided through a transceiver, which is usually built into a vehicle but can also be a handheld device, that provides public safety information to public safety answering points (PSAPs) using global positioning satellite data to provide location information regarding accidents, airbag deployments, and other emergencies in real time. See, e.g., Letter from David L Sieradzki, Counsel for OnStar, to Marlene H. Dortch, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Mar. 2, 2006); *Revision of the Commission's Rules To Ensure Compatibility with Enhanced 911 Emergency Systems*, CC Docket No. 94-102, Order, 18 FCC Rcd 21531, 21531–33, paras. 2, 8 (2003).

³⁵⁶ One-way services include, but are not limited to, one-way paging, electronic facsimile (e-fax), and voicemail services (other than stand-alone voicemail services, as discussed above).

³⁵⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Matthew Brill, Counsel for USA Mobility, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (opposing the assessment of a numbers-based fee on paging carriers and their customers); Letter from Kenneth Hardman, representing the American Association of Paging Carriers, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at Attach. (filed Oct. 22, 2008).

³⁵⁸ See Letter from Ari Q. Fitzgerald, Counsel, Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Apr. 12, 2006) (Mercedes-Benz Apr. 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Letter from John E. Logan, ATX Group, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (filed

(continued....)

advantage over other services that are required to contribute based on residential telephone numbers. These services are receiving the benefit of accessing the public network and therefore assessing universal service contributions on these entities is appropriate.³⁵⁹ These service providers have not shown that grant of a contribution exception is warranted.³⁶⁰ Accordingly, providers of these services will be assessed the full per-number charge. Some one-way service providers argue that their services are currently offered on a free, or nearly-free basis, and if these services are assessed on a per telephone number basis, providers will no longer be able to offer them.³⁶¹ We disagree that our change in contribution policy necessitates this result. Although these services may be marketed as “free” to the end user, these services are not truly free. Commercial providers of free or nearly-free services generate revenue in other ways, such as advertising or through more sophisticated paid service offerings or product offerings, and, therefore, whether they continue to offer free services would be a business decision based upon the circumstances of the particular business.³⁶² Indeed, we find that assessing a per-number contribution obligation on these services is consistent with our determination that services that benefit from a ubiquitous public network are fairly charged with supporting the network.

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Mar. 16, 2006) (ATX Mar. 16, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from David M. Don, Counsel for j2 Global Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Nov. 18, 2005) (j2 Global Nov. 18, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from William B. Wilhelm, Jr., Counsel for Bonfire Holdings, to Tom Navin, Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau, CC Docket No. 96-45 (filed Feb. 13, 2006) (Bonfire Feb. 13, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); j2 Global *Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 2; Letter from Kenneth E. Hardman, Counsel for American Association of Paging Carriers, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Oct. 6, 2005) (AAPC Oct. 6, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Frederick M. Joyce, Counsel for USA Mobility, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1–3 (filed Mar. 22, 2006) (USA Mobility Mar. 22, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³⁵⁹ We similarly decline to adopt an exemption from the numbers-based contribution assessment method for services provided by alarm companies. *See* Letter from Donald J. Evans, Counsel for Corr Wireless Communications, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket No. 06-122, WT Docket No. 05-194, at 2 (filed Oct. 23, 2008). These services are receiving the benefit of having access to the PSTN and should therefore contribute to universal service.

³⁶⁰ Telematics providers argue against imposition of a \$1.00 per number per month contribution assessment on telematics numbers due to the service’s critical role in advancing public safety, and because the \$1.00 assessment would be prohibitively expensive. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Gary Wallace, Vice President Corporate Relations, ATX Group, Inc., to Kevin Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4; Letter from Matthew Brill, Counsel for Toyota Motor Sales USA, Inc., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008). We find, however, that treating these services differently than other residential services would not be equitable, given their use of the PSTN and the ability of telematics providers to recover the assessment from their end users. Given the public safety benefit to consumers, we find unpersuasive the telematics’ providers assertions that consumers will discontinue use of the service based on an assessment of only \$1.00 per number. Furthermore, we disagree with commenters who argue that telematics service should be treated as a business service, and conclude that telematics service is a residential service that should be assessed under the \$1.00 per number per month residential contribution methodology. *See* OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; Letter from Tamara Preiss, Legal and External Affairs, Verizon Wireless, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed Oct. 29, 2008).

³⁶¹ *See, e.g.,* j2 Global *Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 7 (arguing that a connections-based universal service methodology would force many heavily used one-way communications services out of existence).

³⁶² *See, e.g.,* j2 Global *Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 8 (describing a “free” service supported by advertising revenue).

145. We also decline to adopt an exception from the residential numbers-based contribution mechanism for additional handsets provided through a wireless family plan. We do not agree with commenters who argue that telephone numbers assigned to the additional handsets in family wireless plans should be assessed at a reduced rate, either permanently or for a transitional period.³⁶³ These commenters assert that assessing contributions at the full per-number rate would cause family plan customers to experience “rate shock.”³⁶⁴ Although family plan customers may see an increase in universal service contribution pass-through charges on their monthly bills, we are not persuaded that the fear of “rate shock” justifies special treatment. We find that each number associated with a family plan obtains the full benefits of accessing the public network, and thus it is fair to assess each number with a separate contribution obligation. We also note that wireless service is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the industry and the record does not include persuasive data showing that a move to a numbers-based contribution methodology would have a significant, detrimental impact on wireless subscribership.³⁶⁵ We agree with Qwest that an exception for additional family plan handsets would not be competitively neutral and would advantage approximately 70 million wireless family plan consumers over other residential service consumers.³⁶⁶ Multiple wireline lines in a household are not given a discounted contribution assessment rate. We therefore decline to adopt a reduced assessment for wireless family plan numbers.

146. Some parties seek an exception to the contribution methodology we adopt today to exclude Internet-based telecommunications relay services (TRS), including video relay services (VRS) and IP Relay services.³⁶⁷ We decline to adopt an exception for such providers at this time. The Commission has an open proceeding on a number of issues related to these providers, including whether certain costs to these providers related to the acquisition of ten-digit numbers by their customers should be reimbursed by the TRS fund.³⁶⁸ We defer to that proceeding consideration of whether to adopt an exception to the contribution methodology we adopt today for numbers assigned to Internet-based TRS

³⁶³ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4; CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5–6; Leap Wireless 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³⁶⁴ E.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 4; CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5–6; Leap Wireless 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2–3. *But see* AAPC Oct. 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³⁶⁵ There are, as of December 2007, 249,235,715 mobile wireless subscribers, a more than 9% increase from the previous year. See FCC, LOCAL TELEPHONE COMPETITION: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2007, tbl. 14 at 18 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-285509A1.pdf. Moreover, where a wireless provider is eligible to receive universal service support, it receives the same level of support for each handset. See WTA/OPASTCO/ITTA Oct. 10, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³⁶⁶ Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 7; Qwest May 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 9; see also CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1.

³⁶⁷ See Letter from Deb MacLean, Communication Access Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, et al. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1–2 (filed Sept. 29, 2008) (CSDVRS Sept. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³⁶⁸ See *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket No. 03-123, WC Docket No. 05-196, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 11591, 11646, para. 149 (2008) (“We . . . seek comment on whether, and to what extent, the costs of acquiring numbers, including porting fees, should be passed on to the Internet-based TRS users, and not paid for by the [TRS] Fund. . . . We also seek comment on whether there are other specific costs that result from the requirements adopted in the *Order* that, mirroring voice telephone consumers, should be passed on to consumers, including, for example, E911 charges.”).

users.³⁶⁹

6. Reporting Requirements and Recordkeeping

147. Under the existing revenue-based contribution methodology, contributors report their historical gross-billed, projected gross-billed, and projected collected end-user interstate and international revenues quarterly on the FCC Form 499-Q and their gross-billed and actual collected end-user interstate and international revenues annually on the FCC Form 499-A.³⁷⁰ Contributors are billed for their universal service contribution obligations on a monthly basis based on their quarterly projected collected revenue.³⁷¹ Actual revenues reported on the FCC Form 499-A are used to perform true-ups to the quarterly projected revenue data.³⁷²

148. We will develop a new and unified reporting system to accommodate our new universal service contribution methodology.³⁷³ Contributors will report their Assessable Number counts on a monthly basis. Contributors must report as an Assessable Number any such number that is in use by an end user during any point in the relevant month. The Commission will develop an additional version of the FCC Form 499 for use in reporting Assessable Numbers. Under the interim business revenue-based reporting component, contributors will report their revenue information on the modified FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q.

149. Under the new numbers-based system we adopt today, contributors will report historical Assessable Numbers monthly. Contributors will then be invoiced and required to contribute the following month. By reporting actual, historical numbers, the numbers-based component of our contribution methodology remains simple and straightforward. As explained above, a key reason to move to a primarily numbers-based approach is its simplicity. Indeed, several commenters propose monthly reporting of historical number counts.³⁷⁴ We find that reporting Assessable Numbers on a projected

³⁶⁹ To the extent that Internet-based TRS users utilize a proxy number or identifier other than an assigned ten-digit number during/pending the transition to ten-digit numbering for Internet-based TRS services, we make clear that those numbers or identifiers are NOT subject to universal service contribution at this time. This treatment is necessary to ensure the smooth transition to ten-digit numbering for these services, and to prevent duplicative charges for end users of these services.

³⁷⁰ See, e.g., *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24969, para. 29. Filers are required to file revisions to FCC Form 499-Q within 45 calendar days of the original filing date. See FCC, INSTRUCTIONS TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET, FCC Form 499-Q, at 10 (Feb. 2008), available at <http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form499-Q/499q.pdf>. Filers are required to file revisions to FCC Form 499-A by March 31 of the year after the original filing date. See FCC, INSTRUCTIONS TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET, FCC Form 499-A, at 11–12 (Feb. 2008), available at <http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form499-A/499a-2008.pdf>.

³⁷¹ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24972, para. 35.

³⁷² See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24972, para. 36.

³⁷³ We decline to adopt the suggestion by AT&T and Verizon to transition the Telecommunications Relay Services Fund, local number portability cost recovery, and numbering administration to a numbers/connections-based assessment methodology. See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6. Although these programs rely on the revenue information reported in the current FCC Form 499-A, they do not rely on many of the revenue distinctions, such as interstate and intrastate, that necessitate the change from a revenue-based assessment for the universal service fund.

³⁷⁴ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 2-3; CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5; USF by the Numbers Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

collected basis would unnecessarily complicate the numbers-reporting system. Although we are mindful of the issues inherent in historical reporting,³⁷⁵ we find that a one month lag between the reported Assessable Numbers and the contribution based on those numbers is minimal and will not unfairly disadvantage any provider, even those with a declining base.

150. We allow contributors to self-certify which telephone numbers are, consistent with this order, considered “residential.” Contributors will be subject to audit, however, and their method for distinguishing residential from other numbers must be reasonable and supportable. For example, in the Commission’s *Broadband Data Gathering Order* released earlier this year, the Commission directed mobile wireless service providers “to report as residential subscriptions those subscriptions that are not billed to a corporate account, to a non-corporate business customer account, or to a government or institutional account.”³⁷⁶ We added that “[f]or purposes of Form 477, subscriptions billed to a federal government department or agency, for example, will not be ‘residential’ subscriptions, while subscriptions to a service plan offered to all federal government employees will be considered to be residential subscriptions.”³⁷⁷ For purposes of identifying numbers associated with business services (which are not Assessable Numbers), contributors may rely on the fact that the line associated with that number is assessed a *multi-line* end user common line charge (i.e., SLC); provided, however, that the SLC must be a mandatory charge, rather than a discretionary charge.³⁷⁸ For determining residential numbers (which are Assessable Numbers), however, a contributor may not rely on the assessment of a residential SLC, because SLC rates are the same for residential and single-line business end users. Therefore, the fact that a contributor charges the single-line business/residential SLC may not accurately indicate whether the service provided is a business or residential service.³⁷⁹

151. Each contributor must maintain the necessary internal records to justify, in response to an audit or otherwise, its reported Assessable Number counts and the data reported on the Commission’s contribution forms.³⁸⁰ Contributors are responsible for accurately including all Assessable Numbers associated with residential services in their Assessable Number counts and revenues from all business services in the interim business services revenue component of the methodology. Failure to file the required form by the applicable deadline, or failure to file accurate information on the form, could subject a contributor to enforcement action.³⁸¹ In addition, as with the current FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q, we will require that an officer of the filer certify to the truthfulness and accuracy of the forms submitted to the administrator.

³⁷⁵ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24969–70, paras. 29–32.

³⁷⁶ *Development of Nationwide Broadband Data to Evaluate Reasonable and Timely Deployment of Advanced Services to All Americans, Improvement of Wireless Broadband Subscribership Data, and Development of Data on Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Subscribership*, WC Docket No. 07-38, 23 FCC Rcd 9691, 9704, para. 24 (2008) (*Broadband Data Gathering Order*), Order on Reconsideration, 23 FCC Rcd 9800 (2008).

³⁷⁷ *Broadband Data Gathering Order* at para. 24 n.91.

³⁷⁸ In other words, the SLC type and rate must be established pursuant to the Commission’s rules. 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(o)(1), 69.152(k)(1). To the extent that the contributor is not required to charge a SLC (e.g., is not rate-regulated by the Commission), a voluntary business choice to include a “subscriber line charge” on a customer’s bill may not be dispositive of the type of service, residential or business, being provided.

³⁷⁹ 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1), 69.152(d)(1).

³⁸⁰ *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, para. 27.

³⁸¹ Pursuant to section 1.80 of the Commission’s rules, failure to file required forms or information carries a base forfeiture amount of \$3,000 per instance and is subject to adjustment criteria. See 47 C.F.R. § 1.80.

152. To ensure that filers report correct information, we continue to require all reporting entities to maintain records and documentation to justify the information reported in these forms, and to provide such records and documentation to the Commission and to USAC upon request.³⁸² All universal service fund contributors are required to retain their records for five years.³⁸³ Specifically, contributors to the universal service fund must retain all documents and records that they may require to demonstrate to auditors that their contributions were made in compliance with the program rules, assuming that the audits are conducted within five years of such contribution. Contributors further must make available all documents and records that pertain to them, including those of contractors and consultants working on their behalf, to the Office of Inspector General, to USAC, and to their respective auditors. These documents and records should include without limitation the following: financial statements and supporting documentation; accounting records; historical customer records; general ledgers; and any other relevant documentation.³⁸⁴

153. Further, we make clear that for purposes of the interim business revenue component, we retain all existing reporting requirements associated with the filing of the FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q for business service revenue. Finally, we direct the Bureau, and delegate to the Bureau the authority, to develop or modify the necessary forms to ensure proper contribution reporting occurs, consistent with this order.

7. Transition to New Methodology

154. The new reporting procedures discussed above will require reporting entities to adjust their record-keeping and reporting systems in order to provide reports to USAC regarding the number of Assessable Numbers and to adjust their revenue information to include only business service revenue. Accordingly, we implement a 12-month transition period for the new contribution mechanisms.³⁸⁵ This transition period will give contributors ample time to adjust their record-keeping and reporting systems so that they may comply with modified reporting procedures. As explained below, a 12-month transition period will also allow reporting entities to submit several reports for informational purposes before being assessed on the basis of projected Assessable Numbers for residential services.³⁸⁶ We find, therefore, that a 12-month transition period balances administrative burdens on contributors with the need to implement the new contribution methodologies in a balanced and equitable manner.

155. During 2009, filers will continue reporting their interstate telecommunications revenue

³⁸² *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16372, para. 27; *see also* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.706(e), 54.711(a).

³⁸³ *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16372, para. 27; 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(e).

³⁸⁴ *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, paras. 27–28. We note that contributors who also report NRUF data to the NANPA are currently required to maintain internal records of their numbering resources for audit purposes. *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7601, para. 62.

³⁸⁵ *See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 Ex Parte Letter*, Attach. at 3 (proposing a 12-month transition to the new mechanism taking effect).

³⁸⁶ *See CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments* at 7; *see also Verizon and AT&T Sept. 11, 2008 Ex Parte Letter*, Attach. at 2 (advocating a 12-month implementation period followed by a 6-month transition period). Some parties advocated for a transition period as short as possible. *See, e.g., Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, Attach. at 2 (filed Sept. 19 2008) (CenturyTel Sept. 19, 2008 Ex Parte Letter); Sprint Nextel June 14, 2006 Ex Parte Letter.* Others advocated for a longer transition period. *See, e.g., Qwest Mar. 21, 2006 Ex Parte Letter, Attach. at 3 (advocating 18 months); XO Communications Oct. 3, 2008 Ex Parte Letter, Attach. at 11 (advocating at least 18 months).*

on a quarterly basis and USAC will continue assessing contributions to the federal universal service mechanisms based on those quarterly reports. This one-year period and, in particular, the first six months of that period, should be used by contributors to adjust their internal and reporting systems to prepare for the reporting of Assessable Numbers and business revenues.

156. Beginning in July 2009, contributors will continue to report and contribute based on their quarterly reported interstate and international revenues for the last two quarters of the year, but they will also begin filing with USAC monthly reports of their Assessable Numbers and quarterly reports of their business revenues. USAC will thus collect data under the old revenue-based methodology, while collecting and reviewing data under the new Assessable Number and business revenues methodologies for the last six months of 2009. We find that this six-month period of double-reporting is necessary to help reporting entities, Commission staff, and USAC identify implementation issues that may arise under this new methodology prior to it taking effect.³⁸⁷ Although only the December 2009 Assessable Numbers and the fourth quarter 2009 business revenue data will be used to compute contributors' January 2010 and first quarter 2010 assessments, we find it is reasonable to require contributors to begin filing under the new methodologies prior to these periods to ensure that there is adequate time for all affected parties to address any implementation issues that may arise. Moreover, we conclude that the short overlap of reporting under both the old and new methodologies will not be unduly burdensome for contributors given the limited duration of the dual reporting.

V. REFORM OF INTERCARRIER COMPENSATION

157. Since Congress first passed the Communications Act in 1934, the Commission has sought "to make available, so far as possible, to all the people of the United States . . . a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges."³⁸⁸ To promote universal service, regulators have long relied on a complex array of intercarrier compensation mechanisms, which generally have included implicit subsidies. Through the years, the introduction of competition into first long-distance and then local markets, as well as the development and deployment of new technologies, have eroded the fundamental economic underpinnings of the current intercarrier compensation regimes. The reforms we adopt in this order are designed to unify and simplify the myriad intercarrier compensation systems in existence today. This unification and simplification will encourage the efficient use of, and investment in, advanced telecommunications and broadband networks, spur intermodal competition throughout the United States, and minimize the need for future regulatory intervention.

158. Today, we adopt a new approach to intercarrier compensation and establish the blueprint for moving to new uniform termination rates that are economically efficient and sustainable in our increasingly competitive telecommunications markets. At the same time, we recognize, as the Commission has in the past, that we need to be cognizant of market disruptions and potential adverse effects on consumers and carriers of moving too quickly from the existing intercarrier compensation regimes to our new uniform approach to intercarrier compensation. Accordingly, we adopt here a gradual ten-year transition plan, with separate stages, designed to reduce rates over a sufficient period to minimize market disruptions and to cushion the impact of our reform on both customers and carriers. At the end of the transition period, all telecommunications traffic will be treated as falling within the reciprocal compensation provisions of section 251(b)(5), and states will set default reciprocal compensation rates pursuant to the new methodology we adopt herein.

³⁸⁷ See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3 (recommending a six-month transition period for filers and USAC to test and calibrate the new system prior to its taking effect).

³⁸⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 151.

A. A Brief History of Intercarrier Compensation

159. This section provides an overview of the development of intercarrier compensation regulation in the United States. Although not comprehensive, it highlights several important goals that have emerged in Commission precedent, which are relevant to intercarrier compensation reform.

- *Promoting universal service.* The Commission has sought to promote universal service, and, in furtherance of that objective, an intricate web of implicit subsidies evolved that were intended to keep the price of residential local telephone service affordable, even if that price was below cost. With the introduction of competition for long-distance telephone service, regulators sought to maintain implicit subsidies of local service when they created regulated intercarrier compensation charges, known as “access charges,” that long-distance service providers paid local telephone companies to originate and terminate long-distance calls.
- *Encouraging efficient use of the network.* The Commission has long recognized that requiring end-users to bear a greater proportion of the cost of the local network encourages them to make rational choices in their use of telephone service. The Commission nevertheless has declined to shift a significant percentage of the cost of the network to those end users in light of universal service concerns.
- *Realigning cost recovery in response to competition.* For much of the twentieth century, telephone service was viewed as a natural monopoly. The emergence of competition for long-distance services in the 1970s and for local services, particularly after the 1996 Act, has placed pressure on above-cost intercarrier compensation charges. Although the Commission, in response to competitive entry, sought to develop intercarrier compensation rules that align more closely with the economic principle that costs should be recovered in the way they are incurred, marketplace developments confirm that those efforts were incomplete. As new competitors entered, a series of regulatory arbitrage strategies developed, some of which the Commission has attempted to address on a case-by-case basis.
- *Technological advancements.* As carriers shift from circuit-switched telephone-only networks to packet-switched broadband networks supporting numerous services and applications, it is important that intercarrier compensation rules create the proper incentives for carriers to invest in new broadband technology and that consumers have the opportunity to take full advantage of the new capabilities of this broadband world.

1. Intercarrier Compensation Regulation Before the Telecommunications Act of 1996

160. When AT&T began offering telephone service in 1877,³⁸⁹ it held all the essential patents and effectively operated as a legal monopoly. When the original patents expired in 1894, however, thousands of independent telephone companies began offering competing local telephone service.³⁹⁰ This

³⁸⁹ The company that became AT&T was originally called the Bell Telephone Company. See AT&T, A Brief History: Origins, <http://www.corp.att.com/history/history1.html> (last visited Sept. 11, 2008) (AT&T Brief History). For simplicity, we use the term “AT&T” to include all predecessor companies.

³⁹⁰ Between 1894 and 1904, “over six thousand independent telephone companies went into business in the United States, and the number of telephones boomed from 285,000 to 3,317,000.” See AT&T Brief History. By 1900, independent telephone companies controlled “38 percent of the phones installed in the United States.” GERALD W. BROCK, THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY, THE DYNAMICS OF MARKET STRUCTURE 148 (1981) (THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY). And, by 1902, 451 out of 1002 cities with telephone service had two or more

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new competition led to lower rates,³⁹¹ and reduced AT&T's average return on investments by over 80 percent.³⁹² AT&T responded by refusing to interconnect with any independent telephone company to exchange long-distance or local traffic.³⁹³ Without interconnection, independent telephone companies could not offer a viable service unless such entities duplicated the AT&T system, which was not economically feasible. As a result, independent telephone companies began to go out of business or were acquired by AT&T.³⁹⁴

161. AT&T's predatory strategy led the Department of Justice to file an antitrust suit against AT&T in 1913. The government alleged that AT&T's interconnection and acquisition policies violated Section 2 of the Sherman Act.³⁹⁵ The case was eventually dropped after AT&T committed to abide by certain principles in what became known as the Kingsbury Commitment of 1913. Under the Kingsbury Commitment, AT&T agreed to: (i) allow independent telephone companies to interconnect with AT&T's long-distance network; and (ii) not acquire any additional independent telephone companies absent regulatory approval.³⁹⁶ In exchange, the government sanctioned AT&T's monopoly control over markets where it already offered service.

162. In essence, the Kingsbury Commitment and subsequent regulation assumed that both the local and long-distance telephone businesses were natural monopolies.³⁹⁷ Policymakers embraced the

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competing providers. See MICHAEL K. KELLOGG ET AL. FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW 11 (1992) (FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW).

³⁹¹ THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 116.

³⁹² FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11; see also Adam D. Thierer, *Unnatural Monopoly: Critical Moments In The Development Of The Bell System Monopoly*, 14 CATO J. 2 (1994), available at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/journal/cjv14n2-6.html> (*Unnatural Monopoly*). Although independent companies competed with AT&T for local service, AT&T had the only long-distance network operating at the time and possessed important long-distance technology patents. See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 148. According to Brock, there is some evidence that the independent companies had planned on starting a separate long-distance network until AT&T refused interconnection. GERALD W. BROCK, THE SECOND INFORMATION REVOLUTION 30–32 (2003) (SECOND INFORMATION REVOLUTION).

³⁹³ FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11–12; THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 148; David F. Weiman & Richard C. Levin, *Preying for Monopoly? The Case of Southern Bell Telephone Company, 1894–1912*, 102 J. POL. ECON. 103, 103–26 (1994).

³⁹⁴ FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11. In 1912 alone, AT&T purchased 136,000 telephone companies and sold 43,000. See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 156.

³⁹⁵ Original Petition, *United States v. AT&T*, No. 6082 (D. Or. 1913); *United States v. AT&T*, No. 6082, 1 DECREES AND JUDGMENT IN CIVIL ACTION CASES 483 (D. Or. 1914); see also PETER TEMIN, THE FALL OF THE BELL SYSTEM: A STUDY IN PRICES AND POLITICS 9–10 (1987); ROBERT W. GARNET, THE TELEPHONE ENTERPRISE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BELL SYSTEM'S HORIZONTAL STRUCTURE, 1876–1909 152–53 (1985).

³⁹⁶ The Kingsbury Commitment was a “unilateral letter rather than an actual consent decree.” See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 155. The Kingsbury Commitment was republished in AT&T's 1913 Annual Report at 24–26, available at http://www.porticus.org/bell/pdf/1913ATTar_Complete.pdf. AT&T also agreed to sell off its Western Union stock, a large independent telephone company that AT&T had recently acquired. See *id.* at 24. See FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11–12; see also *Unnatural Monopoly*.

³⁹⁷ See, e.g., *Unnatural Monopoly* (noting that a Senate Commerce Committee hearing in 1921 stating that “telephoning is a natural monopoly” and a House of Representative committee report stated that “[t]here is nothing to be gained by local competition in the telephone business.”) (quoting G. H. Loeb, *The Communications Act Policy Toward Competition: A Failure to Communicate*, 1 DUKE LAW J. 14 (1978)); see also *id.* (explaining that many state regulatory agencies began refusing requests by telephone companies to construct new lines in areas already served

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view that, because of economies of scale, a natural monopoly could provide service more efficiently than would occur in a competitive market.³⁹⁸ Rates for these natural monopolies were subject to rate-of-return regulation.³⁹⁹ In setting regulated rates, a primary policy objective of regulators was to promote universal service to all consumers through affordable local telephone rates for residential customers. To accomplish this objective, however, regulators created a patchwork of what has become known as implicit subsidies. Thus, for example, regulators permitted higher rates to business customers so that residential rates could be lower, and they frequently required similar rates to urban and rural customers, even though the cost of serving rural customers was higher.⁴⁰⁰ Similarly, AT&T was permitted to charge artificially high long-distance toll rates, and its interstate toll revenues were placed into an interstate “settlements” pool.⁴⁰¹ AT&T then shared a portion of these interstate revenues with independent telephone companies and AT&T’s affiliated Bell Operating Companies (BOCs).⁴⁰² These high long-distance rates enabled regulators to set lower local rates for the BOCs and independent local telephone companies.

163. The use of microwave technology by Microwave Communications, Inc. (MCI), to offer a competitive alternative to AT&T’s switched long-distance service beginning in the 1970s cast into doubt the assumption that long-distance telecommunications was a natural monopoly.⁴⁰³ MCI focused initially on private line service, where AT&T’s rates were above cost. MCI’s service offerings grew after a series of Commission and court decisions rejected AT&T’s objections to MCI’s entry.⁴⁰⁴ Despite these (continued from previous page) _____
by another carrier and continued to encourage monopoly swapping and consolidation in the name of “efficient service”) (citing Warren G. Lavey, *The Public Policies That Changed the Telephone Industry Into Regulated Monopolies: Lessons From Around 1915*, 39 FED. COMM. L.J. 171, 184–85 (1987)); FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 17.

³⁹⁸ A natural monopoly arises “when a single firm can efficiently serve the entire market because average costs are lower with one firm than with two firms.” R. PRESTON MCAFEE, INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMIC ANALYSIS 6–241 (2006), available at <http://www.mcafee.cc/Introecon/IEA.pdf>; see also DANIEL F. SPULBER, REGULATION AND MARKETS 3–4 (1989) (“Natural monopoly generally refers to a property of productive technology, often in conjunction with market demand, such that a single firm is able to serve the market at less cost than two or more firms. Natural monopoly is due to economies of scale or economies of multiple-output production.”).

³⁹⁹ For discussions of rate of return regulation, see, e.g., JAMES C. BONBRIGHT ET AL., PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY RATES 197–376 (1988); CHARLES F. PHILLIPS, JR., THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC UTILITY INDUSTRIES 260–302 (1969) (PHILLIPS, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION); 1 ALFRED E. KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION: PRINCIPLES AND INSTITUTIONS 20–58 (1970) (THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION).

⁴⁰⁰ See, e.g., JONATHAN E. NUECHTERLEIN & PHILIP J. WEISER, DIGITAL CROSSROADS: AMERICAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY IN THE INTERNET AGE 10–15 (2007) (DIGITAL CROSSROADS).

⁴⁰¹ See *Economic Implications and Interrelationships Arising from Policies and Practices Relating to Customer Information, Jurisdictional Separations and Rate Structures*, Docket No. 20003, First Report, 61 FCC 2d 766, 796–97, paras. 81–82 (1976).

⁴⁰² Under the settlements process, the local exchange companies were allowed to recover the portion of their costs allocated to the interstate jurisdiction from the interstate toll revenues. The process for affiliated companies was a process of intracorporate accounting known as “division of revenues,” while the process for unaffiliated companies represented real payments from AT&T to the independent companies. See THE SECOND INFORMATION REVOLUTION at 188. According to Brock, the revenue sharing settlements process was a major source of support for small rural companies, which often could recover a large share of their costs from the interstate toll revenue pool (in some cases as much as 85 % of their non-traffic sensitive costs). See *id.*

⁴⁰³ See DIGITAL CROSSROADS at 60–64.

⁴⁰⁴ AT&T argued that MCI would cherry pick the most profitable customers (those paying above-cost rates) and force AT&T to increase local rates thereby undermining the goal of universal service. AT&T opposed the entry of

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victories, MCI was not entitled to equal access to local exchange service,⁴⁰⁵ and MCI and other IXCs were dependent on the BOCs and independent local telephone companies to complete long-distance calls to the end users.⁴⁰⁶

164. For a number of reasons, including AT&T's resistance to the introduction of competition in the long-distance market, the Department of Justice in 1974 filed an antitrust suit alleging that AT&T had engaged in unlawful monopolization in the local, long-distance, and equipment manufacturing markets.⁴⁰⁷ After eight years of litigation, AT&T and the Department of Justice entered into a consent decree, which federal District Court Judge Greene approved in 1982.⁴⁰⁸ Under the Modification of Final Judgment (MFJ), AT&T agreed to divest its affiliated BOCs from AT&T long distance, and the BOCs were required to provide equal access and dialing parity.⁴⁰⁹ In addition, the MFJ barred the BOCs from entering the long-distance, information services, equipment manufacturing, or other competitive markets to prevent predatory cross subsidization by their regulated monopoly local telephone service.⁴¹⁰ Although the MFJ applied only to the BOCs, the Commission subsequently extended interconnection and nondiscriminatory equal access obligations to all incumbent LECs.⁴¹¹ As a result of the MFJ, MCI, and other competitors were able to compete directly with AT&T to provide long-distance or interstate service, and all IXCs paid interstate access charges to the BOCs and other incumbent LECs to originate and

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MCI before the Commission and the courts. See FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 602-14; *Bell System Tariff Offerings of Local Distribution Facilities for Use by Other Common Carriers*, Docket No. 19896, Decision, 46 FCC 2d 413 (1974), *aff'd Bell Tel. Co. of Pa. v. FCC*, 503 F.2d 1250 (3d Cir. 1974); see also DIGITAL CROSSROADS at 60-64 (noting that AT&T fought "tooth and nail" to deprive MCI of effective access and even unplugged certain MCI lines from AT&T's network).

⁴⁰⁵ Equal access requires that all long-distance carriers be accessible by dialing a 1 and not a string of long-distance codes before dialing the called party's telephone number. See, e.g., HARRY NEWTON, *NEWTON'S TELECOM DICTIONARY* 326 (16th ed. 2000).

⁴⁰⁶ During much of the 1970s, AT&T and MCI debated before the Commission and courts about the charges that MCI should pay the BOCs for originating and terminating interstate calls placed by or to end users on the BOCs' local networks. In December 1978, under the Commission's supervision, AT&T, MCI, and other IXCs entered into a comprehensive interim agreement, known as Exchange Network Facilities for Interstate Access (ENFIA), which set the rates that AT&T's affiliated BOCs would charge IXCs for originating and terminating access to local exchange networks. See *Exchange Network Facilities for Interstate Access (ENFIA)*, CC Docket No. 78-371, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 71 FCC 2d 440 (1979) (subsequent history omitted).

⁴⁰⁷ See *United States v. AT&T*, 524 F. Supp. 1336, 1346 (D.D.C. 1981).

⁴⁰⁸ See *United States v. AT&T*, 552 F. Supp. 131 (D.D.C. 1982), *aff'd sub nom. Maryland v. United States*, 460 U.S. 1001 (1983). The 1982 consent decree, as entered by the court, was called the Modification of Final Judgment because it modified a 1956 Final Judgment against AT&T stemming from a 1949 antitrust lawsuit. See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 116-20.

⁴⁰⁹ The Act defines "dialing parity" to mean that a "person that is not an affiliate of a local exchange carrier is able to provide telecommunications services in such a manner that customers have the ability to route automatically, without the use of any access code, their telecommunications to telecommunications services provider of the customer's designation from among 2 or more telecommunications services providers (including such local exchange carrier)." 47 U.S.C. § 153(15).

⁴¹⁰ See *United States v. AT&T*, 552 F. Supp. 131 (D.D.C. 1982).

⁴¹¹ *MTS and WATS Market Structure*, CC Docket No. 78-72, Phase I, Third Report and Order, 93 FCC 2d 241 (1983) (*1983 Access Charge Order*), *modified on recon.*, 97 FCC 2d 682 (1983), *modified on further recon.*, 97 FCC 2d 834 (1983), *aff'd in part and remanded in part, Nat'l Ass'n of Regulatory Util. Commissioners v. FCC*, 737 F.2d 1095 (D.C. Cir. 1984).

terminate service to end users.

165. While the AT&T antitrust suit was pending, the Commission began to take the first steps toward reforming intercarrier compensation. In 1978, the Commission commenced a review of intercarrier compensation for originating and terminating access.⁴¹² In 1983, following the MFJ, the Commission eliminated the “existing potpourri of [compensation] mechanisms,”⁴¹³ and replaced it “with a single uniform mechanism . . . through which local carriers [could] recover the cost of providing access services needed to complete interstate and foreign telecommunications.”⁴¹⁴ The access charge rules adopted by the Commission provided for the recovery of incumbent LECs’ costs assigned to the interstate jurisdiction and detailed “the precise manner in which [incumbent LECs] may assess charges on IXCs and end users.”⁴¹⁵ In designing the interstate access charge rules, the Commission sought to balance a number of competing objectives.⁴¹⁶ For one, the Commission recognized that “[a]rtificial pricing structures, while perhaps appropriate for use in achieving social objectives under the right conditions, cannot withstand the pressures of a competitive marketplace.”⁴¹⁷ Consequently, the Commission sought to follow more closely the principle that costs should be recovered in the way they are incurred, consistent with principles of cost-causation.⁴¹⁸ Under this rate structure principle, the cost of facilities that do not vary based on the amount of traffic carried over those facilities (i.e., non-traffic-sensitive costs) should be recovered through fixed, flat-rated charges, while only costs that vary with usage of facilities (i.e., traffic-sensitive costs) should be recovered through corresponding per-minute rates.⁴¹⁹

166. Despite these rate structure principles, the Commission concluded that a sudden introduction of large flat-rated charges on end-users could have “adverse effects” on subscribership. It therefore adopted a “plan [that] provides for the gradual introduction of these end-user charges.”⁴²⁰ Thus,

⁴¹² See *MTS and WATS Market Structure*, CC Docket No. 78-72, Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 67 FCC 2d 757 (1978); Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 73 FCC 2d 222 (1979); Second Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 77 FCC 2d 224 (1980); Report and Third Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 81 FCC 2d 177 (1980); and Fourth Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 90 FCC 2d 135 (1982).

⁴¹³ See *MTS and WATS Market Structure*, CC Docket No. 78-72, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 97 FCC 2d 682, 683, para. 2 (1983) (*First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*).

⁴¹⁴ See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d 682.

⁴¹⁵ See *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15991–92, para. 22.

⁴¹⁶ See, e.g., *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d at 683, para. 3 (identifying the four primary objectives of: (1) elimination of unreasonable discrimination and undue preferences among rates for interstate services; (2) efficient use of the local network; (3) prevention of uneconomic bypass; and (4) preservation of universal service).

⁴¹⁷ See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d. at 686, para. 7.

⁴¹⁸ See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d. at 688–89, para. 10; see also *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15992, para. 24 (“The Commission has recognized in prior rulemaking proceedings that, to the extent possible, costs of interstate access should be recovered in the same way that they are incurred, consistent with principles of cost-causation.”).

⁴¹⁹ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15992, para. 23.

⁴²⁰ *1983 Access Charge Order*, 93 FCC 2d at 253, para. 35; see also *id.* at 243, para. 4 (finding that a “transitional plan is necessary” in part because “[i]mmediate recovery of high fixed costs through flat end user charges might cause a significant number of local exchange service subscribers to cancel local exchange service despite the existence of a Universal Service Fund” and “[s]uch a result would not be consistent with the goals of the Communications Act.”). As a result, the Commission initially limited the flat rate charge imposed on end users, also

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the Commission limited the amount of the interstate loop costs assessed to residential and business customers as a flat-rated monthly charge, and it recovered the remaining interstate loop costs through a per-minute charge imposed on IXCs.⁴²¹ Moreover, the Commission continued to apply traditional rate-of-return regulation based on carriers' embedded, fully distributed costs, including common costs and overhead.⁴²²

167. In 1991, the Commission took another step toward intercarrier compensation reform by replacing rate-of-return regulation with an incentive-based system of regulation for the BOCs and GTE.⁴²³ This new regulatory regime, known as price cap regulation, was designed to replicate some of the efficiency incentives found in competitive markets. In particular, price caps were designed to encourage companies to: (1) improve their efficiency by creating incentives to reduce costs; (2) invest efficiently in new plant and facilities; and (3) develop and deploy innovative service offerings.⁴²⁴ Although many smaller and rural incumbent LECs remain subject to the Part 69 rate-of-return rules, most of the larger incumbent LECs are now subject to price cap regulation.⁴²⁵

168. The Commission's reforms during the 1980s and early 1990s yielded many public interest benefits. For example, economists have estimated that above-cost access charges reduced U.S.

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known as the subscriber line charge or SLC, to \$1.00 (subsequent orders raised the cap on the subscriber line charge for residential users to \$6.50).

⁴²¹ This per-minute charge was called the carrier common line charge. See *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15992, para. 24. Additional charges were imposed on IXCs to recover the interstate portion of the costs of other parts of a local exchange carrier's network, such as local switches and transport. See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d at 735-40, paras. 129-34, 137-43.

⁴²² See 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.301-.502; see also *Policy and Rules Concerning Rates for Dominant Carriers*, CC Docket No. 87-313, Second Report and Order, 5 FCC Rcd 6786, 6787, para. 1 (1990) (*LEC Price Cap Order*). The rate-of-return regulations are set forth in Part 69 of our rules. See generally 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.1-701.

⁴²³ Price cap regulation was mandatory for the BOCs and GTE and optional for other incumbent local exchange carriers. See *LEC Price Cap Order*, 5 FCC Rcd at 6818-20, paras. 257-79; see also *Access Charge Reform; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchanges Carriers; Interexchange Carrier Purchases of Switch Access Services Offered by Competitive Local Exchange Carriers; Petition of U.S. West Comm'ns, Inc. for Forbearance from Regulation as a Dominant Carrier in the Phoenix, Arizona MSA*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, 98-157, Fifth Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 14 FCC Rcd 14221, 14224 n.1 (1999) (*Pricing Flexibility Order*).

⁴²⁴ *LEC Price Cap Order*, 5 FCC Rcd at 6789-91, paras. 21-37; *Special Access Rates for Price Cap Carriers*, WC Docket No. 05-25, Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 1994, 1998-99, para. 11 (2005); *Section 272(b)(1)'s "Operate Independently" Requirement for Section 272 Affiliates*, WC Docket No. 03-228, CC Docket Nos. 96-149, 98-141, 96-149, 01-337, Report and Order, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 19 FCC Rcd 5102, 5115, para. 22 (2004); *Access Charge Reform; Price Cap Performance Review for LECs; Low-Volume Long Distance Users; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, 99-249, 96-45, Order on Remand, 18 FCC Rcd 14976, 14979, para. 4 (2003); *Cost Review Proceeding for Residential and Single-Line Business Subscriber Line Charge (SLC) Caps; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, Order, 17 FCC Rcd 10868, 10873, para. 9 (2002). See also *Windstream Petition for Conversion to Price Cap Regulation and for Limited Waiver Relief*, WC Docket No. 07-171, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 5294 (2008); *Petition of Puerto Rico Telephone Company, Inc. for Election of Price Cap Regulation and Limited Waiver of Pricing and Universal Service Rules; Consolidated Communications Petition for Conversion to Price Cap Regulation and for Limited Waiver Relief; Frontier Petition for Limited Waiver Relief upon Conversion of Global Valley Networks, Inc., to Price Cap Regulation*, WC Docket Nos. 07-291, 07-292, 08-18, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 7353 (2008).

⁴²⁵ See generally 47 C.F.R. §§ 61.1-.193, 69.1-.701.

economic welfare by an estimated \$10–17 billion annually during the late 1980s, but that the annual welfare loss declined substantially to between \$2.5 billion and \$7 billion following the Commission’s access charge reforms in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁴²⁶ Despite these reforms, however, per-minute access rates remained high.⁴²⁷ These high switched access rates created an opportunity for competitive access providers (CAPs) to begin offering facilities-based competition. CAPs could offer carriers a competitive alternative to the BOCs, often with lower rates and higher quality.⁴²⁸ The entry of CAPs and the potential entry of cable companies into local residential telephone markets created pressure toward opening the local telephone markets to competition, which ultimately resulted in the passage of the 1996 Act.

2. Intercarrier Compensation Regulation Since the 1996 Act

169. Recognizing these fundamental market changes, Congress’s goals in passing the 1996 Act were to: (1) open local exchange and exchange access markets to competition; (2) promote increased competition in telecommunications markets that were already open to competition; and (3) reform the existing universal service system to be consistent with competitive markets.⁴²⁹ With respect to the last goal, Congress recognized that implicit subsidies, which were implemented when the industry was considered a natural monopoly, were neither consistent with, nor sustainable in, a competitive market, and that they should be replaced with explicit support where necessary.⁴³⁰ It also recognized, however, that conversion of the existing web of implicit subsidies to a system of explicit support would be a difficult task that could not be accomplished immediately.⁴³¹ Accordingly, when Congress established the statutory scheme to open local markets to competition,⁴³² it included a transitional mechanism in section 251(g) providing for the continued enforcement of certain pre-Act obligations.⁴³³ Notably, section 251(g)

⁴²⁶ See Letter from Jerry Ellig, Senior Research Fellow, Mercatus Center, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 08-183, 07-135, 05-337, 99-68 at 2 (filed Sept. 22, 2008) (Mercatus Center Sept. 22, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (citing ROBERT W. CRANDALL, *AFTER THE BREAKUP: U.S. TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN A MORE COMPETITIVE ERA* 141 (1991) and ROBERT W. CRANDALL & LEONARD WAVERMAN, *WHO PAYS FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICE?* 120 (2000)).

⁴²⁷ Among the reasons that switched access rates remained high were that they were based on fully distributed costs and included a large allocation of common and overhead network costs. See *supra* note 422.

⁴²⁸ See, e.g., *Expanded Interconnection with Local Telephone Company Facilities*, CC Docket No. 91-141, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 5154, 5158, para. 8 (1994) (recognizing that local competition should lead to more efficient operations, the deployment of “new technologies facilitating innovative service offerings, increase the choices available to access customers, and reduce the prices of services subject to competition”).

⁴²⁹ See *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and Interconnection between Local Exchange Carriers and Commercial Mobile Radio Service Providers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 95-185, First Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 15499, 15505, para. 3 (1996) (subsequent history omitted) (*Local Competition First Report and Order*).

⁴³⁰ Specifically, Congress directed that universal service support “should be explicit and sufficient to achieve the purposes” of section 254. 47 U.S.C. § 254(e); see also S. REP. NO. 104-230, at 131 (1996) (Conf. Rep) (stating that, “[t]o the extent possible, . . . any support mechanisms continued or created under new section 254 should be explicit, rather than implicit as many support mechanisms are today”).

⁴³¹ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9.

⁴³² See 47 U.S.C. §§ 251–52; *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15505, para. 3.

⁴³³ See 47 U.S.C. § 251(g); *WorldCom, Inc. v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429, 432 (D.C. Cir. 2002) (*WorldCom*) (subsequent history omitted) (holding that section 251(g) appears to provide for the continued enforcement “of certain pre-Act regulatory ‘interconnection restrictions and obligations’”); see also *Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 117 F.3d

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provides for the continued enforcement of exchange access and interconnection obligations only “until such restrictions and obligations are explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission after the date of such enactment,” suggesting that such obligations would be re-evaluated based on the requirements imposed by the 1996 Act.⁴³⁴

170. Congress also recognized the need to impose new obligations on carriers to open local telephone markets to competition, and directed the Commission to adopt implementing rules. Specifically, section 251(b) imposed certain obligations on all LECs, while section 251(c) imposed additional obligations on incumbent LECs, including the obligation to provide access to network elements on an unbundled basis.⁴³⁵ Of relevance here, section 251(b)(5) of the 1996 Act imposed on all LECs a “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications.”⁴³⁶

171. In requiring LECs to enter into reciprocal compensation agreements with requesting carriers, Congress introduced another mechanism through which carriers compensate each other for the exchange of traffic besides the access charge regime preserved under section 251(g). Although Congress expressed a preference for negotiated interconnection agreements to implement the requirements of section 251, section 252 provided procedures for the resolution of interconnection disputes involving incumbent LECs, including standards governing arbitration of such disputes by state regulatory commissions.⁴³⁷ For such state arbitrations, section 252(d) also established general pricing guidelines for incumbent LECs, including guidelines for setting the price of unbundled network elements (UNEs)⁴³⁸ and reciprocal compensation rates.⁴³⁹

172. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission adopted pricing rules for states to use in setting the price of interconnection and UNEs when arbitrating interconnection disputes.⁴⁴⁰ In particular, the Commission directed the states to employ a forward-looking, long-run average incremental cost methodology, which it called “Total Element Long-Run Incremental Cost” or “TELRIC.”⁴⁴¹ The Commission found that TELRIC prices should include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs, including overheads.⁴⁴² Although the Commission recognized that peak-

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1068, 1072 (8th Cir. 1997) (finding that section 251(g) preserves certain rate regimes already in place and “leaves the door open for the promulgation of new rates at some future date”).

⁴³⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

⁴³⁵ See 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(b)–(c). Certain rural carriers were exempt from section 251(c) until such time as a requesting carrier met the statutory test for removing the so-called “rural exemption.” See 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(1).

⁴³⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

⁴³⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 252.

⁴³⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(1).

⁴³⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2).

⁴⁴⁰ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15812–929, paras. 618–862 (implementing the pricing principles contained in sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(3) and section 252(d)(1) of the 1996 Act); see also 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(c)(2)–(3), 252(d)(1). Among other things, the 1996 Act required incumbent LECs to make portions of their networks (the physical facilities and features, functions, and capabilities associated with those facilities) available to requesting competitive carriers on an unbundled basis. See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15624, 15631, paras. 241, 258.

⁴⁴¹ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15844–56, paras. 672–703.

⁴⁴² See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15851–54, paras. 694–98; 47 C.F.R. §§ 51.503, 51.505. The term “common costs” refers to “costs that are incurred in connection with the production of multiple

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load pricing was the most efficient way to recover the cost of traffic-sensitive facilities, it did not require states to adopt peak-load pricing because of the administrative difficulties associated with such an approach.⁴⁴³ In interpreting the statutory pricing rules for reciprocal compensation contained in section 252(d)(2)(A) of the 1996 Act,⁴⁴⁴ the Commission found that costs for transport and termination should “be recovered in a cost-causative manner and that usage based charges should be limited to situations where costs are usage sensitive.”⁴⁴⁵ In particular, the Commission found that the “additional costs” to the LEC of terminating a call that originates on another carrier’s network “primarily consists of the traffic-sensitive component of local switching” and that non traffic-sensitive costs, such as the costs of local loops and line ports, should not be considered “additional costs.”⁴⁴⁶ The Commission further found that the “additional costs” standard of section 252(d)(2) permits the use of the same TELRIC standard that it

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products or services, and remains unchanged as the relative proportion of those products or services varies.” *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15845, para. 676. In its rules, the Commission defines forward-looking common costs as “economic costs efficiently incurred in providing a group of elements or services . . . that cannot be attributed directly to individual elements or services.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.505(c)(1). The term “overhead costs” refers to common costs incurred by the firm’s operations as a whole, such as the salaries of executives. *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15851, para. 694.

⁴⁴³ The Commission recognized that, “[b]ecause the cost of capacity is determined by the volume of traffic that the facilities are able to handle during peak load periods, we believe, as a matter of economic theory, that if usage-sensitive rates are used, then somewhat higher rates should apply to peak period traffic, with lower rates for non-peak usage.” *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15878, para. 755. The Commission recognized that higher costs are incurred to carry additional traffic at peak volumes, because additional capacity is required to carry that traffic. *Id.* at 15878, para. 755. In contrast, “off-peak traffic imposes relatively little additional cost because it does not require any incremental capacity to be added to base plant.” *Id.* at 15878, para. 755. The Commission found that there would be administrative difficulties with establishing peak-load prices, however, and did not require or forbid states from adopting that approach. *Id.* at 15878–79, paras. 756–57.

⁴⁴⁴ See generally *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16008–58, paras. 1027–118 (implementing the reciprocal compensation obligations contained in section 251(b)(5) of the 1996 Act). The reciprocal compensation rules currently require the calling party’s LEC to compensate the called party’s LEC for the additional costs associated with transporting a call subject to section 251(b)(5) from the carriers’ interconnection point to the called party’s end office, and for the additional costs of terminating the call to the called party. Section 51.701(c) of the Commission’s rules defines transport as “the transmission and any necessary tandem switching of telecommunications traffic subject to section 251(b)(5) of the Act from the interconnection point between the two carriers to the terminating carrier’s end office switch that directly serves the called party, or equivalent facility provided by a carrier other than an incumbent LEC.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(c). Section 51.701(d) of the Commission’s rules defines termination as “the switching of telecommunications traffic at the terminating carrier’s end office switch, or equivalent facility, and delivery of such traffic to the called party’s premises.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(d). In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission also concluded that “the new transport and termination rules should be applied to LECs and CMRS providers.” 11 FCC Rcd at 16016–17, para. 1043.

⁴⁴⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16028, para. 1063. This determination led to per-minute pricing for transport and termination, except in the case of dedicated facilities, which may be flat-rated. *Id.* at 16028, para. 1063. Specifically, the Commission required that all interconnecting parties be offered the option of purchasing dedicated facilities on a flat-rated basis. *Id.* at 16028, para. 1063.

⁴⁴⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16024–25, para. 1057. Although the Commission concluded that “non-traffic sensitive costs should not be considered ‘additional costs,’” the only non-traffic sensitive costs specifically identified and required to be removed were the costs of local loops and line ports. *Id.* at 16025, para. 1057.

established for interconnection and unbundled elements.⁴⁴⁷ The pricing rules governing reciprocal compensation that the Commission adopted in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* remain in effect today.⁴⁴⁸

173. Following passage of the 1996 Act, the Commission also began reforming both interstate access charges and federal universal service support mechanisms by moving the implicit subsidies contained in interstate access charges into explicit universal service support, consistent with the 1996 Act's directives. In particular, in the 1997 *Access Charge Reform Order*, the Commission modified the price cap rules for larger incumbent LECs by aligning the price cap LECs' rate structure more closely with the manner in which costs are incurred.⁴⁴⁹ Recognizing Congress's direction that universal service support should be "explicit," the Commission adopted rules to "reduce usage-sensitive interstate access charges by phasing out local loop and other non-traffic sensitive costs from those charges and directing incumbent LECs to recover those NTS [non-traffic sensitive] costs through more economically efficient, flat-rated charges."⁴⁵⁰

174. The Commission acknowledged, however, that the measures it adopted in the *Access Charge Reform Order* would not "remove all implicit support from all access charges immediately."⁴⁵¹ Rejecting suggestions that all implicit subsidies be eliminated from access charges immediately, the Commission noted that it did not have the tools to identify the existing subsidies precisely, and it expressed concern that eliminating all implicit subsidies at once might have an "inequitable impact on the incumbent LECs."⁴⁵² Moreover, while stating its desire to rely on competition to drive access charges toward cost,⁴⁵³ the Commission recognized that "some services may prove resistant to competition," and

⁴⁴⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16023–25, paras. 1054–58. As with its pricing rules for UNEs, the Commission determined that termination rates established pursuant to the TELRIC methodology should include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs. *Id.* at 16025, para. 1058. Similarly, the Commission again noted that the costs of transporting and terminating traffic during peak and off-peak hours may not be the same. *Id.* at 16028–29, para. 1064. In light of administrability concerns, the Commission once again neither required nor forbid states from adopting rates that reflected peak and off-peak costs, but expressed hope that some states or negotiating parties would consider peak-load pricing. *Id.* at 16028–29, para. 1064.

⁴⁴⁸ A number of parties appealed the Commission's *Local Competition First Report and Order*, including the rules it adopted governing the setting of rates for unbundled network elements and reciprocal compensation. In *AT&T v. Iowa Utilities Board*, the Supreme Court upheld the Commission's jurisdiction to "design a pricing methodology" to govern state rate setting under section 252 of the Act. *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. 366, 397 (1999) (*AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*). Subsequently, in *Verizon Commc'ns, Inc. v. FCC*, the Supreme Court affirmed the Commission's choice of TELRIC as a permissible methodology for states to use in ratemaking proceedings. *Verizon Commc'ns, Inc. v. FCC*, 535 U.S. 467, 497–529 (2002) (*Verizon v. FCC*). The court held that the Commission's decision to adopt a forward-looking cost methodology was a reasonable interpretation of the statute and that the Commission did not err in rejecting alternative methodologies advocated by the incumbent LECs. *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 507–08. The Court also rejected arguments that various aspects of the TELRIC methodology were unlawful. *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 523.

⁴⁴⁹ See *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16004–07, paras. 54–66 (summarizing the rate structure changes).

⁴⁵⁰ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15986, para. 6.

⁴⁵¹ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9.

⁴⁵² *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9; see also *id.* at 16002–03, paras. 45–47.

⁴⁵³ Explaining its reliance on a "market-based" approach to access reform, it stated its belief that emerging competition in the local exchange markets would provide a more accurate means of identifying implicit subsidies

(continued....)

it reserved the right to “adjust rates in the future to bring them into line with forward-looking costs.”⁴⁵⁴

175. To limit possible rate shock to retail customers, the Commission also limited the amount of allocated interstate cost of a local loop that could be assessed directly on residential and business customers as a flat-rated monthly charge.⁴⁵⁵ Although the *Access Charge Reform Order* started the process toward establishing explicit subsidies, the Commission concluded that “a process that eliminates implicit subsidies from access charges over time [was] warranted.”⁴⁵⁶

176. In the 2000 *CALLS Order*,⁴⁵⁷ the Commission continued its effort to remove implicit subsidies and replace them with explicit universal service support for price cap LECs by, among other things, reducing per-minute intercarrier charges, raising the SLC cap, phasing out the Presubscribed Interexchange Carrier Charge (PICC),⁴⁵⁸ and permitting price-cap LECs to deaverage the SLC once the affected carrier charges were eliminated.⁴⁵⁹ The Commission also created a new universal service fund to compensate price-cap incumbent LECs, in part, for lost interstate access revenues.⁴⁶⁰

177. In the *MAG Order*, the Commission extended similar reforms to incumbent LECs subject

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and moving access rates to economically sustainable levels. *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16001–02, para. 44.

⁴⁵⁴ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16003, para. 48. The Commission also applied its market-based approach to the terminating access rates charged by competitive LECs and declined to adopt any regulations governing competitive LEC access charges. *Id.* at 16141, para. 363. It reasoned that “the possibility of competitive responses by IXCs will have a constraining effect on non-incumbent LEC pricing.” *Id.* at 16141, para. 362. This reliance on a market-based approach proved misplaced. In subsequent years, competitive LECs, instead of reducing access charges, frequently raised them above the regulated rates of incumbent LECs. As a result, the Commission was forced to regulate competitive LEC access charges. See 47 C.F.R. § 61.26; *Access Charge Reform, Reform of Access Charges Imposed by Competitive Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 96-262, Seventh Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 9923, 9924, paras. 1–3 (2001) (*CLEC Access Charge Order*) (establishing benchmark rates for competitive LEC access charges), *recon.*, *Access Charge Reform, Reform of Access Charges Imposed by Competitive Local Exchange Carriers, Petition of Z-Tel Commc’ns Inc. For Temporary Waiver of Commission Rule 61.26(d) to Facilitate Deployment of Competitive Service in Certain Metropolitan Statistical Areas*, CC Docket No. 96-262, CCB/CPD File No. 01-19, Eighth Report and Order and Fifth Order on Reconsideration, 19 FCC Rcd 9108 (2004) (*CLEC Access Charge Recon. Order*).

⁴⁵⁵ See, e.g., *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16010–11, para 73. To reduce per-minute carrier common line (CCL) charges, the Commission created the presubscribed interexchange carrier charge (PICC), a flat-rated, monthly charge imposed on IXCs on a per-line basis. *Id.* at 15998–16000, paras. 37–40. The Commission also shifted the cost of line ports from per-minute local switching charges to the common line category and established a mechanism to phase out the per-minute Transport Interconnection Charge (TIC). *Id.* at 16035–40, 16073–86, paras. 125–34, 210–43.

⁴⁵⁶ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9.

⁴⁵⁷ See *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962.

⁴⁵⁸ See *supra* note 455 (discussing the PICC).

⁴⁵⁹ See generally *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 13025–28, paras. 151–59 (reducing interstate switched access rates); *id.* at 12991–13007, paras. 76–112 (raising SLC caps and eliminating PICCs); *id.* at 13007–14, paras. 113–28 (deaveraging SLCs).

⁴⁶⁰ See *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 13046–49, paras. 201–05 (establishing a “\$650 million interstate access universal service support mechanism”).

to rate-of-return regulation.⁴⁶¹ As with the *CALLS Order*, these reforms were designed to rationalize the interstate access rate structure by aligning it more closely with the manner in which costs are incurred.⁴⁶² Among other things, the *MAG Order* increased the SLC caps for rate-of-return carriers and phased out the per-minute CCL charge from the common line rate structure.⁴⁶³ The Commission also created a universal service support mechanism to replace implicit support with explicit support, in order to foster competition and more efficient pricing.⁴⁶⁴ Many, but not all, states have also addressed intercarrier compensation regulation. In addition to setting rates for reciprocal compensation, many states have revised their rules governing intrastate access charges. Although some states have chosen to mirror interstate access charges,⁴⁶⁵ others continue to maintain intrastate access charges that far exceed interstate charges.⁴⁶⁶

3. Problems Associated With the Existing Intercarrier Compensation Regimes

⁴⁶¹ *Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Interstate Services of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 00-256, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Fifteenth Report and Order, *Access Charge Reform for Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers Subject to Rate-of-Return Regulation*, CC Docket No. 98-77, Report and Order, *Prescribing the Authorized Rate of Return From Interstate Services of Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 98-166, Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 19613 (2001) (*MAG Order*), *recon. in part, Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 00-256, First Order on Reconsideration, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket 96-45, Twenty-Fourth Order on Reconsideration, 17 FCC Rcd 5635 (2002), *amended on recon., Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 00-256, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket 96-45, Third Order on Reconsideration, 18 FCC Rcd 10284 (2003); *see also Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 00-256, 96-45, Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 19 FCC Rcd 4122 (2004).

⁴⁶² *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19617, para. 3.

⁴⁶³ *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19621, para. 15.

⁴⁶⁴ *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19617, para. 3. A new universal service support mechanism, Interstate Common Line Support (ICLS), was implemented to replace the CCL charge beginning July 1, 2002. *Id.* at 19621, para. 15. This mechanism recovers any shortfall between the allowed common line revenue requirement of rate-of-return carriers and their SLC and other end-user revenues, thereby ensuring that changes in the rate structure did not affect the overall recovery of interstate access costs by rate-of-return carriers serving high-cost areas. *Id.* at 19642, 19667–73, paras. 61, 128–41. To reform the local switching and transport rate structure of rate-of-return carriers, the Commission shifted the non-traffic sensitive costs of local switch line ports to the common line category, and reallocated the remaining costs contained in the TIC to other access rate elements, thus reducing per-minute switched access charges. *Id.* at 19649–61, paras. 76–111.

⁴⁶⁵ *See, e.g., BA-WV's Intrastate Access Charges*, Case No. 00-0318-T-GI, Commission Order, 2001 WL 935643 (West Virginia PSC June 1, 2001) (ordering that “the traffic-sensitive intrastate access charges of Verizon-WV shall be modified to mirror the interstate rate structure and rate elements”); *Tariff Filing of BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc to Mirror Interstate Rates*, Case No. 98-065, Order (Kentucky PSC Mar. 31, 1999) (requiring BellSouth “to eliminate the state-specific Non-Traffic Sensitive Revenue Requirement . . . , thus moving its aggregate intrastate switched access rate to the FCC’s ‘CALLS’ interstate rate”); *Establishment of Carrier-to-Carrier Rules*, Case No. 06-1344-TP-ORD, Order, 2007 WL 3023991 (Ohio PUC Oct. 17, 2007) (“[T]his Commission requires ILECs to mirror their interstate switched access rate on the intrastate side . . .”).

⁴⁶⁶ *See, e.g.,* Letter from David C. Bartlett, Vice President of Federal Government Affairs, Embarq, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Exh. C (filed Aug. 1, 2008) (noting intrastate terminating switched access rates five to ten times higher than interstate rates in Missouri, Washington, Virginia, and several other States).

178. The introduction of competition into local telephone markets revealed weaknesses in the existing intercarrier compensation regimes that remained notwithstanding the efforts of the Commission and certain states to reform interstate and intrastate access charges. As the Commission observed in 2001, “[i]nterconnection arrangements between carriers are currently governed by a complex system of intercarrier compensation regulations . . . [that] treat different types of carriers and different types of services disparately, even though there may be no significant differences in the costs among carriers or services.”⁴⁶⁷ We have seen numerous examples of regulatory arbitrage in the marketplace both because of the different rates for similar functions under different intercarrier compensation regimes and because none of these regimes currently set rate levels in an economically efficient manner.⁴⁶⁸

179. One example of regulatory arbitrage involves traffic to dial-up ISPs. Following adoption of the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, state commissions set reciprocal compensation rates for the exchange of local traffic. These reciprocal compensation rates were sufficiently high that many competitive LECs found it profitable to target and serve ISP customers who were large recipients of local traffic, since dial-up Internet customers would call their ISP and then stay on the line for hours. This practice led to significant traffic imbalances, with competitive LECs seeking billions of dollars in reciprocal compensation payments from other LECs.⁴⁶⁹ The Commission responded by adopting a separate interim intercarrier compensation regime for this traffic.

180. On February 26, 1999, the Commission issued a Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in which it held that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate because end users access websites across state lines. Because the *Local Competition First Report and Order* concluded that the reciprocal compensation obligation in section 251(b)(5) applied to only local traffic, the Commission found in the *Declaratory Ruling* that ISP-bound traffic is not subject to section 251(b)(5).⁴⁷⁰ On March 24, 2000, in the *Bell Atlantic* decision, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (D.C. Circuit) vacated certain provisions of the *Declaratory Ruling*.⁴⁷¹ The court did not question the Commission’s finding that ISP-bound traffic is interstate. Rather, the court held that the Commission had not adequately explained how its end-to-end jurisdictional analysis was relevant to determining whether a call to an ISP is subject to reciprocal compensation under section 251(b)(5).⁴⁷² In particular, the court noted that a LEC serving an ISP appears to perform the function of “termination” because the LEC delivers traffic from the calling party through its end office switch to the called party, the ISP.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁷ *Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 16 FCC Rcd 9610 (2001) (*Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*).

⁴⁶⁸ The phrase “regulatory arbitrage” refers to profit-seeking behavior that can arise when a regulated firm is required to set difference prices for products or services with a similar cost structure. See, e.g., PATRICK DEGRABA, BILL AND KEEP AT THE CENTRAL OFFICE AS THE EFFICIENT INTERCONNECTION REGIME 1, para. 2 n.3 (Federal Communications Commission, OPP Working Paper No. 33, 2000), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OPP/working_papers/oppwp33.pdf.

⁴⁶⁹ See *Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68, Order on Remand and Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 9151, 9183, para. 70 (2001) (subsequent history omitted) (*ISP Remand Order*).

⁴⁷⁰ See *Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 14 FCC Rcd 3689, 3703–06, paras. 21–27 (1999) (*Declaratory Ruling*), vacated and remanded, *Bell Atlantic Tel. Cos. v. FCC*, 206 F.3d 1 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (*Bell Atlantic*).

⁴⁷¹ *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 1.

⁴⁷² See *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 5.

⁴⁷³ *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 6.

181. On April 27, 2001, the Commission released the *ISP Remand Order*, which concluded that section 251(g) excludes ISP-bound traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5).⁴⁷⁴ The Commission explained that section 251(g) maintains the pre-1996 Act compensation requirements for “exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access,” thereby excluding such traffic from the reciprocal compensation requirements that the 1996 Act imposed. The Commission concluded that ISP-bound traffic is “information access” and, therefore, is subject instead to the Commission’s section 201 jurisdiction over interstate communications.⁴⁷⁵ The Commission concluded that a bill-and-keep regime might eliminate incentives for arbitrage and force carriers to look to their own customers for cost recovery.⁴⁷⁶ To avoid a flash cut to bill-and-keep, however, the Commission adopted an interim compensation regime pending completion of the *Intercarrier Compensation* proceeding.⁴⁷⁷

182. On May 3, 2002, the D.C. Circuit found that the Commission had not provided an adequate legal basis for the rules it adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*.⁴⁷⁸ Once again, the court did not question the Commission’s finding that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. Rather, the court held that section 251(g) of the Act did not provide a basis for the Commission’s decision. The court held that section 251(g) is simply a transitional device that preserved obligations that predated the 1996 Act until the Commission adopts superseding rules, and there was no pre-1996 Act obligation with respect to intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic.⁴⁷⁹ Although the court rejected the legal rationale for the interim compensation rules, the court remanded, but did not vacate, the *ISP Remand Order* to the Commission, and it observed that “there is plainly a non-trivial likelihood that the Commission has authority” to adopt the rules.⁴⁸⁰ Accordingly, the interim rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* have remained in effect.

⁴⁷⁴ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9171–72, para. 44.

⁴⁷⁵ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9175, para. 52. Thus, the Commission affirmed its prior finding in the *Declaratory Ruling* that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. See *id.*; see also *Declaratory Ruling*, 14 FCC Rcd at 3701–03, paras. 18–20.

⁴⁷⁶ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9184–85, paras. 74–75. The Commission discussed at length the market distortions and regulatory arbitrage opportunities created by the application of per-minute reciprocal compensation rates to ISP-bound traffic. In particular, the Commission found that requiring compensation for this type of traffic at existing reciprocal compensation rates undermined the operation of competitive markets because competitive LECs were able to recover a disproportionate share of their costs from other carriers, thereby distorting the price signals sent to their ISP customers. See *id.* at 9181–86, paras. 67–76.

⁴⁷⁷ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9155–57, paras. 7–8. The interim regime adopted by the Commission consisted of: (1) a gradually declining cap on intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic, beginning at \$.0015 per minute-of-use and declining to \$.0007 per minute-of-use; (2) a growth cap on total ISP-bound minutes for which a LEC may receive this compensation; (3) a “new markets rule” requiring bill-and-keep for the exchange of this traffic if two carriers were not exchanging traffic pursuant to an interconnection agreement prior to the adoption of the interim regime; and (4) a “mirroring rule” that gave incumbent LECs the benefit of the rate cap only if they offered to exchange all traffic subject to section 251(b)(5) at the same rates. *Id.* at 9187–89, 9193–94, paras. 78, 80, 89. In a subsequent order, the Commission granted forbearance to all telecommunications carriers with respect to the growth caps and the new markets rule. See *Petition of Core Commc’ns Inc. for Forbearance Under 47 U.S.C. § 160(c) from Application of the ISP Remand Order*, WC Docket No. 03-171, Order, 19 FCC Rcd 20179 (2004) (*Core Forbearance Order*). Thus, only the rate caps and mirroring rule remain in effect today.

⁴⁷⁸ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 429.

⁴⁷⁹ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433.

⁴⁸⁰ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434.

183. On November 5, 2007, Core filed a petition for writ of mandamus with the D.C. Circuit seeking to compel the Commission to enter an order resolving the court's remand in the *WorldCom* decision.⁴⁸¹ On July 8, 2008, the court granted a writ of mandamus and directed the Commission to respond to the *WorldCom* remand in the form of a final, appealable order that “explains the legal authority for the Commission’s interim intercarrier compensation rules that exclude ISP-bound traffic from the reciprocal compensation requirement”⁴⁸² The court directed the Commission to respond to the writ of mandamus by November 5, 2008.⁴⁸³

184. Another regulatory arbitrage opportunity arose as a result of the Commission’s 1997 decision not to regulate the interstate access charges of competitive LECs. As a result, many competitive LECs filed tariffs with access charges that were well above the rates charged by incumbent LECs for similar services.⁴⁸⁴ In response, the Commission adopted new rules that effectively capped the interstate access charges that competitive LECs could tariff.⁴⁸⁵

185. Two more recent examples of regulatory arbitrage involve billing problems and the “Access Stimulation” problem. Commenters describe problems billing for traffic when it arrives for termination with insufficient identifying information.⁴⁸⁶ Because the existing intercarrier compensation mechanisms have vastly disparate rates that apply to different types of traffic, carriers have both the opportunity and incentive to disguise the nature, or conceal the source, of the traffic being sent in order to avoid or reduce payments to other carriers.⁴⁸⁷ “Access Stimulation” refers to allegations that certain LECs may have entered into agreements with providers of services that generate large volumes of incoming calls to substantially increase the number of calls sent to the LEC.⁴⁸⁸ It has been alleged that

⁴⁸¹ Pet. for Writ of Mandamus, In re Core Communications Inc., No. 07-1446 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 5, 2007).

⁴⁸² *In re Core Commc'ns Inc.*, 531 F.3d 849, at 861–62 (D.C. Cir. 2008) (*Core Decision*).

⁴⁸³ See *Core Decision*, 531 F.3d at 861–62. If the Commission fails to comply with the writ by the November 5th deadline, the interim rules will be vacated on November 6, 2008. See *id.* at 862.

⁴⁸⁴ See *CLEC Access Charge Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9931, para. 22. For instance, the Commission found that certain competitive LECs charged \$0.09 per minute and that the weighted average of competitive LEC access rates was above \$0.04 per minute. *Id.* In contrast, the same underlying data showed a composite incumbent LEC rate of \$0.0056 for that same traffic. See AT&T Additional Comments, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 97-146, CCB/CPD File No. 98-63, App. A. (Jan. 11, 2001). The Commission found that competitive LECs could impose excessive charges due to two factors. First, the Commission observed that access charges are paid by the IXC rather than the end-user customer. Because the IXC has no ability to affect the calling or called party's choice of service providers, it cannot avoid carriers with high access charges. *CLEC Access Charge Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9935, para. 31. Second, the Commission found that the rate averaging requirements in section 254(g) of the Act precluded IXCs from passing through particular competitive LECs' excessive access charges to the end user customers of those competitive LECs. *Id.* As a result, the Commission found the existing regulatory regime did not effectively create the incentives for the end users to select a lower-priced access provider. *Id.*

⁴⁸⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 61.26 (containing rules governing the tariffing of competitive LEC interstate switched exchange access services). As a general matter, the Commission's rules governing competitive LEC access charges limit these rates to those charged by the competing incumbent LEC. *Id.*

⁴⁸⁶ See *infra* Part V.D.

⁴⁸⁷ See *infra* para. 326.

⁴⁸⁸ See, e.g., *Qwest Commc'ns Corp. v. Farmers and Merchs. Mut. Tel. Co.*, File No. EB-07-MD-001, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 17973, para. 1 (2007) (addressing Qwest's allegations that Farmers deliberately planned to “increase dramatically the amount of terminating access traffic delivered to its exchange, via agreements with conference calling companies”).

this significantly increased “growth in terminating access traffic may be causing carriers’ rates to become unjust or unreasonable” in violation of section 201 of the Act.⁴⁸⁹ In the *Access Stimulation NPRM*, the Commission has sought information about the extent of this practice, its potential impact on the rates of price cap, rate-of-return, and competitive LECs, and how this practice should be addressed.⁴⁹⁰

B. Comprehensive Reform

1. Introduction

186. Evidence of increasing regulatory arbitrage, as well as increased competition and changes in technology, has led the Commission to consider comprehensive reform of intercarrier compensation. In 2001, the Commission adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to examine possible alternatives to existing intercarrier regimes with the intent of moving toward a more unified system.⁴⁹¹ The notice generated extensive comments that generally confirmed the need for comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform, including a number of competing proposals.⁴⁹² In 2005, the Commission adopted a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comment on the various industry proposals.⁴⁹³ In 2006, another industry coalition submitted an alternative comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform proposal, known as the Missoula Plan.⁴⁹⁴ The Commission separately requested and received comments

⁴⁸⁹ See *Establishing Just and Reasonable Rates for Local Exchange Carriers*, WC Docket No. 07-135, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 17989, para. 1 (2007) (*Access Stimulation NPRM*).

⁴⁹⁰ *Access Stimulation NPRM*, 22 FCC Rcd 17989.

⁴⁹¹ See *Inter-carrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd 9610. The Commission acknowledged a number of problems with the existing regimes, including inefficient rates and different rates for the same types of calls. *Id.* at 9616–18, paras. 11–18. The Commission thus sought comment on alternative approaches to reforming intercarrier compensation, including moving to a bill-and-keep approach to intercarrier compensation. *Id.* at 9611–13, paras. 2–4.

⁴⁹² See, e.g., Regulatory Reform Proposal of the Intercarrier Compensation Forum (ICF Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Gary M. Epstein and Richard R. Cameron, Counsel for the Intercarrier Compensation Forum, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, App. A (filed Oct. 5, 2004) (ICF Oct. 5, 2004 *Ex Parte* Letter); Comprehensive Plan For Intercarrier Compensation Reform of Expanded Portland Group (EPG Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Glenn H. Brown, EPG Facilitator, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Nov. 2, 2004); Intercarrier Compensation Reform Plan of Alliance for Rational Intercarrier Compensation (ARIC Plan), *attached to* Letter from Wendy Thompson Fast, President, Consolidated Companies, and Ken Pfister, Vice President—Strategic Policy, Great Plains Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, 96-98, WC Docket No. 04-36 (filed Oct. 25, 2004); Cost-Based Intercarrier Compensation Coalition (CBICC Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Richard M. Rindler, Counsel for the Cost-Based Intercarrier Compensation Coalition, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Sept. 2, 2004); Updated *Ex Parte* of Home Telephone Company, Inc. and PBT Telecom (Home/PBT Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Keith Oliver, Vice President, Finance, Home Telephone Company, and Ben Spearman, Vice President, Chief Regulatory Officer, PBT Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Nov. 2, 2004); NASUCA Intercarrier Compensation Proposal at 1 (NASUCA Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Philip F. McClelland, Senior Assistant Consumer Advocate, NASUCA, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Dec. 14, 2004); Western Wireless Intercarrier Compensation Reform Plan at 9 (Western Wireless Proposal), *attached to* Letter from David L. Sieradzki, Counsel for Western Wireless Corp., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Dec. 1, 2004).

⁴⁹³ See *Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 4685, 4687, para. 4 (2005) (*Inter-carrier Compensation FNPRM*).

⁴⁹⁴ See Missoula Plan for Intercarrier Compensation Reform (Missoula Plan), *attached to* Letter from Tony Clark, Commissioner and Chair, NARUC Committee on Telecommunications, Ray Baum, Commissioner and Chair,

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on the Missoula Plan proposal.⁴⁹⁵ Finally, in 2008, the Commission stabilized the universal service fund by adopting an interim cap on payments to competitive ETCs, helping pave the way for comprehensive intercarrier compensation and universal service reform, and leading to a number of new reform proposals.⁴⁹⁶

187. As a result of the *Inter-carrier Compensation NPRM*, the *Inter-carrier Compensation FNPRM*, the filing of the Missoula Plan, and the more recent proposals that have been filed, the Commission has compiled an extensive record over the past seven years. The Commission has received comments or proposals from a wide variety of interested parties, including, states, incumbent LECs, competitive LECs, rural companies, IXCs, new technology companies, consumer advocates, business customers, and industry associations. As demonstrated throughout this order, the Commission has thoroughly reviewed and analyzed the voluminous record, has considered the evidence submitted by the parties supporting the alternatives, and has carefully evaluated each of the proposals that have been presented. Based on this examination of the options, we find that the approach we describe below and adopt in this order best achieves the goals of promoting universal service, encouraging the efficient use of, and investment in, broadband technologies, spurring competition, and ultimately, further reducing the need for regulation.

2. A New Approach to Intercarrier Compensation

188. Since the introduction of competition into long-distance telephone service, the Commission has moved toward eliminating implicit subsidies from intercarrier charges. At every stage, however, the Commission has had to balance the desire to establish more efficient intercarrier charges against the potential adverse effects on consumers (in the form of higher flat-rated charges) and carriers (in the form of reduced intercarrier revenues). The introduction of competition into local telephone markets accelerated the need for reform. As discussed above, since the implementation of the 1996 Act, not only has local competition increased, but so has the incidence and severity of regulatory arbitrage.

189. We conclude today that, with the universal service fund now stabilized, we can wait no longer to begin the process of comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform. The differences in existing intercarrier compensation regimes impose significant inefficiencies on users and distort carriers' investment incentives, which can result in losses of billions of dollars in consumers and producers surplus. Possibly more important, these legacy regulatory regimes pose an obstacle to the transition to an all-IP broadband world. Because carriers currently can receive significant revenues from charging above-cost rates to terminate telecommunications traffic, they have a reduced incentive to upgrade their networks to the most efficient technology or to negotiate interconnection agreements that are designed to accommodate the efficient exchange of IP traffic, as both actions would likely lead to reduced intercarrier

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NARUC Task Force, and Larry Landis, Commissioner and Vice-Chair, NARUC Task Force, to Hon. Kevin Martin, Chmn., FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed July 24, 2006) (NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁴⁹⁵ *Comment Sought on Missoula Intercarrier Compensation Reform Plan*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, 21 FCC Rcd 8524 (2006). Subsequently, the Missoula Plan supporters filed additional details concerning specific aspects of the plan, on which the Commission continued to seek comment. See *Comment Sought on Missoula Plan Phantom Traffic Interim Process and Call Detail Records Proposal*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, 21 FCC Rcd 13179 (2006); *Comment Sought on Amendments to the Missoula Plan Intercarrier Compensation Proposal to Incorporate a Federal Benchmark Mechanism*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 3362 (2007).

⁴⁹⁶ The Commission invited parties to refresh the record in these and other relevant dockets. *Interim Cap Clears Path for Comprehensive Reform: Commission Poised to Move Forward on Difficult Decisions Necessary to Promote and Advance Affordable Telecommunications for All Americans*, News Release (May 2, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-281939A1.pdf.

payments.⁴⁹⁷

190. In this order, we therefore adopt a new approach to intercarrier compensation and establish the blueprint for moving to new uniform termination rates that are economically efficient and sustainable in our increasingly competitive telecommunications markets. At the same time, we recognize, as the Commission has in the past, the need to be cognizant of market disruptions and potential adverse effects on consumers and carriers of moving too quickly from the existing intercarrier compensation regimes to our new uniform approach to intercarrier compensation. Accordingly, we adopt here a gradual ten-year transition plan with separate stages, designed to reduce rates over a sufficient period to minimize market disruptions and to cushion the impact of our reform on both customers and carriers. At the end of the transition period, all telecommunications traffic will be treated as falling within the reciprocal compensation provisions of section 251(b)(5), and states will set default reciprocal compensation rates pursuant to the new methodology we adopt herein.

191. The requirements that we adopt for intercarrier compensation do not apply to providers operating in Alaska, Hawaii, or any U.S. Territories and possessions. We find that these areas have very different attributes and related cost issues than the continental states.⁴⁹⁸ For this reason, we are exempting providers in Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. Territories and possessions from the requirements and rules adopted herein, and we will address them in a subsequent proceeding.⁴⁹⁹

192. *Transition Plan.* As described below, we adopt a ten-year transition plan.⁵⁰⁰ In the first stage, intrastate access rates are reduced to the levels of interstate rates. During stage two, carriers will reduce their rates to an interim uniform termination rate, set by the state. Carriers whose current rates are below the interim uniform rate set by the state, however, may not increase their rates. During stage three, the rates carriers charge at the end of stage two (either the interim uniform rates or their prior rates, whichever are lower) will be gradually reduced to the rates that will apply at the end of the transition. This transition will be designed by the state so as to minimize market disruptions and adverse economic effects. This transition is described in more detail below.

⁴⁹⁷ See, e.g., T. RANDOLPH BEARD & GEORGE S. FORD, DO HIGH CALL TERMINATION RATES DETER BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT? (Phoenix Center Policy Bulletin No. 22, Oct. 2008), available at <http://www.phoenix-center.org/PolicyBulletin/PCPB22Final.pdf>.

⁴⁹⁸ See, e.g., *Verizon/América Móvil Transfer Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 6211, para. 36 (describing “difficult to serve terrain and dramatic urban/rural differences” in Puerto Rico); *Rates and Services Integration Order*, 4 FCC Rcd at 396, paras. 7–8 (describing the unique market conditions and structure in Alaska); GCI Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (citing cost distinctions between Alaska and the continental United States).

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. *Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 8860, para. 47 (“The Commission is committed to establishing policies and rules that will promote service to all regions in the United States, particularly to traditionally underserved areas, such as Alaska and Hawaii, and other remote areas.”).

⁵⁰⁰ A number of parties argue for a shorter transition period than that provided here. See, e.g., Letter from Robert W. Quinn, Senior Vice President, Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 23, 2008) (AT&T Oct. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Kyle McSparrow, President and CEO, NCTA, to Kevin J. Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (NCTA Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Paul W. Garnett, Assistant Vice-President, CTIA—The Wireless Association, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed October 27, 2008) (CTIA October 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy (SBA) *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 5–7. We note that the reforms adopted today do not preclude carriers from entering into agreements that would reduce intercarrier charges more quickly, (See, e.g., Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice-President, Verizon, to Kevin J. Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed October 28, 2008) at 6.) nor do they prevent state commissions from accelerating the glide path toward the final reciprocal compensation rate if they deem it appropriate.

193. *Intrastate Rate Reductions.* One year from the effective date of this order, we require that all LECs reduce their terminating *intrastate* switched access rates by 50 percent of the difference between their intrastate switched access rates and their *interstate* switched access rates.⁵⁰¹ Two years from the effective date of this order, we require that all LECs reduce their terminating intrastate switched access rates by the remaining 50 percent of the difference between their intrastate switched access rates and their interstate switched access rates so that their intrastate rates equal their interstate rates. Carriers will comply with state tariffing requirements or other applicable state law in effectuating those changes in intrastate terminating access rates.

194. *State Establishment of Interim, Uniform Reciprocal Compensation Rates.* Within two years from the effective date of this order, states must adopt a state-wide interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate applicable to all carriers (except carriers whose rates are below the interim, uniform rate, in which case, those carriers' rates shall be capped at those lower, existing rates). Three years from the effective date of this order, we require that all LECs reduce their terminating rates by 50 percent of the difference between their current terminating rate and the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate established by the state. Four years from the effective date of this order we require that all LECs reduce their terminating rates by the remaining 50 percent of the difference between their current terminating rate and the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate established by the state so that their terminating rates equal the state-set interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate. This rate will become the starting point for stage three—a six-year gradual downward transition to the final uniform reciprocal compensation rate, which the states will also set, consistent with the methodology we adopt in this order. The states will have discretion to determine the glide path, which begins four years from the effective date of this order and ends ten years from the effective date of this order. This glide path will determine the trajectory of the interim reciprocal compensation rate as it trends down to the final reciprocal compensation rate. All carriers are subject to this glide path. However, if a carrier's rate is below the rate specified in the glide path, such carrier cannot raise its rates, but is subject to the trajectory when the interim rate equals that carrier's rate. At the end of ten years (i.e., at the end of stage two), all the terminating rates of all carriers in each state will be reduced to the new final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate established by each state. We believe that, by establishing this ten-year, multiple-stage transition to a state-set final uniform reciprocal compensation rate, we will provide a sufficiently smooth and gradual glide path so that carriers will be able to adjust their other rates and revenues in a measured way over time, as allowed by the reforms adopted in this order, without creating unacceptable rate or revenue effects.

195. Although we permit the states to establish the particular interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate for each step of the final six years of the transition, we establish certain conditions on the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate and on the terminating intercarrier rates that carriers may charge. First, although we do not set forth a methodology that states must use in setting the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates, we do require that, within each state, there must be a single, state-wide interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate during each year and at each stage of the transition.⁵⁰² Therefore, in establishing interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates, a state may wish to consider the impact of those rates on all the carriers in the state. States are permitted to adopt an interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate that may be higher at the beginning of the transition than some existing incumbent LEC rates today. If they do so, however, carriers with lower termination rates may not raise

⁵⁰¹ To the extent that a carrier's intrastate terminating access rate already is below its interstate terminating access rate, it will not change that rate.

⁵⁰² We recognize that the state-wide interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates may vary state-by-state as state commissions consider the best means of transitioning to a final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate.

them to the interim uniform rate. Second, states may determine the glide path for moving from the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate to the final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, subject to the requirement that the interim uniform rate be identical for all carriers at each step in the transition. By the end of the transition period, the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates must decrease to a single final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate for all carriers established pursuant to the Commission's new "additional costs" methodology.

196. *Transition of Rates During Stage Three.* Beginning four years from the effective date of this order, and through the remainder of the transition, each carrier must set each of its terminating rates at the lower of: (i) its current rate; or (ii) the state-set interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate applicable at that stage of the transition. Thus, for example, if a carrier has an interstate terminating access rate above the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate applicable at that stage of the transition, but a current reciprocal compensation rate below the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, the carrier will reduce its interstate rate to the interim rate but leave its current reciprocal compensation rate unchanged. That carrier will continue to have two separate termination rates until such time as the applicable interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate is adjusted lower and becomes less than its current reciprocal compensation rate. At that time, all the carrier's rates will be set at the level of the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate for that state.

197. We emphasize that under no circumstances shall a carrier be permitted to increase its current rates, even if the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate is higher than one or more of its current rates. In this respect, the applicable interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate set by the states will act as a ceiling or cap on such rates. We do not permit a carrier to charge a rate for terminating interstate or intrastate access, reciprocal compensation, or ISP-bound traffic that is higher than the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, but we will permit a carrier to continue to charge a rate that is lower than the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate. We note that because CMRS providers may not tariff terminating access today,⁵⁰³ and we do not permit a carrier to increase rates during the transition, CMRS providers therefore will not be permitted to charge for terminating access until the end of the transition period.⁵⁰⁴

198. We note that we already have an interim intercarrier compensation regime for ISP-bound traffic, and to avoid disruption in the marketplace, we will apply on a transitional basis the pricing standards we adopted for ISP-bound traffic in the *ISP Remand Order*,⁵⁰⁵ as modified by the *Core*

⁵⁰³ Although CMRS providers may not tariff access charges, they are not prohibited from entering into contracts with interexchange carriers that provide for the payment of such charges. *Petitions of Sprint PCS and AT&T Corp. For Declaratory Ruling Regarding CMRS Access Charges*, WT Docket No. 01-316, Declaratory Ruling, 17 FCC Rcd 13192 (2002) (*CMRS Access Charges Declaratory Ruling*).

⁵⁰⁴ Consistent with our conclusion that CMRS providers are unable to assess access charges during the transition, we make clear that our symmetry rule, set forth in Part V.C.1.b, will not apply until the transition is over. Even so, we clarify that, to the extent that any carrier has a terminating rate above the permissible rate, such carrier must reduce the rate to the permissible level. Specifically, in the first year of the transition, all carriers with intrastate access charges higher than their interstate access charges must reduce such charges by 50 percent of the difference between its interstate switched access rate and its intrastate switched access rate. Similarly, once the state-set interim, uniform rate is in effect, all carriers must reduce terminating rates, whether interstate access, reciprocal compensation, or ISP-bound traffic, by 50 percent of the difference between the current terminating switched access rate and the interim, uniform rate (as it is reduced over time). Even though rates during the transition will not reflect true symmetry, rates for most carriers should be symmetric before the transition is over as all carriers reduce charges to the final, uniform rate.

⁵⁰⁵ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9153, 9186-93, paras. 21, 77-88.

Forbearance Order.⁵⁰⁶ Currently, two rules remain in effect: (1) ISP-bound traffic is currently subject to a reciprocal compensation rate cap of \$.0007 per minute-of-use; and (2) under the mirroring rule, the \$.0007 cap applies to traffic exchanged with an incumbent LEC only if it offers to exchange all traffic subject to section 251(b)(5) at the same rate. As explained below, we conclude that it is appropriate to retain these rules, but only on a transitional basis until a state commission, applying the “additional costs” standards adopted in this order, has established reciprocal compensation rates that are at or below \$.0007 per minute-of-use.

199. In the *ISP Remand Order* in 2001, based on “convincing evidence in the record” that carriers had “targeted ISPs as customers merely to take advantage of . . . intercarrier payments”—offering free service to ISPs, paying ISPs to be their customers, and sometimes engaging in outright fraud—the Commission adopted an interim ISP payment regime to “limit, if not end, the opportunity for regulatory arbitrage.”⁵⁰⁷ The Commission adopted a gradually declining cap on intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic, beginning at \$.0015 per minute-of-use and declining to \$.0007 per minute-of-use.⁵⁰⁸ These rate caps reflected the downward trend in intercarrier compensation rates contained in then-recently negotiated interconnection agreements.⁵⁰⁹ We have previously recognized that evidence that “carriers have agreed to rates”—through voluntary, arms-length negotiations—constitutes substantial evidence that rates are just and reasonable.⁵¹⁰

200. Most commenters urge the Commission to maintain the interim compensation rules governing ISP-bound traffic until the Commission is able to transition to comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform.⁵¹¹ These parties contend that a higher compensation rate would create new

⁵⁰⁶ See *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20184–89, paras. 16–26.

⁵⁰⁷ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9187, para. 77.

⁵⁰⁸ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9187, para. 78.

⁵⁰⁹ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9190–91, para. 85.

⁵¹⁰ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9190–91, para. 85; see also *Petition of ACS of Anchorage, Inc. Pursuant to Section 10 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Amended, for Forbearance from Sections 251(c)(3) and 252(d)(1) in the Anchorage Study Area*, WC Docket No. 05-281, 22 FCC Rcd 1958, 1984–85, paras. 39, 40 n.136 (2007) (finding that “commercially negotiated rates” provide “just and reasonable prices”); *Review of the Section 251 Unbundling Obligations of Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers; Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996; Deployment of Wireline Services Offering Advanced Telecommunications Capability*, CC Docket Nos. 01-338, 98-147, 96-98, Report and Order and Order on Remand and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 18 FCC Rcd 16978, 17389, para. 664 (2003) (subsequent history omitted) (*Triennial Review Order*) (finding that “arms-length agreements . . . to provide [an] element [a] rate” “demonstrate[s]” that the rate is “just and reasonable”).

⁵¹¹ See, e.g., Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 10 (filed July 8, 2008) (asking the Commission to maintain the existing compromises reached with respect to ISP-bound traffic); Letter from Gary L. Phillips, Associate General Counsel, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-98, 99-68 at 8 (filed May 9, 2008) (asserting that the public interest would be best served by maintaining the existing transitional rates pending broader intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Sage Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at 6 (Sage Telecom May 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (stating that retaining the ISP rate serves broad policy goals); Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68 at 1 (filed May 7, 2008) (supporting continuation of the interim compensation rules); Letter from Joshua Seidmann, Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 2 (filed Apr. 28, 2008) (ITTA Apr. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (asking the Commission to retain the current \$0.0007 rate for ISP-bound traffic); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to

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opportunities for arbitrage⁵¹² and impose substantial financial burdens on wireless companies, incumbent LECs and state public utility commissions.⁵¹³ They further claim that the existing regime has simplified interconnection negotiations.⁵¹⁴

201. We share these commenters' concerns. The record also suggests that eliminating the \$.0007 cap and instead applying higher reciprocal compensation rates that may be set by the states during the transition period to the adoption of our new methodology would have a significant negative impact on carriers serving rural markets and broadband deployment.⁵¹⁵ The record demonstrates that dial-up minutes remain at high levels in rural areas and that the application of reciprocal compensation to these minutes would generate significant costs to carriers serving these rural areas.⁵¹⁶ Thus, it remains the case that the "rate caps help avoid arbitrage and market distortions that otherwise would result from the

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Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98 at 1 (filed Apr. 7, 2008) (urging the Commission to support its earlier finding that \$.0007 is appropriate compensation for dial-up ISP traffic); Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, Attach. (filed May 1, 2008) (describing how elimination of the existing ISP rate would create substantial burdens on a number of carriers and state commissions) (Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Glenn Reynolds, Vice President, Policy, USTelecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-262, WC Docket No. 07-135 at 2 (filed Apr. 29, 2008) (noting that the Commission's existing rules have "largely mitigated the debate around compensation for ISP-bound traffic, but there is every reason to believe the same problems would arise if the Commission were to reverse direction on this issue") (USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵¹² See, e.g., USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, WC Docket No. 07-135, Attach. at 3-5 (filed Apr. 25, 2008) (Qwest April 25, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Verizon and BellSouth, Further Supplemental White Paper on ISP Reciprocal Compensation at 20 (Verizon/BellSouth Further Supp. ISP White Paper), attached to Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68 (filed Sept. 27, 2004).

⁵¹³ See, e.g., Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach.

⁵¹⁴ See, e.g., Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (stating that "the [m]irroring [r]ule simplified wireless-ILEC interconnection negotiations tremendously."); Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless on Intercarrier Payments for ISP-Bound Traffic and the *WorldCom* Remand, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-98, 99-68 at 38-40 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments) (indicating that Verizon entered into multiple agreements using the \$.0007 rate cap established in the *ISP Remand Order*).

⁵¹⁵ See, e.g., ITTA April 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3, 5; Embarq May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2, 5-7.

⁵¹⁶ See, e.g., Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel for Earthlink, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at iii, 11-12 (filed Aug. 14, 2008) (estimating that 24% of dial-up users in rural America say that broadband service is not available where they live); Sage Telecom May 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3-4; Embarq May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 6 (calculating its cost to be \$100 million if all ISP-bound minutes were subject to TELRIC-based rates under section 251(b)(5)); ITTA Apr. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (noting that dial-up usage remains strong in rural areas); USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (noting a "recent study from the Pew Internet & American Life Project that indicated that while the number of dial-up subscribers had dropped 63% since 2001, the number of minutes spent online by each dial-up subscriber had increased approximately 70%. As a result, some USTelecom member companies are actually seeing an *increase* in dial-up minutes.") (emphasis in original); Letter from Bennett L. Ross, General Counsel—D.C., BellSouth D.C., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, WC Docket No. 03-171 (filed Aug. 29, 2005) (attaching a chart showing that "dial-up subscribers would continue to generate substantial minutes of dial-up ISP calls, notwithstanding projections of a continued decline in the number of dial-up subscribers.").

availability of reciprocal compensation for ISP-bound traffic.”⁵¹⁷ We further believe that maintaining the cap on a transitional basis will minimize the disruptive effects and regulatory uncertainty that otherwise would result from the abrupt elimination of clear compensation rules for ISP-bound traffic.

202. We expect that state commissions, applying the new “additional costs” standard adopted in this order, will set final reciprocal compensation rates at or below \$.0007 per minute-of-use. As noted below, the evidence in the record suggests that the incremental cost of call termination on modern switches is de minimis.⁵¹⁸ We have given state commissions up to ten years to transition to new rates based on the “additional costs” standard. Accordingly, the rate cap will only have an impact in a particular state on a transitional basis until that state sets rates at or below \$.0007.

203. The mirroring rule has also succeeded in promoting the Commission’s “goal of a more unified intercarrier compensation regime by requiring LECs to offer similar rates for like traffic.”⁵¹⁹ Most intraMTA traffic is now exchanged pursuant to the rate caps, and a substantial portion of wireline intraexchange traffic is being exchanged at rates at or below the rate caps as well.⁵²⁰ Eliminating the mirroring rule and allowing carriers to charge higher transitional reciprocal compensation rates for traffic currently subject to the mirroring rule would significantly increase the cost carriers incur in exchanging that traffic. Those increased costs would divert funds from investment in next generation wireless networks and likely would be borne by consumers, through increases in the costs of wireless offerings.⁵²¹

204. We reject arguments that the Commission unlawfully delegated its authority in the *ISP Remand Order* and arguments that the Commission addressed previously in the *Core Forbearance Order*.⁵²² We also disagree with parties who suggest that the Commission, in responding to the D.C. Circuit’s remand in *WorldCom*, must offer detailed new justifications for each of the four features of the ISP intercarrier payment regime: the rate caps, the mirroring rule, the growth cap, and the new markets rule.⁵²³ The prior policy justifications offered for those rules by the Commission have not been overturned by any court, and our current policy justification for retaining these rules is simply to maintain the status quo in this area on a transitional basis until our new “additional costs” methodology has been fully implemented. Indeed, pursuant to our new “additional costs” methodology, we believe that the rate caps set forth in 2001 may well be higher than the final, uniform reciprocal compensation rates set by the states. However, discarding these rules during the transition to our new methodology would be unwise and unwarranted because the “rate caps are necessary to prevent discrimination *between* dial-up Internet

⁵¹⁷ *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20815–16, para. 18.

⁵¹⁸ *See supra* para. 255.

⁵¹⁹ *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20816, para. 19.

⁵²⁰ *See, e.g.*, Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 40.

⁵²¹ Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments. at 40.

⁵²² *See* Letter from Michael B. Hazzard, Counsel for Core Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at 18 & n.8 (filed May 14, 2008) (Core May 14, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). We also reject Core’s argument that the *ISP Remand Order* unlawfully delegates to incumbent LECs the decision of whether the *ISP Remand Order* applies. *See id.* at 19–20. The Commission did not delegate its authority in the *ISP Remand Order* but rather provided options that were not mandatory. *See, e.g., ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9193, para. 89. Additionally, Core argues that the Commission provided no reasoned explanation for the growth cap and new market rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* and never provided notice or an opportunity for comment on those specific rules. These rules, as applicable to all carriers, were forborne from in the *Core Forbearance Order*. *See Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20186–87, paras. 20–21. As such, this argument is moot.

⁵²³ *See* Core May 14, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 20–26.

access customers and basic telephone service customers,” those caps “protect consumers of basic telephone service” from being forced to subsidize dial-up Internet access service, and the rate caps minimize the “classic regulatory arbitrage” that reciprocal compensation for ISP-bound traffic had made possible.⁵²⁴

205. In sum, we maintain the \$.0007 cap and the mirroring rule, on a transitional basis, pursuant to our section 201 authority. These interim rules shall remain in place in a state until the state commission, applying the “additional costs” standard adopted in this order, has established reciprocal compensation rates that are at or below \$.0007 per minute-of-use.

206. We find that our transition plan is necessary and appropriate to prevent undue economic hardships to carriers caused by a too-rapid reduction in intercarrier compensation rates. If there is evidence that carriers are attempting to abuse the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate and/or transition process to create arbitrage opportunities, we encourage carriers to bring such evidence to our attention or that of the state commission so such claims can be investigated and, if appropriate, action taken.

3. Legal Authority

a. Legal Authority for Comprehensive Reform—Interpretation of Sections 251(b)(5) and 251(g)

207. The history of intercarrier compensation reveals many policy reasons for comprehensively reforming intercarrier compensation rates, including reducing arbitrage, promoting competition, facilitating the introduction of new technologies, and benefiting consumers. The dual structure of separate federal and state jurisdiction over communications has made accomplishing such reforms more complex, however. Although our reform does not disturb those fundamental jurisdictional distinctions, we find that, through the tools made available by the 1996 Act, we have the means to accomplish this reform by electing to partner with the states.

208. The Commission unquestionably has authority to reform intercarrier compensation with respect to interstate access services, rates charged by CMRS providers, and IP/PSTN traffic. Section 2(a) of the Act establishes the Commission’s jurisdiction over interstate services, for which the Commission ensures just, reasonable, and not unjustly and unreasonably discriminatory rates under section 201 and 202.⁵²⁵ Likewise, the Commission has authority over the rates of CMRS providers pursuant to section 332 of the Act.⁵²⁶ We also make clear that authority to impose economic regulation with respect to IP/PSTN traffic rests exclusively with this Commission. The Commission has adopted a number of regulatory requirements applicable to interconnected VoIP services and providers.⁵²⁷ With respect to the statutory classification of IP-enabled services, however, the Commission only has addressed two

⁵²⁴ *In re Core Commc’ns* 455 F.3d at 277–80 (internal quotation marks omitted).

⁵²⁵ 47 U.S.C. §§ 152(a), 201, 202.

⁵²⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 332.

⁵²⁷ See, e.g., *Telephone Number Requirements for IP-Enabled Services Providers; Local Number Portability Porting Interval and Validation Requirements; IP-Enabled Services; CTIA Petitions for Declaratory Ruling on Wireline-Wireless Porting Issues*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 95-116, WC Docket Nos. 07-243, 07-244, 04-36, Report and Order, Declaratory Ruling, Order on Remand, and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 19531, 19538–40, paras. 14, 16 (2008) (*LNP Order*) (imposing LNP requirements, and noting that the Commission previously imposed the requirement to provide 911 service, to contribute to universal service, to protect the privacy of customers, to comply with disability access and telecommunications relay service requirements, and to satisfy certain CALEA obligations).

situations.⁵²⁸

209. We now classify as “information services” those services that originate calls on IP networks and terminate them on circuit-switched networks, or conversely that originate calls on circuit-switched networks and terminate them on IP networks (collectively “IP/PSTN” services).⁵²⁹ Such traffic today involves a net protocol conversion between end-users, and thus constitutes an “enhanced” or “information service.”⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ On one hand, the Commission classified as an “information service” Pulver.com’s free service that did not provide transmission and offers a number of computing capabilities. *Petition for Declaratory Ruling that Pulver.com’s Free World Dialup is Neither Telecommunications nor a Telecommunications Service*, WC Docket No. 03-45, Memorandum Order and Opinion, 19 FCC Rcd 3307 (2004) (*Pulver.com Order*). On the other hand, the Commission found that certain “IP-in-the-middle” services were “telecommunications services” where they: (1) use ordinary customer premises equipment (CPE) with no enhanced functionality; (2) originate and terminate on the public switched telephone network (PSTN); and (3) undergo no net protocol conversion and provide no enhanced functionality to end users due to the provider’s use of IP technology. See, e.g., *Petition for Declaratory Ruling that AT&T’s Phone-to-Phone IP Telephony Services are Exempt from Access Charges*, WC Docket No. 02-361, Order, 19 FCC Rcd 7457 (2004) (*IP-in-the-Middle Order*). See also, e.g., *Regulation of Prepaid Calling Card Services*, WC Docket No. 05-68, Declaratory Ruling and Report and Order, 21 FCC Rcd 7290 (2006) (*Prepaid Calling Card Order*).

⁵²⁹ We use the term “IP/PSTN” as a shorthand, without reaching any universal conclusions regarding the technology underlying the PSTN. Today the PSTN continues to rely primarily on circuit-switched technology to connect to end-user customers, although we recognize that carriers increasingly are converting portions of their networks to IP technology. See, e.g., *IP-Enabled Services; E911 Requirements for IP-Enabled Service Providers*, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-196, First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 10245, 10258, para. 24 & n.77 (2005) (distinguishing the “specialized” CPE required for interconnected VoIP services from the standard CPE used for typical telephone calls); *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report to Congress, 13 FCC Rcd 11501, 11532, para. 84 (1998) (“‘IP telephony’ services enable real-time voice transmission using Internet protocols. The services can be provided in two basic ways: through software and hardware at customer premises, or through ‘gateways’ that enable applications originating and/or terminating on the PSTN. Gateways are computers that transform the circuit-switched voice signal into IP packets, and vice versa, and perform associated signaling, control, and address translation functions.”). Insofar as a service allows a customer to originate a communication on an IP network and terminate it on a circuit-switched network, or vice versa, it involves a net protocol conversion, and we classify it as an “information service” today. Insofar as that service allows communications with no net protocol conversion, it is not subject to our “information service” classification here. We note that the presence of a net protocol conversion is not the only basis for classifying a service as an “enhanced” or “information service.” See, e.g., 47 C.F.R. § 64.702(a); *Computer II Final Decision*, 77 FCC 2d at 420–21, para. 97. We do not reach those issues at this time, however.

⁵³⁰ See, e.g., *Implementation of the Non-Accounting Safeguards of Sections 271 and 272 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Amended*, CC Docket No. 96-149, First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 11 FCC Rcd 21905, 21957–58, para. 106 (1996) (*Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*). Interpreting the 1996 Act’s definition of “information services,” the Commission held that “all of the services that the Commission has previously considered to be ‘enhanced services’ are ‘information services.’” *Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 21956, para. 103. For the all reasons discussed in Part V.B.2, we decline to defer the classification of IP/PSTN services, as requested by some parties, instead finding it appropriate to address this issue as part of our comprehensive reforms. See, e.g., Letter from Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 at 15 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (Free Press Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus and Genevieve Morelli, Counsel for Broadview Networks, et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008).

210. Although there are certain exceptions to this treatment, we do not find them applicable.⁵³¹ In particular, we do not find this to be “protocol conversion in connection with the introduction of new technology to implement existing services” that would be treated as a “basic,” rather than “enhanced” service.⁵³² That exception was designed to address situations “involving no change in an existing service, but merely a change in electrical interface characteristics to facilitate transitional introduction of new technology.”⁵³³ By contrast, we find that IP/PSTN services are not mere changes to the underlying technology used for “existing” basic services, but are entirely new services with characteristics in many ways distinct from pre-existing telephone services.⁵³⁴

211. Consistent with the *Pulver.com Order* and the *Vonage Order*, we preempt any state efforts to impose “traditional ‘telephone company’ regulations” as they relate to IP/PSTN information services as inconsistent with our generally unregulated treatment of information services.⁵³⁵ Of course, neither the *Vonage Order*, the *Pulver.com Order*, nor our actions here preempt state actions that are

⁵³¹ Two of the exceptions are: (1) protocol processing involving communications between an end user and the network itself (e.g., for initiation, routing, and termination of calls) rather than between or among users; and (2) protocol conversion to facilitate the interconnection of networks. *Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 21957–58, para. 106. These categories of protocol processing services may involve protocol conversions, but they result in no net protocol conversion between the end users. *Implementation of the Non-Accounting Safeguards of Sections 271 and 272 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Amended*, CC Docket No. 96-149, Order on Reconsideration, 12 FCC Rcd 2297, 2297–99, para. 2 (1997). Thus, they are not relevant here.

⁵³² *Amendment to Sections 64.702 of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations (Third Computer Inquiry); and Policy and Rules Concerning Rates for Competitive Common Phase II Carrier Service and Facilities Authorization Thereof; Communications Protocols Under Section 64.702 of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations*, CC Docket No. 85-229, Report and Order, 2 FCC Rcd 3072, 3081, para. 65 (1987) (*Computer III Phase II Order*). See also *Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 21957–58, para. 106.

⁵³³ *Communications Protocols under Section 64.702 of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations*, GN Docket No. 80-756, Memorandum Opinion, Order, and Statement Of Principles, 95 FCC 2d 584, para. 16 (1983) (*Protocols Order*).

⁵³⁴ See, e.g., Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 9–11 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President, Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, WC Docket No. 04-36, at 10–11 (filed Aug. 6, 2007); Letter from AT&T et al., to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, et al., WC Docket No. 04-36, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2–3 (filed Aug. 6, 2008); VON Coalition *IP-Enabled Services NPRM* Comments at 3–16; AT&T *IP-Enabled Services NPRM* Comments at 13–17. We thus disagree with parties who suggest, in essence, that IP/PSTN services are no different than “basic” services. See, e.g., Letter from Thomas Jones and Jonathan Lechter, Counsel for tw telecom et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 99-68, 04-36, Attach. at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (*tw telecom et. al* Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). We note that whether a service is viewed by consumers as a possible substitute for a “basic” service is a distinct question from whether, as a matter of technology and the nature of the service offering, the service simply replaces the technology underlying a pre-existing basic service. Thus, our conclusion here is not inconsistent with the Commission’s recognition that interconnected VoIP services increasingly are viewed by consumers as a substitute for traditional telephone services. See, e.g., *LNP Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 19547, para. 28.

⁵³⁵ *Vonage Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 22404; see also *Pulver.com Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 3316, para. 15 (“We determine, consistent with our precedent regarding information services, that FWD is an unregulated information service and any state regulations that seek to treat FWD as a telecommunications service or otherwise subject it to public-utility type regulation would almost certainly pose a conflict with our policy of nonregulation.”).

consistent with federal policy.⁵³⁶ Moreover, as we describe below, we allow states to establish reciprocal compensation rates, pursuant to our methodology, including for IP/PSTN traffic.

212. In sections 251 and 252 of the Act, Congress altered the traditional regulatory framework based on jurisdiction by expanding the applicability of national rules to historically intrastate issues and state rules to historically interstate issues.⁵³⁷ In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that the 1996 Act created parallel jurisdiction for the Commission and the states over interstate and intrastate matters under sections 251 and 252.⁵³⁸ The Commission and the states “are to address the same matters through their parallel jurisdiction over both interstate and intrastate matters under sections 251 and 252.”⁵³⁹ Moreover, section 251(i) provides that “[n]othing in this section shall be construed to limit or otherwise affect the Commission’s authority under section 201.”⁵⁴⁰ The Commission concluded that section 251(i) “affirms that the Commission’s preexisting authority under section 201 continues to apply for purely interstate activities.”⁵⁴¹

213. In implementing sections 251 and 252 in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission’s treatment of LEC-CMRS traffic provides an instructive approach. Prior to the 1996 Act, the Commission expressly preempted “state and local regulations of the kind of interconnection to which CMRS providers are entitled” based on its authority under section 201 and 332 of the Act.⁵⁴² Nevertheless, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission brought LEC-CMRS interconnection within the section 251 framework as it relates to intraMTA (including interstate intraMTA) traffic.⁵⁴³ The Commission recognized, however, that it continued to retain separate authority over CMRS traffic.⁵⁴⁴

214. Courts confirmed that, in permitting LEC-CMRS interconnection to be addressed through the section 251 framework, the Commission did not in any way lose its independent jurisdiction or authority to regulate that traffic under other provisions of the Act. Thus, although the Eighth Circuit invalidated the Commission’s TELRIC pricing rules in general,⁵⁴⁵ it recognized that “because section 332(c)(1)(B) gives the FCC the authority to order LECs to interconnect with CMRS carriers, we believe that the Commission has the authority to issue the rules of special concern to the CMRS providers,

⁵³⁶ For example, states are free to require contributions to state universal service or telecommunications relay service funds through methodologies that are consistent with federal policy. See, e.g., Letter from Robert W. Quinn, Jr. Senior Vice President, Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 11–16 (filed July 23, 2008) (describing ways that states could require contributions to state universal service or telecommunications relay service funds in a manner that is consistent with federal policy).

⁵³⁷ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15544, para. 83.

⁵³⁸ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15544–45, para. 85.

⁵³⁹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15546–47, para. 91.

⁵⁴⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(i).

⁵⁴¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15546–47, para. 91.

⁵⁴² *Implementation of Sections 3(n) and 332*, Second Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 1411, 1498, para. 230 (1994).

⁵⁴³ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16005, para. 1023.

⁵⁴⁴ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16005, para. 1023 (“By opting to proceed under sections 251 and 252, we are not finding that section 332 jurisdiction over interconnection has been repealed by implication, or rejecting it as an alternative basis for jurisdiction.”).

⁵⁴⁵ We note that the Supreme Court later reversed this decision and affirmed the TELRIC methodology. See *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 467.

[including the reciprocal compensation rules] but only as these provisions apply to CMRS providers. Thus, [the pricing] rules . . . remain in full force and effect with respect to the CMRS providers, and our order of vacation does not apply to them in the CMRS context.”⁵⁴⁶ Subsequently, the D.C. Circuit held that CMRS providers were entitled to pursue formal complaints under section 208 of the Act for violations of the Commission’s reciprocal compensation rules.⁵⁴⁷

215. We build upon our actions in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, and now permit states to establish a uniform reciprocal compensation rate, in accordance with the new methodology we establish in this order, pursuant to the section 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework. In particular, section 251(b)(5) imposes on all LECs a “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications.”⁵⁴⁸ Section 252(d)(2)(A) sets forth an “additional costs” standard that state commissions, in arbitrating interconnection disputes involving incumbent LECs, should apply in setting the “charges for transport and termination of traffic.”⁵⁴⁹ Although we allow states to set new uniform termination rates under this framework, pursuant to our methodology, we retain our authority under section 201 to find that reciprocal compensation charges are unjust and unreasonable as they relate to interstate, CMRS, and IP/PSTN traffic within our jurisdiction.⁵⁵⁰ We expect that states will faithfully implement the pricing standards adopted in this order, and thus it will not be necessary for us to exercise that authority.⁵⁵¹

216. The Commission unquestionably has authority to interpret and adopt rules implementing sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2). Congress delegated to the Commission the task of administering the Communications Act. Section 201(b) authorizes the Commission to “prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act.”⁵⁵² “[T]he grant in § 201(b) means what it says: The FCC has rulemaking authority to carry out the ‘provisions of this

⁵⁴⁶ *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC*, 120 F.3d 753, 800 n.21 (8th Cir. 1997) (*Iowa Utils. Bd.*), *rev’d in part and remanded on other grounds*, *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. 366.

⁵⁴⁷ *Qwest Corp. v. FCC*, 252 F.3d 462, 465–66 (D.C. Cir. 2001) (describing the Eighth Circuit’s analysis of section 332(c)(1)(B) in *Iowa Utils. Bd.* and concluding that an attempt to relitigate the issue was barred by the doctrine of issue preclusion).

⁵⁴⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

⁵⁴⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A).

⁵⁵⁰ See *supra* paras. 208–14. See also, e.g., Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 01-92 at 9–11 (filed on Aug. 18, 2008) (Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). Contrary to Verizon’s claims, we thus find no tension between permitting states to set reciprocal compensation rates for interstate traffic under the section 251 and 252 framework and the Commission’s continuing authority over traffic subject to its jurisdiction, including section 201 authority expressly preserved under section 251(i).

⁵⁵¹ We recognize that “the just and reasonable rates required by Sections 201 and 202 . . . must ordinarily be cost-based, absent a clear explanation of the Commission’s reasons for a departure from cost-based ratemaking.” *Access Charge Reform*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, 91-213, Second Order on Reconsideration and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 16606, 16619–20, para. 44 (*Access Charge Reform Second Order*) (citing *Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 87 F.3d 522, 529 (D.C. Cir. 1996)). In this order, we adopt an incremental cost methodology for setting termination rates. We find that the proper application of that methodology produces rates that are “just and reasonable” under section 201. As discussed below, we find it appropriate to adopt a transition before carriers begin charging rates set pursuant to our incremental cost methodology.

⁵⁵² 47 U.S.C. § 201(b) (“The Commission may prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act.”).

Act.”⁵⁵³ The Commission’s rulemaking authority is not limited to interstate matters; it extends to all provisions of the Communications Act.⁵⁵⁴

217. In addition, we find that the section 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework is broad enough to facilitate our intercarrier compensation reform. We acknowledge that, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic,⁵⁵⁵ and some commenters continue to press for such an interpretation.⁵⁵⁶ As other commenters recognize, however, the Commission, in the *ISP Remand Order*, reconsidered that judgment and concluded that it was a mistake to read section 251(b)(5) as limited to local traffic, given that “local” is not a term used in section 251(b)(5).⁵⁵⁷ We recognize, as the Supreme Court noted in *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utilities Board*, that “[i]t would be a gross understatement to say that the 1996 Act is not a model of clarity.”⁵⁵⁸ Nevertheless, we find that the better view is that section 251(b)(5) is not limited to local traffic.

218. We begin by looking at the text of the statute. Section 251(b)(5) imposes on all LECs the “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications.”⁵⁵⁹ The Act broadly defines “telecommunications” as “the transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user’s choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received.”⁵⁶⁰ Its scope is not limited geographically (“local,” “intrastate,” or “interstate”) or to particular services (“telephone exchange service,”⁵⁶¹ telephone toll service,⁵⁶² or “exchange access”⁵⁶³). We find that the traffic we elect to bring within this framework fits

⁵⁵³ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378.

⁵⁵⁴ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378 n.6 (“[T]he question in these cases is not whether the Federal Government has taken the regulation of local telecommunications competition away from the States. With regard to the matters addressed by the 1996 Act, it unquestionably has.”).

⁵⁵⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16012–13, para. 1033.

⁵⁵⁶ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 24–32; Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President, Legal and Industry, NTCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 9 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (NCTA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Verizon *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 38–42; NARUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 6–7; Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 144–49; Cincinnati Bell *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 5–11; Maine PUC and Vermont Pub. Serv. Bd. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7; New York State PSC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7; Verizon and BellSouth, Supplemental White Paper on ISP Reciprocal Compensation, CC Docket No. 96-98, 99-68 at 16–20 (filed July 20, 2004) (Verizon/BellSouth Supp. ISP White Paper); NARUC’s Initial Comments at 7 n.13 (May 23, 2004). *But see*, e.g., ICF *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 39.

⁵⁵⁷ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9166–67, para. 35. See also, e.g., Qwest, Legal Authority for Comprehensive Intercarrier Compensation Reform at 2–4, attached to Letter from Melissa Newman, Counsel for Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 06-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, 05-195, 06-122 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham et al., Counsel for T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 9–10 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2, 15–18; AT&T *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 35–41; Brief from Gary M. Epstein, Counsel for ICF, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 29–35 (filed Oct. 5, 2004)

⁵⁵⁸ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 397.

⁵⁵⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

⁵⁶⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 153(43).

⁵⁶¹ *Id.* at § 153(47).

⁵⁶² *Id.* at § 153(48).

⁵⁶³ *Id.* at § 153(16).

squarely within the meaning of “telecommunications.”⁵⁶⁴ Had Congress intended to preclude the Commission from bringing certain types of telecommunications traffic within the section 251(b)(5) framework, it could have easily done so by incorporating restrictive terms in section 251(b)(5). Because Congress used the term “telecommunications,” the broadest of the statute’s defined terms, we conclude that section 251(b)(5) is not limited only to the transport and termination of certain types of telecommunications traffic, such as local traffic.

219. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order* the Commission concluded that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic, but recognized that “[u]ltimately . . . the rates that local carriers impose for the transport and termination of local traffic and for the transport and termination of long distance traffic should converge.”⁵⁶⁵ In the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission reversed course on the scope of section 251(b)(5), finding that “the phrase ‘local traffic’ created unnecessary ambiguities, and we correct that mistake here.”⁵⁶⁶ The *ISP Remand Order* noted that “the term ‘local,’ not being a statutorily defined category, . . . is not a term used in section 251(b)(5).”⁵⁶⁷ The Commission found that the scope of section 251(b)(5) is limited only by section 251(g), which temporarily grandfathered the pre-1996 Act rules governing “exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access” provided to IXCs and information service providers until “explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission.”⁵⁶⁸ On appeal, the D.C. Circuit left intact the Commission’s findings concerning the scope of section 251(b)(5), although it took issue with other aspects of the *ISP Remand Order*.⁵⁶⁹

220. We agree with the finding in the *ISP Remand Order* that traffic encompassed by section 251(g) is excluded from section 251(b)(5) except to the extent that the Commission acts to bring that traffic within its scope. Section 251(g) preserved the pre-1996 Act regulatory regime that applies to access traffic, including rules governing “receipt of compensation.”⁵⁷⁰ There would have been no need for Congress to have preserved these compensation rules against the effects of section 251 if the scope of section 251(b)(5) was not broad enough for the Commission to bring within its scope the traffic covered by section 251(g), i.e., access traffic. Because Congress is presumed not to have wasted its breath, particularly with a provision as lengthy and detailed as section 251(g), we find that section 251(g) confirms that section 251(b)(5) applies to the transport and termination of all telecommunications traffic exchanged with LECs, including ISP-bound traffic. And because section 251(g) “is worded simply as a transitional device, preserving various LEC duties that antedated the 1996 Act until such time as the Commission should adopt new rules pursuant to the Act,”⁵⁷¹ we clearly have authority under the Act to

⁵⁶⁴ As discussed above, we classify IP/PSTN services as “information services.” We note, however, that information services, by definition, are provided “via telecommunications,” enabling us to bring IP/PSTN traffic within the section 251(b)(5) framework. 47 U.S.C. § 153(20). Moreover, given that we retain independent authority under section 201, we find it reasonably ancillary to that authority to regulate IP/PSTN services in this regard, consistent with our efforts to ensure uniform treatment of all traffic on the PSTN for intercarrier compensation purposes. Thus, IP/PSTN traffic ultimately will be subject to the final uniform reciprocal compensation rates established pursuant to the methodology adopted in this order. We maintain the status quo for this traffic during the transition, however.

⁵⁶⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16012, para. 1033.

⁵⁶⁶ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9173, para. 46.

⁵⁶⁷ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9167, para. 34.

⁵⁶⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

⁵⁶⁹ *See WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 429.

⁵⁷⁰ 47 U.S.C. 251(g).

⁵⁷¹ *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 430.

adopt regulations superseding that regime. We exercise that authority today.⁵⁷²

221. By placing all traffic under the umbrella of one compensation scheme, we eliminate jurisdictional and regulatory distinctions that are not tied to economic or technical differences between services. As the Commission observed in the *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, regulatory arbitrage arises from different rates that different types of providers must pay for essentially the same functions.⁵⁷³ Our current classifications require carriers to treat identical uses of the network differently, even though such disparate treatment usually has no economic or technical basis. These artificial distinctions distort the telecommunications markets at the expense of healthy competition. Similar types of traffic should be subject to similar rules. Similar types of functions should be subject to similar cost recovery mechanisms. We achieve that result by moving away from the regime preserved by section 251(g) and bringing that traffic within the section 251(b)(5) framework.

222. We disagree with commenters who argue that section 251(b)(5) only can be applied to traffic exchanged between LECs, and not traffic exchanged between a LEC and another carrier.⁵⁷⁴ The Commission rejected that argument in the *Local Competition Order*, finding that section 251(b)(5) applies to traffic exchanged by a LEC and any other telecommunications carrier, and adopted rules implementing that finding.⁵⁷⁵ In a specific application of that principle, the Commission concluded that “CMRS providers will not be classified as LECs,”⁵⁷⁶ but nevertheless found that “LECs are obligated,

⁵⁷² Verizon notes that although the Commission in the *ISP Remand Order* deleted the word “local” from its regulations governing reciprocal compensation, the regulations continued to exclude access services from the scope of section 251(b)(5). See Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 24–32; 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(b)(1). At that time, it made sense to retain the access exemption because the Commission had not issued rules superseding the access regime preserved by section 251(g). We supersede the grandfathered access regime in this order, at least in part.

⁵⁷³ *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616, para. 12.

⁵⁷⁴ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments (“The best interpretation of § 251(b)(5) – read in light of the text, structure, and history of the 1996 Act – is that the reciprocal compensation obligation applies only to intraexchange (or ‘local’) voice calls that originate on the network of one LEC (or wireless provider) and terminate on the network of another LEC (or wireless provider) operating in the same exchange (or, in the case of wireless providers, the same MTA.”); Verizon and BellSouth, *Internet-Bound Traffic is Not Compensable Under Sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2)* at 26 (Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper) (“By its nature, ‘reciprocal compensation’ must . . . apply to ‘telecommunications’ exchanged *between LECs* (or carriers, like CMRS providers, that the Commission is authorized to treat as LECs), not to traffic that is exchanged between LECs and non-LECs.”), attached to Letter from Ann D. Berkowitz, Associate Director, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98 (filed May 17, 2004).

⁵⁷⁵ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16013–16, paras. 1034–41. See also 47 C.F.R. 51.703(a) (“Each LEC shall establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for transport and termination of telecommunications traffic with any requesting telecommunications carrier.”); *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9193–94, para. 89 n.177 (“Section 251(b)(5) applies to telecommunications traffic between a LEC and a telecommunications carrier . . .”).

⁵⁷⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15996, para. 1005. In this regard, we note that, absent a determination that CMRS providers are LECs, IXC-CMRS traffic would not be encompassed by section 251(b)(5), since neither are LECs. Nevertheless, it is our intention that, at the end of the transition, CMRS providers be entitled to reciprocal compensation for all the traffic they terminate. As the Commission has observed, “[t]here are three ways in which a carrier seeking to impose charges on another carrier can establish a duty to pay such charges: pursuant to (1) Commission rule; (2) tariff; or (3) contract.” *Petitions of Sprint PCS and AT&T Corp. For Declaratory Ruling Regarding CMRS Access Charges, Declaratory Ruling*, 17 FCC Rcd 13192, 13196, para. 8 (2002).

pursuant to section 251(b)(5) (and the corresponding pricing standards of section 252(d)(2)), to enter into reciprocal compensation agreements with all CMRS providers.”⁵⁷⁷ No one challenged that finding on appeal, and it has been settled law for the past 12 years. We see no reason to revisit that conclusion now. Although section 251(b)(5) indisputably imposes the duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements on LECs alone, Congress did not limit the class of potential beneficiaries of that obligation to LECs.⁵⁷⁸

223. We also disagree with commenters who argue that section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) limits the scope of section 251(b)(5).⁵⁷⁹ Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) provides that a state commission “shall not consider the terms and conditions for reciprocal compensation to be just and reasonable” unless “such terms and conditions provide for the mutual and reciprocal recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier’s network facilities of calls that originate on the network facilities of the other carrier.”⁵⁸⁰ Verizon and others argue that this provision necessarily excludes interexchange traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5) because at the time the 1996 Act was passed, calls neither originated nor terminated on an IXC’s network.⁵⁸¹ We reject this reasoning because it erroneously assumes that Congress intended the pricing standards in section 252(d)(2) to limit the otherwise broad scope of section 251(b)(5). We do not believe that Congress intended the tail to wag the dog.

224. Section 251(b)(5) defines the scope of traffic that is subject to reciprocal compensation. Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i), in turn, deals with the mechanics of who owes what to whom, it does not define the scope of traffic to which section 251(b)(5) applies. Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) provides that, at a minimum, a reciprocal compensation arrangement must provide for the recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier’s network of calls that originate on the network of the other carrier.⁵⁸² Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) does not address what happens when carriers exchange traffic that originates or terminates on a third carrier’s network. This does not mean, as Verizon suggests, that section 251(b)(5) must be read as limited to traffic involving only two carriers. Rather, it means that there is a gap in the pricing rules in section 252(d)(2), and the Commission has authority under section 201(b) to adopt rules to fill that gap.

225. We reject Verizon’s argument that a telecommunications carrier that delivers traffic to an ISP is not eligible for reciprocal compensation because the carrier does not “terminate” telecommunications traffic at the ISP.⁵⁸³ In the *Local Competition Order*, the Commission defined

⁵⁷⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15997, para. 1008.

⁵⁷⁸ If Congress had intended to limit the class of potential beneficiaries of LECs’ duty to establish reciprocal obligation arrangements, it would have said so explicitly. See 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(3) (describing the “duty to provide dialing parity to competing providers of telephone exchange service and telephone toll service”).

⁵⁷⁹ See, e.g., Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper at 41–43; New York State PSC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 8–9; TDS *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 19 n.27; Qwest *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 39; NASUCA *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 17–18.

⁵⁸⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(i).

⁵⁸¹ See, e.g., Maine PUC and Vermont Pub. Serv. Bd. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7–8; New York State PSC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7–10; Verizon/BellSouth Supp. ISP White Paper at 16–20; NARUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7 n.13.

⁵⁸² 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(i).

⁵⁸³ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 33–34; Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper at 31–32.

“termination” as “the switching of traffic that is subject to section 251(b)(5) at the terminating carrier’s end office switch . . . and delivery of that traffic to the called party’s premises.”⁵⁸⁴ As the D.C. Circuit suggested in the *Bell Atlantic* decision, “Calls to ISPs appear to fit this definition: the traffic is switched by the LEC whose customer is the ISP and then delivered to the ISP, which is clearly the ‘called party.’”⁵⁸⁵ We agree.⁵⁸⁶ Consequently, ISP-bound traffic is subject to our new intercarrier compensation framework.⁵⁸⁷

226. We reject opponents’ other arguments that the context and history of the 1996 Act compel a finding that section 251(b)(5) could not be applied to access traffic. Verizon argues, for example, that section 251(g) demonstrates that Congress did not intend to displace the existing access pricing regime.⁵⁸⁸ This argument ignores that Congress preserved the access regime only “until such restrictions and obligations are explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission.”⁵⁸⁹ As noted above, we find that section 251(g) actually supports a finding that section 251(b)(5) is broad enough to cover access traffic. Verizon also argues that the reference to reciprocal compensation in the competitive checklist in section 271,⁵⁹⁰ which was designed to ensure that local markets are open to competition, somehow shows that Congress intended to limit the scope of section 251(b)(5) to local traffic.⁵⁹¹ We do not see how this argument sheds any light on the scope of section 251(b)(5). Congress no doubt included the reference to reciprocal compensation in section 271 because section 251(b)(5) applies to local traffic, a point that no one disputes. That does not suggest, however, that section 251(b)(5) applies *only* to local traffic.

227. We need not respond to every other variation of the argument that the history and structure of the Act somehow demonstrate that section 251(b)(5) does not apply to access traffic. At best, these arguments show that one plausible interpretation of the statute is that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic, a view that the Commission embraced in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*.

⁵⁸⁴ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16015, para. 1040. See also 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(d).

⁵⁸⁵ 206 F.3d at 6.

⁵⁸⁶ Because ISP-bound traffic did not fall within the section 251(g) carve out from section 251(b)(5) as “there had been *no* pre-Act obligation relating to intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic,” *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433, ISP-bound traffic is, and always has been, subject to section 251(b)(5), although clearly interstate in nature and subject to our section 201 authority.

⁵⁸⁷ We reject Verizon’s argument against the application of section 251(b)(5) to ISP-bound traffic because this traffic is one-way traffic and as such is not reciprocal. See *Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments* at 26; *Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper* at 41–43. As Level 3 points out, these arguments have been rejected by the Commission and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. See Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 18; *Pacific Bell v. Cook Telecom, Inc.*, 197 F.3d 1236, 1242–44 (9th Cir. 1999) (reciprocal compensation applies to paging traffic); *TSR Wireless, LLC v. U.S. West Commc’ns, Inc.*, 15 FCC Rcd 11166, 11178, para. 21 (2000) (the Commission’s reciprocal compensation rules draw “no distinction between one-way and two-way carriers”). Because our conclusion in this order concerning the scope of section 251(b)(5) is no longer tied to whether this traffic is local or long distance, we need not address arguments made by the parties as to whether ISP-bound traffic constitutes “telephone exchange service” under the Act. See, e.g., Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 1 (filed Sept. 24, 2004). We note, however, that we retain our interim ISP-bound traffic rules. See *supra* paras. 198–205.

⁵⁸⁸ See *Verizon ICC FNPRM Comments* at 41.

⁵⁸⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

⁵⁹⁰ See 47 U.S.C. § 271(c)(2)(B)(xiii).

⁵⁹¹ See *Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments* at 26; *Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper* at 9.

These arguments do not persuade us, however, that this is the only plausible reading of the statute. Moreover, many of the same arguments based on the history and context of the adoption of section 251 to limit its scope to local traffic were rejected by the D.C. Circuit in the context of section 251(c).⁵⁹² We find that the better reading of the Act as a whole, in particular the broad language of section 251(b)(5) and the grandfather clause in section 251(g), supports our view that the transport and termination of all telecommunications exchanged with LECs is subject to the reciprocal compensation regime in sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2).

228. The approach we adopt here provides a sound basis for comprehensive reform, and we thus decline to adopt alternative proposals. On one hand, we note that some commenters advocate that the Commission adopt an intercarrier compensation rate or cap of \$0.0007 per minute of use for all traffic.⁵⁹³ To implement this reform proposal, parties have suggested that it would likely be necessary for the Commission to preempt state regulation of intrastate access charges.⁵⁹⁴ We believe that such a significant step is not currently warranted, and elect instead to allow states to continue setting rates for intrastate traffic, as well as permitting them to set rates for traffic subject to federal jurisdiction, pursuant to our methodology. We fully expect the new pricing methodology to achieve the goals of our continuing intercarrier compensation reform. On the other hand, some parties contend that the Commission should leave matters of intrastate intercarrier compensation reform entirely to the states.⁵⁹⁵ These proposals evidence a pre-1996 Act worldview, however. Given the tools that the 1996 Act put at our disposal, we find it possible to move forward with truly comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform under an approach which still provides for a state role.

229. We note that, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission observed that section 251(b)(5) does not address charges payable to a carrier that originates traffic and

⁵⁹² *United States Telecom Ass'n v. FCC*, 359 F.3d 554, 592 (D.C. Cir. 2004) (*USTA II*) (“Even under the deferential *Chevron* standard of review, an agency cannot, absent strong structural or contextual evidence, exclude from coverage certain items that clearly fall within the plain meaning of a statutory term. The argument that long distance services are not ‘telecommunications services’ has no support.”). In *USTA II*, the D.C. Circuit was addressing whether the term “telecommunications services” was limited to local telecommunications services under section 251(c), while here we consider the analogous question of whether “telecommunications” is limited to local telecommunications under section 251(b).

⁵⁹³ See, e.g., Letter from Grace E. Koh, Policy Counsel, Cox Enterprises, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. A at 1 (filed Oct. 6, 2008); Letter from Teresa D. Bauer and Richard R. Cameron, Counsel for Global Crossing North America, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1 (filed Sept. 18, 2008); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Kevin Martin et al., Commissioners, FCC, CC Docket. 01-92 at 4 (filed Sept. 12, 2008) (Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). But see, e.g., Letter from Richard A. Askoff, Executive Director—Regulatory, NECA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (“Prescription of a nationwide uniform default rate of \$0.0007 is unnecessary to solve the rate arbitrage problems identified by Verizon. It would also represent bad policy.”); Letter from Lawrence Zawalick, Senior Vice President, Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative, to Kevin Martin et al., Commissioners, FCC, CC Docket 01-92 at 1 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (“The Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative (RTFC) strongly opposes [the \$0.0007] proposal.”).

⁵⁹⁴ See, e.g., Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 14–25 (filed Sept. 19, 2008) (Verizon Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵⁹⁵ In some cases, parties propose that the Commission make available universal service support as an “enticement” for states to reform intrastate rates, but ultimately the decisions would be left to the individual states. See Letter from Tom Karalis, Counsel for Rural Alliance, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 7 (filed Sept. 26, 2008).

concluded, therefore, that such charges were prohibited under that provision of the Act.⁵⁹⁶ Because we elect to have the states set rates under section 251(b)(5), pursuant to our methodology, we find that retention of originating charges would be inconsistent with that statutory scheme and our new regulatory approach. Accordingly, we find that originating charges for all telecommunications traffic subject to our comprehensive intercarrier compensation framework must be eliminated at the conclusion of the transition to the new regime. We recognize, however, that changes to originating access charge rates may raise issues distinct from terminating charges. Moreover, several parties urge the Commission to delay any changes to originating charges.⁵⁹⁷ For these reasons, we ask parties to comment on the appropriate transition for eliminating originating access charges in the accompanying Further Notice.⁵⁹⁸ Although we ask parties to comment on the appropriate transition for eliminating originating access charges, we clarify that, under the transitional mechanism we adopt today, carriers are not permitted to increase any of their current rates, including their originating access rates.⁵⁹⁹ Thus, both interstate and intrastate originating switched access rates will remain capped at current levels until further action by the Commission addressing the appropriate transition for this traffic. This approach is consistent with our transition of terminating rates⁶⁰⁰ and with our goal of eliminating originating access charges at the conclusion of the transition to the new regime.

b. Legal Authority for the Transition

230. Although we comprehensively reform intercarrier compensation, we do not flash cut to our new regime, but provide for a measured transition.⁶⁰¹ The goal of this transition is to avoid overly rapid rate changes for consumers while providing carriers with sufficient means to preserve their financial

⁵⁹⁶ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16016, para. 1042. See also 47 C.F.R. § 51.703(b) (stating that a “LEC may not assess charges on any other telecommunications carrier for telecommunications traffic that originates on the LEC’s network”).

⁵⁹⁷ See, e.g., Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5 (asking the Commission to defer reform of originating access); Letter from Grace E. Kohl, Policy Counsel, Cox, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, 99-68, 96-262 at 2 (filed Oct. 6, 2008) (supporting proposals to delay reform of originating access) (Cox Oct. 6, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Brian Benison, Director—Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, Attach. at 3 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (describing model with “No Change to Current Structure and Rates” for originating access); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham, Federal Regulatory Affairs, T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 5 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); cf. Letter from Mary C. Albert, Assistant General Counsel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, Attach. at 1 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (urging the Commission to delay any changes to intercarrier compensation). But see Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President, Government Affairs, COMPTTEL, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 7 (filed Oct. 1, 2008) (urging the Commission to reform originating access immediately) (Sprint Oct. 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵⁹⁸ See *infra* para 346.

⁵⁹⁹ This prohibition on increasing access rates also applies to the Primary Interexchange Carrier Charge in section 69.153 of the Commission’s rules, the per-minute Carrier Common Line charge in section 69.154 of the Commission’s rules, and the per-minute Residual Interconnection Charge in section 69.155 of the Commission’s rules. 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.153, 69.154, 69.155.

⁶⁰⁰ See *supra* paras. 194–95 (prohibiting carriers from increasing their current rates, even if the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate is higher than one or more of its current rates).

⁶⁰¹ See *supra* section V.B.2.

integrity as we move to the new intercarrier compensation regime.⁶⁰² For many of the same reasons that we have authority to adopt comprehensive reform, we find that the Commission has clear authority to establish such a transitional structure to serve as a glide path to the new methodology we have developed in this order.

231. We find it reasonable to adopt a transition plan under these circumstances. As the D.C. Circuit has recognized, avoiding “market disruption pending broader reforms is, of course, a standard and accepted justification for a temporary rule,”⁶⁰³ and here temporary rules setting forth a glide path are needed to mitigate potentially adverse rate or revenue effects that may be caused by our comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform, including the elimination of implicit universal service subsidies in those rates. Therefore, the Commission’s exercise of its authority to create a transition plan is especially appropriate here, where the Commission is acting to reconcile the Act’s “implicit tension between . . . moving toward cost-based rates and protecting universal service.”⁶⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, most commenters have affirmatively recognized the need for a transitional regime.⁶⁰⁵ Indeed, every major plan submitted to us in this proceeding, whether the Missoula plan,⁶⁰⁶ the ICF plan,⁶⁰⁷ Verizon’s plan,⁶⁰⁸ AT&T’s plan,⁶⁰⁹ or the plan from CBICC,⁶¹⁰ ARIC,⁶¹¹ NARUC,⁶¹² or NASUCA,⁶¹³ has called for the Commission to establish

⁶⁰² This approach is consistent with Commission precedent set forth in Part V.A, which started reforming intercarrier compensation in the 1980s. There the Commission found that a “transitional plan is necessary” in part because “[i]mmediate recovery of high fixed costs through flat end-user charges might cause a significant number of local exchange service subscribers to cancel local exchange service despite the existence of a Universal Service Fund” and “[s]uch a result would not be consistent with the goals of the Communications Act.” *1983 Access Charge Order*, 93 FCC 2d at 243, para. 4. As a result, the Commission initially limited the flat rate charge imposed on end users, also known as the subscriber line charge or SLC, to \$1.00 (subsequent orders raised the cap on the subscriber line charge for residential users to \$6.50).

⁶⁰³ *Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 309 F.3d 8, 14 (D.C. Cir. 2002).

⁶⁰⁴ *Southwestern Bell Tel. Co. v. FCC*, 153 F.3d 523, 538 (8th Cir. 1998).

⁶⁰⁵ See, e.g., BellSouth *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 17 (“In order to avoid the market disruption and dislocation that would be associated with instantaneous implementation of a unified plan, BellSouth proposes a two-phase transition plan.”); CCG *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 2 (“Any plan that reduces access rates should be phased-in over as long a period as possible, at least for rural carriers, so these companies have time to prepare for and adjust to the economic impact.”); Cincinnati Bell *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 12 (“The Commission must allow carriers the opportunity to earn this lost access revenue in the transition to a new compensation regime in order to make any regime change revenue neutral to the affected carriers.”); CCAP *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 23 (“The CCAP believes that any reform of the existing intercarrier compensation regimes should take place over a three-to-five-year period . . .”).

⁶⁰⁶ Missoula Plan, Executive Summary at 3 (“Recognizing the vast differences among carriers, the Plan creates three different transition schedules for intercarrier compensation rates.”).

⁶⁰⁷ Letter from Gary M. Epstein and Richard R. Cameron, Counsel for ICF, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 2 at 3 (filed Aug. 16, 2004).

⁶⁰⁸ Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9–10.

⁶⁰⁹ Letter from Henry Hultquist, Federal Regulatory Vice-President, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 1 at 4 (filed July 17, 2008).

⁶¹⁰ Letter from Richard M. Rindler, Counsel for CBICC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 1 at 2.

⁶¹¹ ARIC *ICC FNPRM* Comments, Attach. 1 at 33.

⁶¹² NARUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments, Attach. C at 6.

an orderly transition period. We take heed of these commenters and of our statutory responsibilities to ensure a smooth transition to the new regime by setting forth a multi-stage transition plan as part of our comprehensive reform of intercarrier compensation.

232. Moreover, we have several independent sources of legal authority to adopt the transition plan established in this order. For one, section 251 explicitly contemplates our authority to adopt a transitional scheme with regard to access charges. We agree with the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that section 251(g) created a “transitional enforcement mechanism”⁶¹⁴ preserving the access charge regimes that pre-dated the 1996 Act “until . . . explicitly superseded by regulations *prescribed by the Commission*.”⁶¹⁵ Thus, section 251(g), by its terms, anticipates that the Commission may take action to end the regimes grandfathered by section 251(g), and inherent within the power to supersede the grandfathered access regime is the lesser power to prescribe regulations that determine *how* to transition to a cost-based pricing mechanism—a power that we have twice employed in the past to reduce access charges without explicitly superseding that regime.⁶¹⁶

233. In addition, as the Supreme Court has further held, the Commission has authority to prescribe the requisite pricing methodology that the States will apply in setting rates under section 252(d)(2).⁶¹⁷ Consistent with our authority, the Commission here is providing for a transitional regime in the public interest to smooth the transition to the new pricing standard adopted by this order. The goal of this transition is to allow gradual changes to consumer rates while providing carriers with sufficient means to preserve their financial integrity as we move to the new intercarrier compensation regime.

234. Significantly, as discussed in greater detail above, although we elect to rely on the sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework for reform, that does not affect the Commission’s jurisdiction

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⁶¹³ Letter from Philip F. McClelland, Senior Assistant Consumer Advocate, NASUCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 1 at 1 (filed Dec. 14, 2004).

⁶¹⁴ *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433.

⁶¹⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g) (emphasis added). At the least, section 251(g) preserved the interstate access regime the Commission had prescribed for all carriers (*see id.* (preserving “obligations (including receipt of compensation) . . . under any . . . regulation, order, or policy of the Commission . . .”) and the intrastate access regime the Bell Operating Companies had agreed to in the Modified Final Judgment. *See United States v. AT&T*, 552 F. Supp. at 169. Recognizing, however, that it would be “incongruous to conclude that Congress was concerned about the effects of potential disruption to the interstate access charge system, but had no such concerns about the effects on analogous intrastate mechanisms,” the Commission has consistently interpreted section 251(g) to preserve the intrastate access regime pre-dating the Act for all carriers. *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9168 n.66 (quoting *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15869, para. 732); *see also Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 117 F.3d 1068, 1072 (8th Cir. 1997) (“[I]t is clear from the Act that Congress did not intend all access charges to move to cost-based pricing, at least not immediately. The Act plainly preserves certain rate regimes already in place.”).

⁶¹⁶ *See MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd 19613 (reducing interstate access charges for rate-of-return carriers); *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962 (reducing interstate access charges for price-cap carriers), *aff’d in relevant part by Texas Office of Pub. Util. Counsel v. FCC*, 265 F.3d at 324 (reasoning that because the Commission had not yet superseded the pre-Act interstate access regime, it retained authority under section 201(b) to set just and reasonable rates for interstate access); *see also WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433 (“We will assume without deciding that under § 251(g) the Commission might modify LECs’ pre-Act ‘restrictions’ or ‘obligations,’ pending full implementation of relevant sections of the Act. The Fifth Circuit appeared to make that assumption . . .”).

⁶¹⁷ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 384; *see also id.* at 378 (“The FCC has rulemaking authority to carry out the ‘provisions of this Act,’ which include §§ 251 and 252, added by the Telecommunications Act of 1996.”)

over traffic or services otherwise subject to federal authority.⁶¹⁸ With respect to interstate services, the Act has long provided us with the authority to establish just and reasonable “charges, practices, classifications, and regulations.”⁶¹⁹ The Commission also has authority over the rates of CMRS providers pursuant to section 332 of the Act.⁶²⁰ The Commission thus retains full authority to adopt transition plans for traffic and services subject to federal jurisdiction, even when it is within the sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework. Because we re-affirm our findings concerning the interstate nature of ISP-bound traffic, it follows that such traffic falls under the Commission’s section 201 authority preserved by the Act.⁶²¹ This conclusion is reinforced by section 251(i) of the Act. As the Commission explained in the *ISP Remand Order*, section 251(i) “expressly affirms the Commission’s role in an evolving telecommunications marketplace, in which Congress anticipates that the Commission will continue to develop appropriate pricing and compensation mechanisms for traffic that falls within the purview of section 201.”⁶²² It concluded that section 251(i), together with section 201, equips the Commission with the tools necessary to keep pace with regulatory developments and new technologies.⁶²³ When read together, these statutory sections preserve the Commission’s authority to address new issues that fall within its section 201 authority over interstate traffic, including compensation for the exchange of ISP-bound traffic. Consequently, in the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission properly exercised its authority under section 201(b) to issue interim pricing rules governing the payment of compensation between carriers for ISP-bound traffic.⁶²⁴

⁶¹⁸ See *supra* section V.B.3.

⁶¹⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 201(b).

⁶²⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 332.

⁶²¹ We have consistently found that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. ISP-bound traffic melds a traditional circuit-switched local telephone call over the PSTN to packet switched IP-based Internet communication to Web sites. *Declaratory Ruling*, 14 FCC Rcd at 3702, para. 18; *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9175, para. 52. This conclusion has not been questioned by the D.C. Circuit. See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 431; *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, 206 F.3d at 5 (“There is no dispute that the Commission has historically been justified in relying on this method when determining whether a particular communication is jurisdictionally interstate”). In other contexts, the Commission has likewise found that services that offer access to the Internet are jurisdictionally interstate services. In 1998, for example, the Commission found that ADSL service is jurisdictionally interstate. See *GTE Tel. Operating Cos.*, CC Docket No. 98-79, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 22466, 22481, para. 28 (1998) (“finding that GTE’s ADSL service is subject to federal jurisdiction” and is “an interstate service”). More recently, the Commission has confirmed this ruling for a variety of broadband Internet access services. See *Inquiry Concerning High-Speed Access to the Internet Over Cable and Other Facilities*, GN Docket No. 00-185, CS Docket No. 02-52, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 17 FCC Rcd 4798, 4832, para. 59 (2002) (finding that, “on an end-to-end analysis,” “cable modem service is an interstate information service”); *Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 14914, para. 110, *aff’d by Nat’l Cable & Telecomms. Ass’n v. Brand X Internet Servs. (Brand X)*, 545 U.S. 967 (2005); *Appropriate Regulatory Treatment for Broadband Access to the Internet Over Wireless Networks*, WT 07-53, Declaratory Ruling, 22 FCC Rcd 5901, 5911, para. 28 (2007); *United Power Line Council’s Petition for Declaratory Ruling Regarding the Classification of Broadband over Power Line Internet Access Service as an Information Service*, WC 06-10, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 21 FCC Rcd 13281, 13288, para. 11 (2006). In the *Vonage Order*, the Commission likewise found that VoIP services are jurisdictionally interstate, employing the same end-to-end analysis reflected in those other orders. *Vonage Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 22413–14, paras. 17–18.

⁶²² *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9174, para. 50.

⁶²³ See *ISP Remand Order*, at 9175, para. 51.

⁶²⁴ We thus respond to the D.C. Circuit’s remand order in *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434, and the court’s writ of mandamus in *Core Communications*, 531 F.3d at 861–62, which directed the Commission to explain its legal

(continued....)

235. This result is consistent with the D.C. Circuit's opinion in *Bell Atlantic*, which concluded that the jurisdictional nature of traffic is not dispositive of whether reciprocal compensation is owed under section 251(b)(5).⁶²⁵ It is also consistent with the court's *WorldCom* decision, in which the court rejected the Commission's view that section 251(g) excluded ISP-bound traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5), but made no other findings.⁶²⁶ Finally, this result does not run afoul of the Eighth Circuit's decision on remand from the Supreme Court in the *Iowa Utilities Board* litigation, which held that "the FCC does not have the authority to set the actual prices for the state commissions to use" under section 251(b)(5).⁶²⁷ At the time of that decision, under the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, section 251(b)(5) applied only to local traffic. Thus, the Eighth Circuit merely held that the Commission could not set reciprocal compensation rates for local traffic. The court did not address the Commission's authority to set reciprocal compensation rates for interstate traffic.⁶²⁸ In sum, the Commission plainly has authority to establish pricing rules for interstate traffic, including ISP-bound traffic, under section 201(b), and that authority was preserved by section 251(i).

4. Additional Costs Standard

236. We now turn to reconsideration of our "additional costs" standard for implementing section 252(d)(2). Before describing our new standard, we briefly review the relevant statutory language and the Commission's implementation of the "additional costs" standard in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*. We then explain the importance of incremental cost in regulated pricing. Next we examine the incremental cost of call termination on modern networks. Finally we describe in detail the "additional costs" standard we adopt in this order.

a. Background

237. Section 252(d)(2)(A) sets forth the standard that state commissions, in arbitrating interconnection disputes, should apply in setting the "charges for transport and termination of traffic." That section states that "[f]or the purposes of compliance ... with section 251(b)(5), a State commission shall not consider the terms and conditions for reciprocal compensation to be just and reasonable unless (i) such terms and conditions provide for the mutual and reciprocal recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier's network facilities of calls that originate on the network facilities of the other carrier; and (ii) such terms and conditions determine such costs on the basis of a reasonable approximation of the additional costs of terminating such calls."⁶²⁹ Section 252(d)(2)(B) provides that the preceding standard "shall not be construed (i) to preclude arrangements that afford the mutual recovery of costs through offsetting of reciprocal obligations, including arrangements that waive mutual recover (such as bill and keep arrangements); or (ii) to authorize the Commission or any State commission to engage in any rate regulation proceedings to establish with

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authority to issue the interim pricing rules for ISP-bound traffic adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*. Specifically, we find, for the reasons set forth above and in Part V.B.3, that the Commission had the authority to adopt the interim pricing regime pursuant to our broad authority under section 201(b) to issue rules governing interstate traffic.

⁶²⁵ See *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 5.

⁶²⁶ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434.

⁶²⁷ *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC*, 219 F.3d 744, 757 (8th Cir. 2000) (*Iowa Utils. II*), *rev'd in part sub nom. Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. 467.

⁶²⁸ Indeed, as discussed above, the court expressly confirmed the Commission's independent authority to set rates for CMRS traffic pursuant to section 332 and declined to vacate the Commission's pricing rules as they applied in the context of CMRS service. See *supra* para. 214; *Iowa Utils. I*, 120 F.3d at 800 n.21.

⁶²⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A).

particularly the additional costs of transporting or terminating calls, or to require carriers to maintain records with respect to the additional costs of such calls.”⁶³⁰

238. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission adopted implementing rules interpreting section 252’s pricing standards for interconnection and UNEs (section 252(d)(1)), and for reciprocal compensation (section 252(d)(2)). In setting the pricing methodology for interconnection and UNEs, the Commission directed the states to employ a forward-looking, long-run average incremental cost methodology, known as TELRIC.⁶³¹ The TELRIC methodology assumes that the relevant increment of output is all current and reasonably projected future demand, (i.e., it is designed to calculate the total cost of building a new, efficient network).⁶³² The Commission found that TELRIC rates should also include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs, including overhead costs. Thus, TELRIC calculates the long-run average incremental cost of a network element. In setting the pricing methodology for reciprocal compensation, the Commission concluded that the statutory pricing standards for interconnection and UNEs (section 252(d)(1)), and for transport and termination of traffic (section 252(d)(2)), were “sufficiently similar” to permit the use of the same TELRIC methodology for establishing rates under both statutory provisions.⁶³³

239. Market developments since the adoption of the *Local Competition First Report and Order* demonstrate that application of the TELRIC methodology to reciprocal compensation has led to “excessively high reciprocal compensation rates.”⁶³⁴ More specifically, following the Commission’s order, certain carriers began designing business plans to take advantage of above-cost reciprocal compensation payments by becoming a net recipient of local traffic. The most prevalent example of regulatory arbitrage for reciprocal compensation is ISP-bound traffic where the Commission found evidence that “CLECs appear to have targeted customers that primarily or solely receive traffic, particularly ISPs, in order to become net recipients” of reciprocal compensation payments.⁶³⁵ As a result, the Commission has found that reciprocal compensation rates “do not simply compensate the terminating

⁶³⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(B).

⁶³¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15515, 15844–96, paras. 29, 672–732.

⁶³² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15850–57, paras. 690–703, *see also* 47 C.F.R. § 51.505.

⁶³³ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16023, para. 1054. In applying the TELRIC methodology to reciprocal compensation, the Commission found that the “additional costs” to the LEC of terminating a call that originates on another carrier’s network “primarily consists of the traffic-sensitive component of local switching.” For purposes of setting rates, the Commission concluded that “only that portion of the forward-looking, economic cost of end-office switching that is recovered on a usage-sensitive basis constitutes an ‘additional cost’ to be recovered through termination charges.” *Id.* at 16024–25, para. 1057. The Commission excluded non-traffic sensitive costs, such as the costs of local loops and line ports. *Id.* Further, the Commission concluded that termination rates established pursuant to the TELRIC methodology should include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs because, the Commission reasoned, a rate equal to incremental costs may not compensate carriers fully when common costs are present. *Id.* at 16025, para. 1058. For transport, the Commission required the calling party’s LEC to compensate the called party’s LEC for the “additional costs” associated with transporting a call subject to section 251(b)(5) from the carriers’ interconnection point to the called party’s end office and for the additional costs of terminating the call to the called party. *Id.* at 16008–58, paras. 1027–118; *see also* 47 C.F.R. §§ 51.701(c), (d).

⁶³⁴ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9185, para. 75); *see also* Letter from Norina Moy, Director, Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket No. 04-36 (filed Sept. 26, 2008) (Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 Ex Parte Letter).

⁶³⁵ *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616, para. 11.

network, but also appear to generate profits for each minute that is terminated, thus creating a potential windfall.”⁶³⁶ In short, the evidence indicates that application of the TELRIC methodology to reciprocal compensation has not led to rates that accurately reflect a carrier’s “additional costs” as the Commission initially envisioned and Congress intended. Rather, the Commission’s existing pricing standard has led to rates that not only vary significantly among states,⁶³⁷ but are generally too high, and which ultimately create regulatory arbitrage opportunities. Based on this evidence, and as detailed further below, we therefore conclude that we need to revise the current reciprocal compensation pricing methodology to align our standard more closely with the statutory text and with economic theory to eliminate, as far as possible, opportunities for regulatory arbitrage.

b. The Importance of Incremental Cost In Regulated Pricing

240. To provide a framework for our reconsideration of the proper “additional costs” methodology, we begin with a brief overview of long-standing principles for public utility pricing. As explained below, we believe the traditional economic definition of incremental cost, as applied to multiproduct firms, is most appropriate for setting intercarrier compensation rates. The Commission’s existing TELRIC standard governing reciprocal compensation deviates from this more efficient version of incremental cost, and is likely to lead to rates that significantly exceed efficient levels. We also consider evidence in the record concerning costs of switches and fiber.

241. In economic theory generally and in its application to regulation, the relationship of price and marginal cost is of fundamental importance. Marginal cost can be simply defined as the rate of change in total cost when output changes by an infinitesimal unit. In economics, the term incremental cost refers to a discrete change in total cost when output changes by any non-infinitesimal amount, which might range from a single unit to a large increment representing a firm’s entire output.⁶³⁸ The terms additional costs and avoidable costs are commonly used to refer to incremental costs resulting from an increase or a decrease in output respectively.⁶³⁹

242. In a competitive market, it is assumed that both consumers and producers independently

⁶³⁶ See, e.g., *Inter-carrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616, para. 11; see also *Inter-carrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4698 n.67 (“[R]eciprocal compensation rates often substantially exceed the per-minute incremental cost of terminating a call and therefore create a potential windfall for carriers that serve customers that primarily or exclusively receive traffic.”); *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9192, para. 87 (“[T]here may be a considerable margin between current reciprocal compensation rates and the actual costs of transport and termination.”); BellSouth *ICC NPRM Comments* at 9 (“[R]eciprocal compensation payments enabled carriers to offer services to their customers at rates that bore little relationship to actual costs and provided the recipients of reciprocal compensation an advantage over their competitors.”); Verizon *2000 Remand of ISP Declaratory Ruling Public Notice Comments* at 11–12 (noting that competitive LECs with ISP customers reap a “windfall profit” because of high reciprocal compensation rates).

⁶³⁷ See, e.g., Eastern Rural Telecom Ass’n *ICC FNPRM Comments* at 2–3 (“Depending on the assumptions used to develop a company’s TELRIC study, the results can vary significantly and be open to challenge.”).

⁶³⁸ If $C(q)$ represents the cost of producing an output q and Δq represents an increment of output, then incremental cost is equal to $C(q+\Delta q) - C(q)$. If incremental cost is used as a guide to pricing, then price should be set equal to the average incremental cost $\frac{C(q + \Delta q) - C(q)}{\Delta q}$. If there are no fixed costs and initial output $q = 0$, then

incremental cost pricing is equivalent to average cost pricing. If Δq is small, then incremental cost pricing approximates marginal cost pricing. Cf. *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15844, para. 675.

⁶³⁹ I KAHN, *THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION* at 65–66. See also *PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY RATES* at 393.

will choose outputs to purchase or to supply on the basis of a market price. In standard economic analysis, this price is determined by the intersection of a downward sloping demand function, which represents consumer valuations for additional units of consumption, and an upward sloping supply function, which represents the marginal cost of supplying an additional unit. The competitive price is efficient in the following sense. At any other price, consumer demands would no longer be equal to producer supply, and market transactions would be limited to the smaller of the two terms.⁶⁴⁰ At this level of output, consumers would value an additional unit of output more than the cost of producing it as determined by the marginal cost function. Hence both consumers and producers could be made better off by increasing output by a small amount.⁶⁴¹ When price is equal to the competitive price, no alternative price can be found such that both consumer and producers are better off.

243. *Forward-looking versus Historical Cost:* When prices are determined in a regulated market, similar reasoning applies. In this context, there is a large amount of literature on practical rules and procedures that must be considered to achieve an outcome that is as close as possible to a fully efficient one.⁶⁴² The cost of any economic resource is equal to its value in the best alternative use. The cost which a regulated firm incurs in producing a particular output is therefore equal to the value of the economic resources that are used to produce it, and which are therefore no longer available for the production of alternative goods and services. It follows that from the standpoint of economic efficiency, the only costs that are relevant in pricing decisions of a regulated firm are current or future costs, and that historical costs can be ignored.⁶⁴³ We acknowledge that economists and industry experts have often debated the relative merits of forward-looking (or reproduction) cost versus historical (or original) capital cost in administering rate-of-return regulation,⁶⁴⁴ and that regulators, including state regulators and this Commission, have continued to use historical cost in rate setting for smaller, primarily rural telephone companies. Nevertheless, since the adoption of the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission has consistently concluded that it believes that forward-looking costs are the most appropriate measure of cost.⁶⁴⁵ In this order, we reaffirm our conclusion that forward-looking costs should form the basis for regulation in a uniform intercarrier compensation regime.

244. *Short-Run versus Long-Run Incremental Cost:* Economists have also debated whether it is appropriate to use short-run or long-run incremental cost as a guide for regulatory pricing.⁶⁴⁶ Short-run incremental cost refers to the cost of an increment of demand when some inputs to production are in fixed

⁶⁴⁰ If price is greater than the competitive level, consumer demand is less than supply, and demand would determine market volume. If price is less than the competitive level, then producers voluntarily would supply no more than the amount at which marginal cost is equal to price.

⁶⁴¹ Where the market price exceeds marginal cost, there will be an associated deadweight loss in social welfare. The deadweight loss represents the loss in consumer plus producer surplus caused by a deviation from the competitive equilibrium. See, e.g., DENNIS W. CARLTON & JEFFREY M. PERLOFF, *MODERN INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION* 84 (1990); KENNETH E. TRAIN, *OPTIMAL REGULATION* 185 (1992) (*OPTIMAL REGULATION*).

⁶⁴² See, e.g., Ronald. H. Coase, *The Theory of Public Utility Pricing and Its Applications*, 1 *BELL J. ECON.* 113, 113–128 (1970) (*Theory of Public Utility Pricing*); 1 KAHN, *THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION* at 63–86.

⁶⁴³ *Theory of Public Utility Pricing*, 1 *BELL J. ECON.* at 122; Alexander C. Larson, *An Economic Guide to Competitive Standards in Telecommunications Regulation*, 1 *COMMLAW CONSPECTUS* 31, 47 n.100 (1993) (quoting *Theory of Public Utility Pricing*, 1 *BELL J. ECON.* at 121–22).

⁶⁴⁴ See, e.g., 1 KAHN, *THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION* at 109–16.

⁶⁴⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15813, 15846, paras. 620, 679.

⁶⁴⁶ See 1 KAHN, *THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION* at 70–75, 83–103; see also PHILLIPS, *THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION* at 390–91 (rev. ed. 1969); *PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY RATES* at 417–25.

supply. Long-run incremental cost refers to the cost of an increment when all inputs are variable. In order to set prices so as to maximize economic efficiency at any particular point in time, it is clear that short-run incremental cost is the appropriate concept.⁶⁴⁷ For example, if an airline carrier has empty seats for a particular scheduled flight, then it would make sense to sell capacity for those seats at any price that would recover the small additional costs of fuel and amenities for an additional passenger. Pricing based on short-run incremental cost, however, necessarily implies that prices can be adjusted freely and perhaps continuously during the day.⁶⁴⁸ Moreover, in a regulatory context, such flexibility is likely infeasible.

245. Short- or intermediate-run costs might also be advocated on practical grounds, since some productive inputs (e.g., poles and conduits) can have extremely long lives. Nevertheless, regulators have traditionally relied on long-run incremental costs rather than short-run incremental costs in setting regulated prices. First, setting prices on the basis of short-run incremental cost may mean that a carrier would not recover its average total cost of investment over the life of the asset.⁶⁴⁹ Second, to the extent that forward-looking costs are used, long-run incremental costs are more naturally and easily accommodated, since a forward looking cost study can legitimately assume that all inputs are variable. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission, in adopting its TELRIC methodology, explained that “[t]his ‘long run’ approach ensures that rates recover not only the operating costs that vary in the short run, but also the fixed investment costs that, while not variable in the short term, are necessary inputs directly attributable to providing the element.”⁶⁵⁰ We reaffirm here the Commission’s decision in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* that long-run incremental cost rather than short-run incremental cost is the appropriate cost concept.⁶⁵¹

246. *Peak Load Pricing*: Closely related to the question of short-run versus long-run costing is the issue of peak load pricing. When demand varies systematically by time of day, day of the week, or over longer periods, there may be periods of time when there is significant excess capacity, since productive inputs clearly cannot vary with such frequency. In such cases, economic efficiency might require that prices should vary by time or day or over longer periods even in the long run.⁶⁵² For example, many wireless telephone carriers offer free minutes of usage during weekends or evenings. Although these arguments are indisputable, it has proven difficult in practice to incorporate peak load pricing principles into regulated rate proceedings.⁶⁵³ Accordingly, we conclude, as the Commission did in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, that we should not require peak-load pricing as part of an intercarrier compensation regime, although we affirm that carriers should be free to voluntarily negotiate agreements including peak pricing principles.

247. *Common Costs*: Telecommunications carriers are multiproduct firms which provide a large array of services to different groups of consumers. Within the category of traditional telephony, these services include call origination, call termination, local transport, and either access to long distance transport or long distance service through an affiliated carrier. As networks evolve, the number of

⁶⁴⁷ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 71; DANIEL F. SPULBER, REGULATION AND MARKETS 234 (1989) (REGULATION AND MARKETS).

⁶⁴⁸ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 84.

⁶⁴⁹ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 88.

⁶⁵⁰ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15851, para. 692.

⁶⁵¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16023, para. 1054.

⁶⁵² 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 89.

⁶⁵³ See *Local Competition First Report and Order* at 15878, paras. 755–57. See also 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 91–93.

services that a telecommunications network can provide is rapidly expanding to include Internet access and other data services and, in some cases, video distribution. Many of these services share common facilities.⁶⁵⁴ For example, a copper loop can be used to provide analog voice service as well as data service using DSL technology. The cost of the loop is therefore common to both voice and DSL services. The incremental cost of voice service, assuming that DSL is already provided, therefore does not include any of the long run incremental cost of the loop itself. Similarly, the incremental cost of DSL, assuming voice is already provided, includes only that portion of the loop cost that may be required to condition the loop to meet the higher quality standards that may be required for data transmission.

248. *Methodology for Computing Incremental Cost in Multiproduct Firms:* Common cost and its relationship to incremental cost in multiproduct firms can be more precisely defined as follows using an analysis developed by Faulhaber, Baumol, and others.⁶⁵⁵ Under this approach, one imagines a multiproduct firm in which a forward looking cost function is known, which allows one to compute the “stand alone cost” of any possible subset of products. For example, if the set of products is indexed by the set $N = \{1, \dots, n\}$, then the stand alone cost of the entire firm can be represented by the value $C(N)$. The incremental cost of any individual product j contained in N can then be represented by the value $IC(j) = C(N) - C(N - j)$, where $C(N - j)$ represents the stand alone cost of producing every product in the set N except product j . Under this definition, the incremental cost may be viewed as the *additional costs* of adding product j to a firm currently producing products $(N - j)$. Alternatively, it may be viewed as the cost that may be *avoided* if the firm, currently producing products 1 through n , decides not to produce product j . The common cost for the firm as a whole is then equal to $C(N) - \sum_{j \in N} IC(j)$. When there is

significant sharing of facilities used in providing groups of services to customers, common costs are typically positive, and may be a significant portion of the firm’s total cost.

249. *Multiproduct Incremental Cost versus TELRIC:* In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission adopted a pricing methodology, which it called Total Element Long Run Incremental Cost or TELRIC. Under the TELRIC methodology, prices for UNEs and interconnection would be determined by estimating the forward-looking cost of individual network elements, which the Commission defined as “physical facilities of the network, together with the features, functions, and capabilities associated with those facilities.”⁶⁵⁶ In adopting the TELRIC methodology, the Commission determined that forward-looking costs should be “based on the least cost, most efficient network . . . technology,” assuming current wire center locations.⁶⁵⁷ It further determined that the relevant increment should “be the entire quantity of the network element provided.”⁶⁵⁸ The Commission concluded that “forward-looking common costs shall be allocated among elements and services in a reasonable manner

⁶⁵⁴ Cf. *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15845, para. 676 (“The term ‘common costs’ refers to costs that are incurred in connection with the production of multiple products or services, and remains unchanged as the relative proportion of those products or services varies (e.g., the salaries of corporate managers).”).

⁶⁵⁵ See, e.g., Gerald R. Faulhaber, *Cross-Subsidization: Pricing in Public Enterprises*, 65 AM. ECON. REV. 966, 966–77 (1975). Faulhaber’s objective in the paper was to define a test for cross subsidy, which could precisely define the maximum and minimum prices that a regulated firm should be allowed to charge to any subset of customers; WILLIAM J. BAUMOL ET AL., *CONTESTABLE MARKETS AND THE THEORY OF INDUSTRY STRUCTURE* 351–56 (1982); William J. Baumol, *Minimum and Maximum Pricing Principles for Residual Regulation*, in *Current Issues in PUBLIC UTILITY ECONOMICS* (A. Danielson & D. Kamerschen eds., 1983).

⁶⁵⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15631, para. 258.

⁶⁵⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15848–49, paras. 683–85.

⁶⁵⁸ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15850, para. 690.

... ”⁶⁵⁹ In choosing to estimate the forward-looking cost of the entire network element, the Commission acknowledged that, when a requesting carrier leased access to that element, it would have exclusive control over that element.⁶⁶⁰

250. With respect to reciprocal compensation, the Commission determined that “the ‘additional cost’ of terminating a call . . . primarily consists of the traffic-sensitive component of local switching.”⁶⁶¹ Nevertheless, the only non traffic-sensitive cost of the local switch that the Commission required states to exclude was the cost of line ports.⁶⁶² Similarly, in the rules that the Commission adopted regarding “shared transmission facilities between tandem switches and end offices,” the Commission allowed the full forward-looking cost of those facilities to be recovered through usage sensitive charges.⁶⁶³ Thus, with the exception of requiring recovery of the cost of line ports through flat-rated charges, the Commission’s TELRIC rules permitted the full forward-looking cost of the local switch, tandem switch, and shared interoffice transmission facilities, including a reasonable allocation of common costs, to be recovered through usage-based charges. In effect, the Commission’s TELRIC methodology permitted average-cost pricing using a forward-looking cost methodology.

251. The TELRIC methodology thus differs significantly from the definition of incremental cost for multiproduct firms proposed by Faulhaber and others. First, unlike TELRIC, the traditional economic approach for determining the incremental cost of a single service excludes all common costs. Second, although the TELRIC methodology is essentially an average cost methodology, the traditional economic approach focuses on identifying the additional forward-looking cost that a network would incur if it provided an additional service—in this case call termination. Under the traditional economic definition, the incremental cost of call termination would be determined by estimating the stand alone cost of a network which incorporates all existing services except call termination (including call origination, switching, etc.) and then subtracting this amount from a comparable estimate of the total cost of providing all the same existing services, including call termination. As should be obvious, the incremental cost of call termination under the traditional economic definition should be significantly lower than that calculated under a TELRIC methodology.

252. *The Relevance of Multi-part Pricing:* One common criticism of incremental cost pricing is that it may not permit a firm to recover its total costs, particularly if there are significant common costs.⁶⁶⁴ Economists have pointed out, however, that multi-part pricing regimes can potentially lead to more efficient outcomes than uniform prices set equal to either marginal cost or average cost.⁶⁶⁵ For example, if the firm is able to charge a fixed monthly fee and a variable usage charge, then it is possible for the firm to set the usage charge at or close to marginal cost and recover any residual costs through the fixed charge. In this case, the regulator must take account of both subscription and usage elasticities in order to minimize the possibility that higher fixed fees will cause some subscribers to drop off the

⁶⁵⁹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15852–53, para. 696.

⁶⁶⁰ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15693, para. 385.

⁶⁶¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057.

⁶⁶² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057. *Cf.* 47 U.S.C. § 51.509(b) (requiring only that line port costs of the unbundled local switching element be recovered through a flat-rated charge).

⁶⁶³ 47 U.S.C. § 51.509(d).

⁶⁶⁴ *See, e.g.*, REGULATION AND MARKETS at 122–23.

⁶⁶⁵ *See, e.g.*, *Theory of Public Utility Pricing*, 1 BELL J. ECON. at 117–20; OPTIMAL REGULATION at 191–213.

network.⁶⁶⁶ We note that, in the access charge regime, the Commission recognized the efficiencies associated with multi-part pricing, even if it failed to reduce usage-based charges to marginal or incremental cost.

c. The Incremental Cost of Call Termination on Modern Networks

253. We now consider the evidence in the record concerning the incremental cost of terminating calls on modern telecommunications networks. We note at the outset that there appear to be no cost studies or analyses in the record that attempt to estimate the termination costs using Faulhaber's definition of incremental cost. Thus, we would expect the cost estimates in the record to be significantly lower if they had been calculated using Faulhaber's definition.

254. We consider first evidence concerning the cost of termination on modern circuit switches. We note that, in 1996, when the Commission adopted the TELRIC methodology, circuit switches and fiber optic transmission facilities were generally considered the "least-cost, most efficient" currently available technology. And it appears that state commissions in interconnection arbitrations analyzed the forward-looking costs of circuit switches and fiber optic transmission facilities in developing TELRIC rates. Sprint Nextel filed an *ex parte* in which it analyzed state UNE rates for unbundled switching and common transport.⁶⁶⁷ Sprint Nextel reports that the national weighted average price per minute for unbundled local switching was \$0.00058 (with individual rates ranging from a low of \$0.00004 to a high of \$0.0061). Similarly the national weighted average price per minute for common transport was \$0.00057 (with individual rates ranging from a low of \$0.00010 to a high of \$0.00727). Sprint Nextel further observes that "the rates for companies in the survey with a relatively small number of lines were often lower than the rates for companies with a large number of lines, indicating scale and scope economies do not significantly affect the cost of traffic termination."⁶⁶⁸ As Sprint Nextel notes, these rates are all based on the TELRIC methodology and thus represent estimates of average, traffic-sensitive forwarding-looking costs, plus an allocation of common cost and overheads.⁶⁶⁹ These estimates, by definition, will significantly exceed incremental cost estimates using the Faulhaber definition; therefore they provide an upper bound on the rates that may result under a Faulhaber approach to incremental cost.

255. Some additional evidence concerning the incremental cost of terminating calls on modern circuit switches can be gleaned from a declaration filed by three economists in support of the Intercarrier Compensation Forum (ICF) plan.⁶⁷⁰ The economists contend that modern circuit switches are to a large

⁶⁶⁶ Demand for subscription is generally estimated to be significantly less elastic than demand for usage. See Mercatus Center Sept. 22, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3 n.15; Jerry Hausman & Howard Shelanski, *Economic Welfare and Telecommunications Regulation: The E-Rate Policy for Universal-Service Subsidies*, 16 YALE J. ON REG. 19, 39 (1999) (estimating elasticity of demand for subscription to be -.005, whereas elasticity of demand for long-distance service is closer to -0.7); *Effects of Breakup of AT&T*, 83 AM. ECON. REV. at 182 (estimating elasticity of demand for basic access at -0.005 and elasticity of demand for long-distances service between -0.25 and -1.2).

⁶⁶⁷ See Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter. The data used in the analysis were obtained from the March 2006 "Survey of Unbundled Network Element Prices in the United States."

⁶⁶⁸ Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3-4.

⁶⁶⁹ We note that NuVox disputes some of Sprint Nextel's assumptions. See, e.g., Letter from Brad Mutschelknaus & John J. Heitmann, Counsel to NuVox, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 and WC Docket No. 04-36 (filed Oct. 27, 2008) (NuVox Oct. 27 *Ex Parte* Letter). There is insufficient information in the two *ex parte* submissions for us to resolve this dispute. Carriers remain free to raise issues for consideration in the course of state proceedings.

⁶⁷⁰ Richard N. Clarke et al., *Economic Benefits from Reform of Intercarrier Compensation (ICF Economists)*, attached to ICF ICC FNPRM Reply, Errata, App. A.

extent non-traffic sensitive.⁶⁷¹ According to the authors, whereas earlier generations of switching technologies had large shared resources that could be commandeered by any line needing to place or receive a telephone call, most of the resources in a digital switch are dedicated to individual lines through line ports and trunk ports.⁶⁷² In addition, according to the authors, because of the “massive increases in computing power offered by modern microchips,” modern circuit switches include “call processing capacity . . . [that] is adequate to serve all reasonably offered demand.”⁶⁷³ In other words, modern switches are designed to be non-blocking, which would suggest that the incremental cost of termination is zero. The declaration thus concludes that the incremental cost of call termination on modern circuit switches should be de minimis.

256. The economists’ declaration further argues that the incremental costs of adding additional fiber optic transmission capacity similarly are low. They contend that fiber optic technologies have large fixed costs associated with supporting structures (poles, trenches and conduits) and relatively low incremental costs of increasing the capacity of each fiber cable by installing improved laser transmission equipment (which in many cases is based on technological advances made subsequent to the initial fiber deployment). For these reasons, they conclude that “once a fiber cable has been laid on a route, the costs of increasing its transmission capacity are relatively small, so extra minutes of demand result in very little incremental costs. We note that this analysis suggests, at a minimum, that the incremental cost of adding capacity is significantly less—and likely orders of magnitude less—than the forward looking average cost of capacity, as estimated under TELRIC.

257. AT&T submitted evidence that attempts to estimate the incremental cost of a modern softswitch.⁶⁷⁴ AT&T maintains that, to estimate the incremental cost of a softswitch, it is necessary to estimate two parameters: the total investment associated with a softswitch, and the percentage of this investment that is traffic-sensitive.⁶⁷⁵ Using what it claims are “conservative” estimates, AT&T first compares the estimated investment cost per line of a Class 5 circuit switch with the estimated investment cost per line of a modern softswitch and finds that the investment cost per-line of a softswitch is significantly lower.⁶⁷⁶ Although it estimates that the investment cost of a Class 5 switch is approximately \$100 per line, it finds that the likely investment cost of a softswitch is between \$34 and \$80 per line.⁶⁷⁷ AT&T then considers the likely percentage of the investment costs per line that are traffic-sensitive, and concludes that, depending on the particular softswitch, the traffic-sensitive costs are likely to be between zero and 20 percent of the total investment cost of the switch.⁶⁷⁸ Using the higher estimate of 20 percent traffic-sensitive costs, and assuming that each line carries an average of 1400 minutes a month, AT&T derives a traffic sensitive incremental cost per minute of between \$0.00010 and \$0.00024.⁶⁷⁹ For the

⁶⁷¹ *ICF Economists* at 22.

⁶⁷² *ICF Economists* at 20–21.

⁶⁷³ *ICF Economists* at 21.

⁶⁷⁴ Letter from Henry Hultquist, Vice President-Regulatory Affairs, AT&T Services, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 05-337, 96-45, 99-68, 07-135 (filed Oct. 4, 2008) (AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁶⁷⁵ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁶⁷⁶ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3.

⁶⁷⁷ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2–3.

⁶⁷⁸ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4.

⁶⁷⁹ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4.

other softswitch that AT&T considers, however, the traffic-sensitive incremental costs of termination would be zero. Although we do not necessarily accept the precise estimates contained in AT&T's *ex parte* letter, we note that its analysis suggests that the incremental traffic-sensitive costs of modern softswitches are likely to be significantly lower than those of circuit switches and possibly zero, both because the investment cost per line is lower and because the percentage of traffic-sensitive costs to total costs is lower for modern softswitches.

258. Windstream Communications, Inc. and NuVox subsequently filed *ex parte* letters criticizing AT&T's analysis of the traffic sensitive costs of a softswitch,⁶⁸⁰ and AT&T filed a response.⁶⁸¹ Essentially, both Windstream and NuVox criticize specific elements of AT&T's analysis. In addition, Windstream argues that it would be grossly inefficient for a rural carrier to immediately replace circuit switching equipment with softswitch technology, while NuVox contends that even a forward-looking network design would not consist entirely of soft switches. Significantly, NuVox criticizes AT&T for failing to apply the TELRIC methodology, and NuVox recalculates AT&T's estimates using TELRIC. Because we expressly reject use of the TELRIC methodology for purposes of setting reciprocal compensation rates, we conclude that many of the NuVox challenges are moot. To the extent that NuVox and Windstream are challenging cost assumptions that may be applied by states pursuant to our new additional costs methodology, such issues may be raised for consideration by the state commission during the cost proceeding to establish the uniform reciprocal compensation rate. We feel compelled, however, to point out a few of the most critical mistakes and misconceptions contained in the Windstream and NuVox *ex parte* letters.

259. First, Windstream argues that it is somehow inappropriate to consider the additional costs of softswitches in setting termination rates because it would be economically infeasible for an incumbent LEC to replace all its existing circuit switches with softswitches.⁶⁸² This argument fundamentally misconstrues the purpose of a forward-looking cost methodology. The adoption of a forward-looking cost standard does not imply in any way that existing carriers should replace fully functional plant and equipment simply because a more recent vintage of replacement equipment is available. Forward-looking costs are simply a measure of the economic value of future investments, and in a competitive marketplace, these values should determine the appropriate investment decisions regarding replacement of existing plant. More importantly, these values should be used as an appropriate guide in setting efficient prices for the utilization of existing plant and equipment. Second, although both Windstream and NuVox raise objections to AT&T's cost analysis, neither they nor AT&T actually attempt to estimate the incremental cost of call termination. For example, both Windstream and NuVox argue that AT&T's estimates of the cost of investment in forward-looking softswitch technologies are flawed because of the assumptions made about the number of lines served per switch.⁶⁸³ Although this is may be a valid issue, as it relates to the extent to which softswitch technologies are scalable for deployment in wire centers with different numbers of final customers, the dispute does not really address the issue of the incremental

⁶⁸⁰ Letter from Eric N. Einhorn, Vice President, Federal Government Affairs, Windstream Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122, 07-135, 08-152 (filed Oct. 27, 2008) (Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from John J. Heitmann, Counsel for NuVox, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁶⁸¹ See Letter from Henry Hultquist, Vice President Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135 (Oct. 28, 2008) (AT&T's response appears specific to the NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁶⁸² See Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁶⁸³ See Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2-3; NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 8-9.

cost of call termination. Third, NuVox claims that the absence of line cards in softswitches is evidence that all switch costs are traffic sensitive.⁶⁸⁴ This analysis ignores the potentially large fixed costs associated with a softswitch that are not related to line ports. Since softswitches resemble small computers, the appropriate analogy for estimating incremental cost would be the cost of additional memory cards, which could be inserted into the CPU. Fourth, NuVox maintains that both common costs to the firm as a whole and land and building costs associated with switching equipment should be included in any traffic sensitive cost computed for purposes of reciprocal compensation.⁶⁸⁵ As explained above, we conclude that common costs should no longer be included in calculating the incremental cost of call termination.

260. Another approach to estimating the incremental cost of call termination is to examine the technology of next generation networks in which voice calls are carried on the same network platform as data and video services delivered to the same customer. Telecommunications carriers are currently deploying such networks at a rapid pace, although the transition to the new technology is far from complete. Nevertheless, most experts believe that IP technologies will be used to deliver the predominant share of voice and data traffic within a few years. Packet technologies, and the resulting commingling of voice and data traffic, make possible a dramatic reduction in the cost of originating and terminating voice traffic in the network. In addition, although the costs of circuit based switching technologies are difficult to quantify using public data sources, the Internet itself provides a variety of sources which can be used to provide at least a rough estimate of the costs associated with a next generation network.

261. Consider the case of a single customer who subscribes to a next generation network offering a full range of voice, video and data services. Suppose that this customer makes exactly one voice call lasting five minutes during each hour of the busy period (which we will unrealistically assume to last for 16 hours every day of the month). High quality (ISDN level) voice service requires a channel capacity of 64 kbps. Ignoring the possibility of signal compression, and making a conservative allowance for packet header overhead,⁶⁸⁶ we assume that the single call per hour requires a network capacity of 100 kbps. This capacity requirement translates to 12,800 bytes per second, or 0.0000128 Gigabytes to be available for the duration of the call.⁶⁸⁷ Publicly available estimates of the cost of serving residential customers on a broadband network range from \$0.1 Gigabytes per month to \$0.5 Gigabytes per month.⁶⁸⁸ These estimates include the cost of the servers, routers and fiber links necessary to provide service to the residential customer, but do not include the substantial cost of the local broadband loop.⁶⁸⁹ The

⁶⁸⁴ See NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 14–15.

⁶⁸⁵ See NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 18 & n.40.

⁶⁸⁶ See, e.g., VoIP-Info.org, Bandwidth Consumption, <http://www.voip-info.org/wiki-Bandwidth+consumption> (last visited Oct. 25, 2008); Westbay, Voice over IP Bandwidth, <http://www.erlang.com/bandwidth.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (investigating bandwidth requirements for the transmission of voice over an IP based network).

⁶⁸⁷ In this analysis, we ignore the additional economies that can result because multiple packet streams for voice traffic can be transmitted simultaneously over the same channel capacity.

⁶⁸⁸ The lower estimate is contained in the Wikipedia entry “Broadband Internet Access,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadband_Internet_access (last visited Oct. 11, 2008). The higher estimate is contained in the trade publication Telephony Online, “OFC: BellSouth Chief Architect warns of HD VOD costs,” March 7, 2006, http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/news/BellSouth_VOD_costs_030706 (last visited Oct. 11, 2008). Both estimates are also reported in David Clark, A Simple Cost Model for Broadband Access: What Will Video Cost?, Presentation at the Telecommunications Policy Research Conference (Sept. 28, 2008), available at <http://tprcweb.com/files/Cost%20analysis%20TPRC.pdf>.

⁶⁸⁹ The cost of the local loop is clearly a common cost that is shared by all of the voice, video, and data services consumed by the subscriber and should not be included under any reasonable definition of incremental cost.

hypothetical consumer described above places a demand of 0.000512 Gigabytes per month, and using the upper limit on the estimated cost, we estimate a monthly incremental cost to the consumer of delivering this level of voice service at 0.0256 cents per month.⁶⁹⁰ Under these conservative assumptions the cost, on a per-minute basis, would be 0.00001 cents per minute.⁶⁹¹ Even if the cost estimates used above are wrong by several orders of magnitude, it is clear that the cost of voice traffic on a broadband network is vanishingly small.⁶⁹² Although we are not directing the states to consider the incremental cost of terminating voice telecommunications on such next generation networks,⁶⁹³ we find that, as carriers move to an all IP broadband world, the incremental costs of terminating voice calls should drop dramatically.

d. Reconsideration of Additional Costs Standard

262. We adopt a new “additional costs” methodology using the traditional economic definition of the incremental cost of a service produced by a multiproduct firm, rather than continuing to rely on the TELRIC methodology.⁶⁹⁴ The Supreme Court has made clear that an “initial agency interpretation is not instantly carved in stone. On the contrary, the agency ... must consider varying interpretations and the wisdom of its policy on a continuing basis,” for example in response to changed factual circumstance, or a change in administrations.”⁶⁹⁵ Consistent with this, the Commission, in its 2005 *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, solicited comment on whether the Commission should reinterpret “additional costs” to mean “incremental cost” in light of the need to reform intercarrier compensation due to market distortions.⁶⁹⁶ In response, several commenters supported such a proposal noting that the additional incremental cost of terminating traffic is de minimis.⁶⁹⁷ Based on the evidence highlighted above and for

⁶⁹⁰ Broadband Internet service is typically priced on the basis of capacity—either the maximum instantaneous upload and download speed or, as in this example, total monthly traffic. A rigorous application of true incremental cost pricing would require measuring each customer’s contribution to system costs, which primarily consists of the delays or packet losses imposed on other users. For this purpose, minutes of use are largely irrelevant.

⁶⁹¹ These estimated costs do not include the costs of billing, advertising, or other customer care expenses. As with the case of the local loop, we believe that such costs should not be included in any measure of long run incremental cost of call termination.

⁶⁹² It is very unlikely that the cost estimates are significantly low. Telecommunications carriers continue to upgrade their networks to provide precisely the range of video and data services that the articles in a previous footnote were concerned with. Indeed, the BellSouth estimate was given with concern that such services would not be viable unless that estimate of cost could be reduced in the near future. Very similar arguments were made exactly 20 years ago in ROBERT M. PEPPER, THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: INTEGRATED BROADBAND NETWORKS, REGULATORY POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE (FCC, OPP Working Paper No. 24, Nov. 1988), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OPP/working_papers/oppwp24.pdf.

⁶⁹³ See *infra* section V.C.1.

⁶⁹⁴ We find it preferable to shift entirely to an approach based on the traditional economic definition of incremental cost, rather than trying to achieve the same result through extensive revisions to the TELRIC methodology as some commenters suggest. See, e.g., Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 50–54 (calling for a more precise definition of TELRIC for purposes of reciprocal compensation).

⁶⁹⁵ *Brand X*, 545 U.S. at 981 (quoting *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Nat’l Res. Def. Council (Chevron)*, 467 U.S. 837, 863–64 (1984) and citing *Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Ass’n of United States, Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Automobile Ins. Co. (State Farm)*, 463 U.S. 29, 59 (1983) (Rehnquist, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)).

⁶⁹⁶ *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Red at 4719, para. 71.

⁶⁹⁷ See, e.g., CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 16 (“Because a call does not impose significant incremental costs on either the calling party’s or called party’s network, there is no justification for allowing the terminating network to impose any charge on the non-terminating network.”); Frontier *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7 (“However, there is virtually NO additional incremental cost of sending a minute-of-use across [dedicated hardware interfaces].”);

(continued....)

the reasons set forth below, we revise our interpretation of the “additional costs” language in section 252(d)(2) to mean “incremental costs” as traditionally defined. We believe that this conclusion is supported by the economic theory discussed above, and represents a more appropriate interpretation of the “additional costs” standard than the TELRIC methodology.⁶⁹⁸

263. As an initial matter, the Commission plainly has the authority to revise its interpretation of “additional costs.”⁶⁹⁹ Indeed, the Supreme Court has recognized that the phrase “additional costs” is ambiguous.⁷⁰⁰ Words like additional cost “give ratesetting commissions broad methodological leeway,”⁷⁰¹ and courts owe “substantial deference to the interpretation the Commission accords them.”⁷⁰² The Commission, consistent with its obligation to “consider varying interpretations and the wisdom of its policy on a continuing basis” now revises its definition of “additional costs.”⁷⁰³

264. Revising our interpretation of “additional costs” to follow the traditional economic definition of the incremental cost of a service is supported by the Commission’s interpretation of the term “additional costs” in section 224 of the Act. Section 224, which addresses the pricing of pole attachments, is the only other place in the Act that uses the term “additional costs.” The Commission consistently has found that the term “additional costs” in section 224 means incremental cost,⁷⁰⁴ and that the legislative history for section 224 makes clear that Congress intended such a result.⁷⁰⁵ Interpreting the term “additional costs” as used in two parts of the Act in the same manner is consistent with the

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Western Wireless *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 16 (“Independent Wireless Carriers urge the Commission to confine its analysis of ‘additional cost’ only to the incremental traffic-sensitive switching and transport costs actually incurred by the parties exchanging traffic for purposes of intercarrier compensation.”).

⁶⁹⁸ We reaffirm that the TELRIC methodology is appropriate for setting interconnection and network element rates pursuant to section 252(d)(1), where Congress directed the Commission to consider a “reasonable profit.”

⁶⁹⁹ The Supreme Court affirmed the Commission’s authority to apply a cost methodology for the states to implement. *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378. *See also id.* at 378 n.6 (“[T]he question in these cases is not whether the Federal Government has taken the regulation of local telecommunications competition away from the States. With regard to the matters addressed by the 1996 Act, it unquestionably has.”); 47 U.S.C. § 201(b); *United Telegraph Workers, AFL-CIO v. FCC*, 436 F.2d 920, 923 (D.C. Cir. 1970) (citations and quotations omitted) (finding that section 201(b) authorizes the Commission to “prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act”).

⁷⁰⁰ *See Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 499–501 (“[W]ithout any better indication of meaning than the unadorned term, the word ‘cost’ in section 252(d)(1), as in accounting generally, is ‘a chameleon,’ a ‘virtually meaningless’ term”) (citations omitted).

⁷⁰¹ *See Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 499–501 (quoting *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 423 (Breyer, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)).

⁷⁰² *Capital Network System, Inc. v. FCC*, 28 F.3d 201, 204 (D.C. Cir. 1994).

⁷⁰³ *Brand X*, 545 U.S. at 981 (quoting *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 863–64 and citing *State Farm*, 463 U.S. at 59 (Rehnquist, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)).

⁷⁰⁴ *See, e.g., Adoption Of Rules For The Regulation Of Cable Television Pole Attachments*, CC Docket No. 78-144, Memorandum and Opinion and Second Report and Order, 72 FCC 2d 59, 62, para. 8 (1979); *Adoption Of Rules For The Regulation Of Cable Television Pole Attachments*, CC Docket No. 78-144, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 68 FCC 2d 3, 15, App. (1978) (*Cable Television Pole Attachment NPRM*).

⁷⁰⁵ *Cable Television Pole Attachment NPRM*, CC Docket No. 78-144, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 68 FCC 2d at 15, App. (“‘Additional costs’ are generally equivalent to what is referred to as incremental cost, and the proportional part of ‘Operating expenses and actual capital costs’ are generally equivalent to fully allocated costs.” (quoting S. Rep. No. 95-580 at 19–21 (1977))).

“presumption that identical words used in different parts of the same act are intended to have the same meaning.”⁷⁰⁶

265. In contrast, the statutory pricing standard for reciprocal compensation (“additional costs”) is not the same as the statutory pricing standard for UNEs (“cost” plus “a reasonable profit”).⁷⁰⁷ Even though the two statutory provisions may, as the Commission found previously, be “similar,” our subsequent experience indicates that TELRIC is not consistent with the “additional costs” standard. First, as discussed above, evidence indicates that reciprocal compensation rates based on TELRIC methodology were “excessive.”⁷⁰⁸ If reciprocal compensation rates truly reflected the incremental “additional costs,” regulatory arbitrage should not occur because a carrier would not make a profit by recovering its incremental cost.⁷⁰⁹

266. Second, TELRIC includes the cost of the “total element” and, as a result, measures the long run incremental average cost of the switch including common costs and overhead, not just the additional costs of using the function to terminate another carrier’s traffic. In other words, TELRIC measures the *average* cost of providing a function, which is not necessarily the same as the *additional* costs of providing that function. Because of this, we expect that the TELRIC methodology would continue to produce reciprocal compensation rates above the true “additional costs” of terminating such traffic, in light of evidence that the cost of terminating traffic today is low⁷¹⁰ and is decreasing even further as carriers transition to softswitches⁷¹¹ and ultimately pure packet switches. Consistent with our change in methodology, we also disavow our finding in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* that “only that portion of the forward-looking, economic cost of end-office switching that is recovered on

⁷⁰⁶ See, e.g., *Atlantic Cleaners & Dyers, Inc. v. United States*, 286 U.S. 427, 433 (1932).

⁷⁰⁷ Compare 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(1) with 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2).

⁷⁰⁸ See, e.g., *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4694, 4697–98, 4717, 4719, paras. 16, 23–24, 66, 71–72; *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616–18, paras. 11–18; *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9161–62, paras. 18–20.

⁷⁰⁹ For the same reasons, we reject suggestions that TELRIC should be used to set a unified rate for intercarrier compensation. See, e.g., Ohio PUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 20 (“[T]he Ohio Commission recommends the use of the TELRIC standard for setting intercarrier compensation rates.”); Pac West et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 9 (“The ‘additional cost’ standard should continue to be tied to TELRIC”); Time Warner Telecom et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 1–2 (“[A] central component of reform must be the requirement that, to the extent possible, each carrier charge a single, cost-based rate for the exchange of all types of traffic. . . . [T]he Commission arguably has the authority to mandate that states use a cost-based methodology, in particular TELRIC, as the basis for setting all intercarrier termination rates.”); Integra *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 3 (“Integra urges the Commission to . . . [u]nify access and reciprocal compensation rates at TELRIC based levels on a company-by-company basis.”); KMC and Xspedius *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 3 (“[T]he Commission should support tariffed-based intercarrier compensation arrangements that: (i) set rates no higher than the comparable TELRIC (or similar cost-based) rates.”); XO *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 11 (“[T]he only appropriate intercarrier compensation regime must include TELRIC-based rates.”).

⁷¹⁰ The national average of TELRIC rates for transport and termination of calls was \$0.00212 in 2004, which likely overstates the actual incremental costs because, as noted above, TELRIC includes common and overhead costs and examines the average cost of the function, not the additional cost of terminating traffic. Letter from Richard M. Rindler, Counsel for the Cost-Based Intercarrier Compensation Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3 (filed Sept. 2, 2004) (CBICC Sept. 9 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

⁷¹¹ See T-Mobile *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 29–30.

a usage-sensitive basis constitutes an “additional costs” to be recovered through termination charges.”⁷¹² In particular, as explained above, we specifically exclude common costs and overhead allocations from the calculation of what constitutes “additional costs” under our new pricing methodology.

267. We thus end our reliance on the TELRIC methodology for setting reciprocal compensation rates, and instead require that such rates be set pursuant to our new incremental cost methodology.⁷¹³ In our Implementation section below, we provide specific guidance to the states regarding how to apply this new methodology. We note that this Commission takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that rates for carriers are just, reasonable, and not confiscatory. In this order, we have set in motion mechanisms to help ensure that the financial viability of carriers will not be undermined. We feel confident that these mechanisms, in combination with the other avenues available for carriers to offset declines in access revenues, will be sufficient to achieve this result.⁷¹⁴

⁷¹² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057.

⁷¹³ A number of parties advocate for or against Commission adoption of bill-and-keep for intercarrier compensation. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Jonathan Askin, Counsel for FeatureGroup IP, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3–4 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Letter from Paul W. Garnett, Assistant Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); *Corr ICC FNPRM Comments* at 8; *Cox ICC FNPRM Comments* at 8–9; *ICF ICC FNPRM Comments* at 26, 30; *Western Wireless et al. ICC FNPRM Comments* at 6–8. *But see, e.g.*, Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel for PAETEC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 10 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (“Mandatory Bill-and-Keep Is Not A Viable or Fair Solution”); Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus and Genevieve Morelli, Counsel for Cavalier Telephone et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (“[T]he adoption of mandatory bill-and-keep arrangements is extremely ill advised as a policy matter.”); *BellSouth ICC FNPRM Comments* at 9 (“[A] plan to transition rates ultimately to bill-and-keep would not promote economic efficiency or preserve universal service, nor is bill-and-keep competitively neutral.”); *CCG Consulting Inc. (CCG) ICC FNPRM Comments* at 7 (“[A]ccess rates should not be reduced to zero through implementation of a Bill and Keep mechanism.”); *CenturyTel ICC FNPRM Comments* at 4 (“. . . CenturyTel unequivocally opposes replacing intercarrier compensation with a “bill and keep” regime.”); *CCAP ICC FNPRM Comments* at 11 (“The CCAP urges the Commission to avoid implementation of a bill and keep regime”); *Frontier ICC FNPRM Comments* at 6 (arguing that bill and keep is inappropriate because it does not account for asymmetric traffic patterns); *SBA ICC FNPRM Comments* at 7 (arguing that bill-and-keep is inappropriate between rural and larger LECs due to various asymmetries). We believe the reforms we adopt here are preferable to a pure bill-and-keep requirement and more appropriately balance the interests of consumers and carriers at this time. The approach we adopt in this order avoids the need to resolve disputes in the record regarding bill-and-keep in various circumstances because it allows parties to advocate for such an approach before state commissions and parties may negotiate such arrangements.

⁷¹⁴ Some carriers have suggested that our changes in ratemaking methodology will necessarily produce confiscatory rates and constitute a taking. *See, e.g.*, NTCA, Interim Universal Service & Intercarrier Compensation Reform Proposal (NTCA Interim Proposal) at 19–22, *attached to* Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President, Legal & Industry, NTCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 (filed Oct. 6, 2008) (NTCA Oct. 6, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (contending that the Commission’s current access regime, not to mention any reductions in access rates, threatens rate-of-return carriers with unconstitutional takings). *See also* Cincinnati Bell *ICC FNPRM* 11–12 (“The elimination of interstate switched access charges without an opportunity to earn the revenue in another fashion could be confiscatory”); *GVNW Consulting ICC FNPRM Comments* at 9 (“The existing system of cost recovery consisting of three equally important components of access charges, universal service support, and local rates is the only approach available to the Commission that will enable it to avoid valid claims of confiscation.”). This argument lacks merit. Faced with a similar challenge to the TELRIC methodology previously adopted by the Commission, the Supreme Court stated unequivocally that “this Court has never considered a taking challenge on a ratesetting methodology without being presented with specific rate orders alleged to be confiscatory” *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 524 (citations omitted).

268. Moreover our decision to adopt a unified intercarrier compensation methodology is in no way arbitrary or adopted with any confiscatory purpose. In fact, the determinations made in this order reveal just the contrary, our decision to raise the cap on SLCs, our referral to the Federal-State Joint Board on Separations (Separations Joint Board) of the issue of whether to allow additional increases in SLC caps in Part V.C below, and our acknowledgment of the ability of a carrier to establish entitlement to supplemental universal service to help ensure that carriers can maintain their financial integrity.⁷¹⁵ Although in most cases the rates for intrastate and interstate terminating access will drop substantially, that alone is not the test for whether a taking has occurred; rather, a primary consideration for takings claims is whether the rates ultimately adopted will produce a reasonable return sufficient to enable a company to maintain its financial integrity.⁷¹⁶

C. Implementation

269. In this section, we detail certain implementation items. First, we provide guidance to states with regard to their implementation responsibilities for the intercarrier compensation regime we adopt today. Importantly, this includes setting reciprocal compensation rates using the new incremental cost pricing methodology. We also provide guidelines for the states' application of the modification and suspension provisions of section 251(f)(2) of the Act. We explain the need to require symmetrical compensation arrangements without any exceptions under section 252(d)(2)(A)(ii) of the Act. And we discuss the effect of our intercarrier compensation reforms on existing interconnection and commercial agreements. Finally, we address the extent to which reduced revenue from carrier-to-carrier charges may be replaced through end-user charges or new universal service support, where needed.

1. Direction to the States

270. We set forth the timeline for states to implement our comprehensive reform and adopt an interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate along with a transition plan in section [III.B.2] above. In this section, we set forth additional parameters for states to follow in implementing the reforms adopted in this order.

a. Setting Final Reciprocal Compensation Rates Based on Incremental Cost

271. Under our new methodology for setting final reciprocal compensation rates, states will need to set prices according to a forward-looking economic cost study or computer cost model using the Faulhaber principles to identify the traffic-sensitive incremental cost of transport and termination of traffic.⁷¹⁷ First, states will need to evaluate a forward-looking economic cost analysis of a stand-alone network that performs all functions of a modern telecommunications network, including transport and termination of other carriers' traffic. Second, states will need to evaluate a forward looking economic cost analysis of a stand-alone network that performs all the same functions except for the transport and termination of other carriers' traffic. Third, states must compare the costs of these two networks. The difference between the costs of the two networks is the additional costs of termination of traffic subject to

⁷¹⁵ See *FPC v. Hope Natural Gas Co.*, 320 U.S. 591, 605 (1944) (“Rates which enable the company to operate successfully, to maintain its financial integrity, to attract capital, and to compensate its investors for the risks assumed certainly cannot be condemned as invalid, even though they might produce only a meager return . . .”).

⁷¹⁶ *FPC v. Hope Natural Gas Co.*, 320 U.S. at 605.

⁷¹⁷ We recognize that the incremental cost of terminating traffic may include certain non-traffic-sensitive costs, such as the cost of a trunk port. Consistent with cost-causation principles, however, such non-traffic-sensitive costs may not be recovered through per-minute charges, but must rather be recovered through flat-rated monthly charges associated with interconnection trunks.

the “additional costs” standard we adopt in this order.⁷¹⁸

272. We offer further guidance regarding specific aspects of these cost studies. First, these cost studies must use the least cost, most efficient network technology. We find that the least cost, most efficient switch today is a softswitch.⁷¹⁹ We further find that the least cost, most efficient technology for transport is fiber optic cable.⁷²⁰ We observe that, when carriers deploy fiber, they typically deploy capacity significantly in excess of current needs.⁷²¹

273. Second, consistent with the traditional economic definition of the incremental cost of a service,⁷²² the cost studies must exclude all common costs, including overhead costs. Third, all non-traffic-sensitive costs must be excluded from the cost studies.⁷²³ Cost studies using the TELRIC methodology do not meet these requirements, given the differences between TELRIC and the traditional economic methodology for determining the incremental cost of a service discussed above.⁷²⁴ Available evidence suggests that the incremental costs of terminating traffic, as determined using this methodology, are likely to be extremely close to zero.

274. We also require each state to set a single, uniform rate for all carriers in that state through their pricing proceedings. We find this approach warranted for several reasons. First, softswitches are easily scalable, and thus the incremental cost of termination does not vary with the number of lines the switch serves. Second, because carriers tend to deploy significant excess capacity when deploying fiber, the incremental cost of adding traffic is likely to approach, or equal, zero. Third, we find that setting a single uniform rate for all incumbent LECs and interconnecting carriers in a state simplifies the regulatory process, minimizes arbitrage that could arise, and reduces the likelihood that unidentifiable traffic would remain a problem. Finally, setting rates based on the costs of the current, least cost, most efficient technology creates incentives for carriers with less efficient networks to migrate more quickly to those more efficient technologies.

275. Following the transition, once carriers are charging the final uniform reciprocal compensation rate, we establish the following default rules regarding the network “edge.”⁷²⁵ These

⁷¹⁸ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷¹⁹ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷²⁰ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷²¹ See, e.g., *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Forward-Looking Mechanism for High Cost Support for Non-Rural LECs*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 97-160, Tenth Report and Order, 14 FCC Rcd 20156, 20237, para. 186 (1999) (subsequent history and citation omitted) (“As we explained in the *Inputs Further Notice*, in determining appropriate cable sizes, network engineers include a certain amount of spare capacity to accommodate administrative functions, such as testing and repair, and some expected amount of growth.”); *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17166, para. 312 n.919 (citing evidence that “the first carrier to lay fiber to a particular location will lay significantly more than it will need because the incremental cost of burying additional fibers is negligible”).

⁷²² See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷²³ We thus go beyond the requirement in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* that only required states to exclude the cost of line ports, see 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057, and mandate that *all* non-traffic sensitive costs be excluded.

⁷²⁴ See, e.g., *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷²⁵ See Letter from Hank Hultquist, AT&T Services, Inc., and Donna Epps, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 14, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Oct. 14, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (providing seven default rules). We reject PAETEC’s assertion that the Commission lacked notice to adopt

(continued....)

default rules would not require changes to physical points of interconnection, but would simply define functions governed by a uniform terminating rate.⁷²⁶

- For every call, the calling party service provider (e.g., the calling party's LEC for a local call or the calling party's IXC for a long distance call) is responsible for the transmission and routing of the call to the network edge of the called party service provider.
- The calling party service provider may fulfill its responsibility for the transmission and routing of a call to the called party service provider network edge via its own facilities and services, the facilities and service of another entity (including the called party's service provider), or any combination.
- The calling party service provider is also responsible for the payment of the uniform terminating rate to the called party service provider. The called party service provider is responsible for performing all network functions to deliver traffic from the network edge to the called party, including dedicated transport, common transport, tandem switching, end office switching, and SS7 messaging.
- The reciprocal compensation regime of section 251(b)(5) will apply to traffic from the called party service provider network edge to the called party.
- The called party service provider's network edge is the location of its end office, MSC, point of presence, or trunking media gateway, which PSTN routing conventions (e.g., NPAC or LERG) associate with the called party telephone number unless that location subtends a tandem switched owned or controlled by the called party service provider, in which case that tandem is the network edge for that call. A service provider that utilizes a tandem as its edge may require, upon reasonable request consistent with standard industry network interconnection principles, that calling party service providers groom their traffic onto segregated trunk groups.
- The called party service provider must either permit interconnection at its edge for purposes of exchanging traffic with the calling party service provider or provide transport at no charge to that edge from a location in the same LATA where it does permit such interconnection.
- The calling party service provider may at its sole discretion choose whether to interconnect directly or indirectly with the called party service provider.

b. Symmetry

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such rules. See Letter from Jonathan S. Frankel and Michael A. Romano, Counsel for PAETEC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92 at 2-3 (Oct. 28, 2008) (PAETEC Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). The Commission expressly sought comment on this issue in the *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*. *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4687, 4702-03, 4712-13, 4727-30, paras. 4, 34, 40-44, 54, 91-97.

⁷²⁶ Thus, the default "edge" rule we adopt today does not alter any obligations of incumbent LECs' to interconnect at any technically feasible point, nor does the rule alter carriers' ability to request interconnection. See, e.g., Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Verizon, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-112 at 5 (filed Oct. 5, 2008). See also, e.g., PAETEC Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5-6 (expressing concern that the adoption of rules regarding a network "edge" not alter existing rules and obligations regarding physical interconnection). Moreover, the "edge" rules we adopt, which will apply at the end of the transition period, are merely a default, and carriers are free to negotiate alternative arrangements.

276. We conclude that final uniform reciprocal compensation rates should be symmetrical.⁷²⁷ In contrast to the approach taken in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, we require, for the reasons described below, symmetry in all cases once the final uniform reciprocal compensation rates become effective.

277. *Background.* In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission concluded that charges for reciprocal compensation were to be presumptively symmetrical and that it was “reasonable to adopt the incumbent LEC’s transport and termination prices as a presumptive proxy for other telecommunications carriers’ additional costs of transport and termination.”⁷²⁸ The Commission observed that “[b]oth the incumbent LEC and the interconnecting carriers usually will be providing service in the same geographic area, so the forward-looking economic costs should be similar in most cases.”⁷²⁹ Moreover, by using the incumbent LEC’s costs of transport and termination, the Commission found that symmetry would provide an incentive for interconnected carriers to minimize costs because if the interconnected carrier could reduce its costs below the costs of the incumbent LEC, then it could realize additional termination revenue.⁷³⁰ Symmetrical compensation also provided the incumbent LECs an incentive to minimize costs. The Commission further found that symmetry reduced incumbent LECs’ bargaining strength because asymmetrical rates could have allowed incumbent LECs to negotiate high charges for traffic terminating on their networks and low charges for traffic originating on their networks, citing as an example incumbent LECs’ treatment of CMRS providers.⁷³¹ A presumption of symmetric rates was administratively efficient and did not require a competing carrier to conduct a forward-looking cost study to enter the market, lowering the cost of entry and thus increasing competition.⁷³²

278. The Commission, however, carved out an exception to the presumption of symmetry. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission permitted interconnecting carriers to rebut the presumption of symmetry by submitting a forward-looking cost study to show that their costs of

⁷²⁷ “Symmetrical compensation arrangements are those in which the rate paid by an incumbent LEC to another telecommunications carrier for transport and termination of traffic originated by the incumbent LEC is the same as the rate the incumbent LEC charges to transport and terminate traffic originated by the other telecommunications carrier.” *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16031–32, para. 1069.

⁷²⁸ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1085. The Commission provided the following findings supporting its conclusion: (1) “using the incumbent LEC’s forward-looking costs for transport and termination of traffic as a proxy for the costs incurred by interconnected carriers satisfies the requirements of section 252(d)(2)” and “is consistent with section 252(d)(2)(B)(ii)”; (2) “[i]f both parties are incumbent LECs, . . . the larger LEC’s forward-looking costs should be used to establish the symmetrical rate for transport and termination”; (3) “larger LECs are generally in a better position to conduct a forward-looking economic cost study”; (4) “imposing symmetrical rates based on the incumbent LEC’s additional forward-looking costs will not substantially reduce carriers’ incentives to minimize those costs”; and (5) “states may establish transport and termination rates in the arbitration process that vary according to whether the traffic is routed through a tandem switch or directly to the end-office switch.” *Id.* at 16040–42, paras. 1085–86, 1090.

⁷²⁹ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1085.

⁷³⁰ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1086 (“A symmetric compensation rule gives the competing carriers correct incentives to minimize its own costs of termination because its termination revenues do not vary directly with changes in its own costs.”).

⁷³¹ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16041, para. 1087 (noting that incumbent LECs have used their greater bargaining power to negotiate asymmetrical rates with CMRS providers and to charge CMRS providers origination, as well as termination, charges).

⁷³² See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16041–42, para. 1088.

termination were higher than the incumbent LEC's.⁷³³ If the interconnecting carrier established that "the costs of efficiently configured and operated systems [were] not symmetrical," the state commission could adopt a "different compensation rate" for the interconnecting carrier.⁷³⁴

279. *Discussion.* We now require symmetric rates and conclude that the exception that permitted asymmetric rates under certain circumstances is no longer warranted.⁷³⁵ We note that there is scant evidence of any competitive LECs seeking to establish their own, higher, costs during the last 12 years, let alone being successful in doing so.⁷³⁶ We conclude that asymmetric rates could undermine the comprehensive reform we adopt by permitting different termination rates for traffic in the same geographic area, which could open the door for continued regulatory arbitrage and thwart the intended public interest benefits associated with reforming the patchwork of existing intercarrier compensation payments.

280. As noted above, symmetrical rates promote efficiency. Symmetry will encourage interconnecting carriers to deploy more efficient technology to reduce their costs. Notably, the Commission of the European Communities (European Communities) has also found that divergent regulatory treatment between different technology termination rates, as this rebuttable presumption exception allows, creates distortions among markets.⁷³⁷ In the context of fixed versus mobile telephony, the European Communities recognized that some European countries have allowed smaller CMRS carriers to charge higher termination rates to compensate for these carriers' lack of economies of scale.⁷³⁸ The European Communities concluded that these higher termination rates for mobile technology led to higher retail rates for customers and lower usage of this technology.⁷³⁹ As the European experience shows, allowing the present exception to the symmetry rule could encourage higher termination rates, and asymmetric termination rates—particularly if such termination rates were high for one carrier—could reduce consumer welfare and lead to higher prices.

281. We conclude that requiring symmetrical compensation arrangements without any

⁷³³ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16042, para. 1089.

⁷³⁴ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16042, para. 1089.

⁷³⁵ We note that the rates that will apply under our transition plan, discussed *supra* Part V.B.2, will not necessarily be symmetric. For example, we do not permit CMRS providers to assess access charges during the transition. See *supra* para. 197; 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2). Our symmetry rules thus apply outside the transition framework, i.e., for carriers exchanging traffic at the final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, or for carriers that have received a suspension or modification of our intercarrier compensation requirements pursuant to 251(f)(2).

⁷³⁶ Indeed, we are only aware of one case where a competitive LEC attempted to rebut the presumption and, in that case, the state commission found that the competitive LEC had failed to do so. See *Petition of Sprint Spectrum L.P. d/b/a Sprint PCS, Pursuant to Section 252(b) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, for Arbitration to Establish an Intercarrier Agreement with Verizon New York Inc., Case 01-C-0767, Arbitration Order, 2002 WL 31505732 (N.Y. P.S.C. 2002)* (holding that Sprint did not rebut the presumption that its costs were higher than the incumbent LEC's).

⁷³⁷ See THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, DRAFT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON THE REGULATORY TREATMENT OF FIXED AND MOBILE TERMINATION RATES IN THE EU 3, para. 3 (2008), available at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecom/doc/library/public_consult/termination_rates/termination.pdf (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES).

⁷³⁸ See EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES at 2, para. 2.

⁷³⁹ See EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES at 3, para. 3.

exceptions is proper under section 252(d)(2)(A)(ii) of the Act.⁷⁴⁰ We also confirm that this mandatory symmetry requirement applies without regard to whether traffic exchanged by the interconnected carriers is balanced or not. Given the substantial benefits of symmetrical rates as described above, the likelihood that allowing asymmetrical rates would give carriers an incentive to find ways to arbitrage the higher rates, and the minimal costs associated with terminating calls,⁷⁴¹ we find that an exception to symmetrical rates where traffic is out of balance is not warranted.

c. Modifications and Suspensions under Section 251(f)(2)

282. In light of the importance of bringing uniformity and symmetry to intercarrier compensation, eliminating opportunities for regulatory arbitrage, and providing regulatory certainty to carriers in making investment plans, we find it appropriate to adopt guidelines regarding the application of section 251(f)(2). Section 251(f)(2) of the Act gives state commissions the ability to suspend or modify our intercarrier compensation rules implementing section 251(b) and (c) under certain conditions. Specifically, section 251(f)(2) of the Act permits a “local exchange carrier with fewer than 2 percent of the Nation’s subscriber lines installed in the aggregate nationwide” to “petition a State commission for a suspension or modification of the application of a requirement or requirements of [section 251] (b) or (c).”⁷⁴² The state commission shall grant such petition “to the extent that, and for such duration as, the State commission determines that such suspension or modification (A) is necessary (i) to avoid a significant adverse economic impact on users of telecommunications services generally; (ii) to avoid imposing a requirement that is unduly economically burdensome; or (iii) to avoid imposing a requirement that is technically infeasible; and (B) is consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”⁷⁴³ In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission “decline[d] . . . to adopt national rules or guidelines” regarding the specific implementation of section 251(f), but explained that the Commission “may offer guidance on these issues at a later date, if we believe it is necessary and appropriate.”⁷⁴⁴ The Supreme Court subsequently confirmed that the Commission has the authority to interpret section 251(f).⁷⁴⁵ The only existing Commission guideline regarding section 251(f)(2) provides that the burden of proof is on the LEC seeking suspension or modification of particular requirements.⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴⁰ This section requires that, in setting rates under interconnection agreements, states must ensure that reciprocal compensation charges are a “reasonable approximation of the additional costs of terminating such calls.” See 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(ii). In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that the incumbent LEC’s costs were a reasonable proxy for other carriers’ costs. 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1085. We reaffirm that finding, especially given that our pricing methodology focuses on the costs of the least cost, most efficient network technology. Moreover, per the express terms of the Act, the “additional costs” standard applies only to the costs of the incumbent LEC, not the competitive LEC. This interpretation of the Act promotes efficiency and therefore bolsters competition, consistent with the goals of the Act. See 1996 Act, Preamble (declaring the purpose of the Act to be “to promote competition and reduce regulation in order to secure lower prices and higher quality services for American telecommunications consumers and encourage the rapid deployment of new telecommunications technologies”).

⁷⁴¹ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷⁴² 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2).

⁷⁴³ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2).

⁷⁴⁴ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16118, para. 1263; 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2).

⁷⁴⁵ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385.

⁷⁴⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 51.405(b). In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission held that, in petitions under section 251(f)(2), “a LEC must offer evidence that application of those requirements would be likely to cause undue economic burdens beyond the economic burdens typically associated with efficient competitive

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283. As an initial matter, we conclude that any suspension or modification granted pursuant to section 251(f)(2) must be for a limited “duration” and cannot be indefinite. This interpretation follows directly from the express language of section 251(f)(2). Specifically, section 251(f)(2) provides that the state should grant a suspension or modification “to the extent that, *and for such duration as*, the State commission determines that such suspension or modification”⁷⁴⁷ satisfies the statutory test. Congress thus expected that the conditions warranting suspension or modification of a requirement would not be permanent, and it permitted the states to continue such modifications or suspensions only for a particular “duration,” rather than remaining in place indefinitely. In contrast, Congress adopted the opposite approach in section 251(f)(1), where it provided a default exemption for “rural telephone companies” from section 251(c) that continues indefinitely “until” certain statutory criteria are met.⁷⁴⁸ Accordingly, we conclude that the LEC requesting the suspension or modification under section 251(f)(2) has the burden of demonstrating the appropriate duration of any suspension or modification. To the extent that a state grants a suspension or modification for a particular duration, the Commission encourages the state to impose a timeline or other requirements on the LEC to ensure that it is taking concrete steps to enable it to comply with the relevant requirements once the suspension or modification ends.⁷⁴⁹ If a state finds that a LEC is not taking such steps necessary to ensure compliance on a date certain, we find that such a determination would be sufficient for the state immediately to revoke the suspension or modification as no longer satisfying the “public interest” criteria.

284. We also offer guidance regarding the substantive standards that state commissions must apply when evaluating requests pursuant to section 251(f)(2) for a suspension or modification of section 251(b) or (c). The first prong of section 251(f)(2)(A) directs state commissions to determine whether the LEC establishes that absence of the requested suspension or modification would cause a “*significant*” adverse economic impact on users of telecommunications services generally.⁷⁵⁰ The term “significant” is ambiguous. According to Webster’s Dictionary, “significant” means “having or likely to have influence or effect; of a noticeably or measurably large amount.”⁷⁵¹ We find this to be a reasonable definition, and conclude that for an “adverse economic impact” to be “significant” requires that such harm be “measurably large.” Moreover, the state commission must evaluate the net impact “on users of telecommunications services *generally*.”⁷⁵² We conclude that state commissions must consider users of

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entry.” 11 FCC Rcd at 16118, para. 1262. The Commission also placed the burden of proof on the carrier seeking the relief under section 251(f)(2). *Id.* at 16118, para. 1263. Although the Supreme Court ultimately upheld the Commission’s authority to interpret section 251(f), *see AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385, the Eighth Circuit subsequently vacated the Commission’s interpretation of “undue economic burden,” finding that the Act requires a state to look at the entire economic burden not just the additional burden of complying with sections 251(b) or 251(c). *See Iowa Utils. II*, 219 F.3d at 759–62. The Eighth Circuit also found that the Commission erred in placing the burden of proof on the rural LEC when a requesting carrier seeks to remove the section 251(f)(1) exemption from section 251(c). The Eighth Circuit therefore vacated sections 51.405(a), (c), and (d) of our rules, *id.* at 762, but did not disturb the allocation of burden of proof under section 251(f)(2) as set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 51.405(b).

⁷⁴⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2) (emphasis added).

⁷⁴⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(1).

⁷⁴⁹ Moreover, if, in the future, we have evidence that states are granting arbitrarily long suspensions/modifications to requesting LECs, the Commission will consider imposing a limit on the number of years that a suspension/modification is appropriate.

⁷⁵⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(i) (emphasis added).

⁷⁵¹ WEBSTER’S NINTH NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY 1096 (1991).

⁷⁵² 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(i) (emphasis added).

telecommunications services more broadly, rather than focusing narrowly on impacts on isolated groups of users, such as customers of the LEC requesting the suspension or modification. Further, state commissions must weigh the overall impact on such users, including not only any adverse impacts on particular users, but whether there are other associated benefits of the regulatory requirements to telecommunications users. For example, the reduction in intercarrier compensation payments might lead some carriers to increase some rates, but also should reduce long distance rates, stimulate additional competition in local markets, consistent with the goals of the 1996 Act, and provide additional benefits to end users. We direct states to consider the totality of the circumstances in evaluating the impact on telecommunications users.

285. The second prong of section 251(f)(2)(A) requires a state commission to determine whether the LEC has demonstrated that the requested suspension or modification is necessary to “avoid imposing a requirement that is unduly economically burdensome.”⁷⁵³ The Eighth Circuit has interpreted the phrase “unduly economically burdensome” to require a state to examine “the full economic burden on the ILEC.”⁷⁵⁴ Consistent with this interpretation, and our interpretation of section 251(f)(2)(A)(i) above, we conclude that states must evaluate the totality of the circumstances in evaluating the net burden. For example, in evaluating the impact of section 251(b)(5) as we interpret it today, states cannot simply look at the LEC’s loss of intercarrier compensation revenues. Rather, the state must consider the full economic impact on the LEC of all the comprehensive reforms we adopt, including the ability of carriers to recover revenues by raising other rates, including the federal SLC, the potential economic savings due to reduced billing costs, fewer disputes and litigation regarding the classification of traffic, and the possibility that a carrier may receive universal service support if its financial integrity is threatened.

286. The third prong under section 251(f)(2)(A) requires a state commission to determine whether the LEC has demonstrated that compliance with section 251(b) or (c) may be “technically infeasible.”⁷⁵⁵ We do not believe that any carrier will be able to establish that implementation of our intercarrier compensation reforms is “technically infeasible,” considering that carriers generally are exchanging and billing for traffic today, and our rules adopted in this order should merely simplify this process. Thus, we recommend that state commissions scrutinize rigorously any claims of technical infeasibility, particularly if the LEC is paying and/or receiving intercarrier compensation today.

287. Even if a state finds that a LEC satisfies the requirements for a temporary suspension or modification under section 251(f)(2)(A), section 251(f)(2)(B) provides that a state commission cannot grant a petition for suspension or modification unless it also finds that granting the requested petition is “consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”⁷⁵⁶ In light of the compelling need to adopt comprehensive reform of existing intercarrier compensation regimes as described above,⁷⁵⁷ the Commission urges states to use caution and consider carefully the ramifications of granting any suspension or modification, particularly regarding petitions seeking relief from section 251(b)(5). Indeed, any suspension or modification that continues to treat traffic under different rate structures opens the door for continued regulatory arbitrage and disputes. Such action would undermine the tremendous public

⁷⁵³ See 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(ii).

⁷⁵⁴ *Iowa Utils. II*, 219 F.3d at 761. The Commission initially interpreted undue economic burden to mean the “undue economic burden beyond the economic burden that is typically associated with efficient competitive entry.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.405(d). The Eighth Circuit vacated this reading of the statute. See *Iowa Utils. II*, 219 F.3d at 760–61.

⁷⁵⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(iii).

⁷⁵⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(B).

⁷⁵⁷ See *supra* section V.A.3.

interest benefit associated with treating all traffic the same.

288. The Act is silent on what occurs if a state grants a suspension or modification of the section 251(b) or (c) obligations. We find that this silence creates ambiguities and could lead to inconsistent results following a modification or suspension under section 251(f)(2). We are concerned that a suspension or modification of section 251(b)(5) could result in exactly the kind of disparate treatment that we intend to correct with our actions today. Pursuant to our authority under section 201(b), as well as our authority to interpret section 251(f),⁷⁵⁸ we therefore adopt rules specifically addressing certain of the implications of a suspension or modification of our intercarrier compensation rules.⁷⁵⁹

289. First, to minimize inconsistency and the possibility that the reforms we adopt today could be undermined, we extend our symmetry requirement for reciprocal compensation rates at the end of the transition period described in Part V.B to any suspension or modification of our section 251(b)(5) reciprocal compensation rules and requirements. If a LEC receives a suspension or modification of our reciprocal compensation pricing methodology, for example, all other LECs and CMRS providers that exchange traffic with the LEC receiving the suspension or modification will likewise be entitled to charge that LEC those same rates that the LEC charges them for the duration of such suspension or modification. We conclude that this symmetry requirement is in the public interest and will reduce disputes, arbitrage, and transaction costs. Indeed, a contrary result that would permit different terminating rates in the same geographic area would not be in the public interest and likely would lead to the same disputes we have today. If a state attempts to avoid this symmetry requirement by granting a LEC a suspension or modification of any section 251(b)(5) reciprocal compensation obligation and the state fails to require symmetric rates, we will invoke our authority under sections 201 and 332 of the Act to ensure that all carriers exchanging traffic with that LEC pay the same rate for terminating all traffic.

290. Second, if a state grants any suspension or modification that is more than 1 year in duration, we require the state to take a fresh look to determine whether such suspension/modification continues to satisfy the statutory test in light of possible changes in circumstances. To this end, 90 days before the 1-year anniversary of the grant of the suspension or modification, the LEC must file a petition demonstrating that the suspension or modification continues to satisfy the statutory criteria. In the intervening time, for example, a state may have rebalanced rates, the LEC may have increased its end-user charges, or other relevant changes may have occurred. Those actions may have obviated the need for the suspension or modification or, at a minimum, could result in the need for changes to the terms and duration of the suspension or modification. In such a review, the LEC continues to have the burden of demonstrating that the section 251(f)(2) criteria remain satisfied. We conclude that states should act upon such a fresh look within the 180 days for new petitions set forth in section 251(f)(2).⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁸ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385.

⁷⁵⁹ Section 201(b) authorizes the Commission to “prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act.” 47 U.S.C. § 201(b); *see also* 47 U.S.C. § 154(i) (“The Commission may perform any and all acts, make such rules and regulations, and issue such orders, not inconsistent with this Act, as may be necessary in the execution of its functions.”). “[T]he grant in § 201(b) means what it says: The FCC has rulemaking authority to carry out the ‘provisions of this Act.’” *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378. As the Supreme Court has confirmed, this grant of authority necessarily includes section 251(f). *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385 (holding that the Commission has “jurisdiction to promulgate rules . . . regarding rural exemptions”); *see also id.* at 378 n.6 (“[T]he question in these cases is not whether the Federal Government has taken the regulation of local telecommunications competition away from the States. With regard to the matters addressed by the 1996 Act, it unquestionably has.”).

⁷⁶⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2) (“The State commission shall act upon any petition filed under this paragraph within 180 days after receiving such petition.”).

d. Existing Agreements

291. Below we discuss the effect of our intercarrier compensation reforms on certain types of existing agreements.

292. *Interconnection agreements.* With respect to interconnection agreements, we do not disturb the processes established by section 252 of the Act. As discussed above, the intercarrier compensation reforms we adopt will necessitate that states implement our new reciprocal compensation methodology. We expect that incumbent LECs and competing carriers will implement the reciprocal compensation changes as directed by section 252 of the Act.⁷⁶¹ We make clear that our actions today constitute a change in law, and we recognize that interconnection agreements may contain change of law provisions that allow for renegotiation and/or may contain some mechanism to resolve disputes about new agreement language implementing new rules.⁷⁶² Verizon raises a concern regarding the impact on contracts in “evergreen” status, which Verizon describes as “contracts that have reached the end of their terms but remain in effect pending entry into new contracts.”⁷⁶³ Given that the comprehensive reforms today are necessary to eliminate arbitrage and reduce disputes, we believe it is appropriate for carriers to take a “fresh look” at their interconnection agreements in “evergreen” status, including agreements that lack a change-of-law provision, and follow the section 252 process of negotiation and arbitration. We also note that, pursuant to section 251(a)(1), carriers remain free to negotiate alternative arrangements.⁷⁶⁴

293. *Commercial arrangements.* As discussed above, the intercarrier compensation reforms will require carriers to make certain changes to their tariffs relating to carrier-to-carrier charges, and potentially also SLCs. We do not, however, abrogate existing contracts or otherwise allow for a “fresh look” in light of our reforms.⁷⁶⁵ As the Commission has recognized, for example, early termination provisions can be mutually beneficial by giving providers greater assurance of cost recovery, and giving

⁷⁶¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 252.

⁷⁶² See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17404, para. 700. Although section 252(a)(1) and section 252(b)(1) refer to requests that are made to incumbent LECs, we have interpreted that in the interconnection agreement context to mean that either the incumbent or the competitive LEC may make such a request, consistent with the parties’ duty to negotiate in good faith pursuant to section 251(c)(1). See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17405, para. 703 n.2087; see also 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(c)(1), 252(a)(1), (b)(1). We believe that this adequately addresses concerns about existing interconnection agreements that do not include express change of law provisions.

⁷⁶³ See, e.g., Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5–6 (urging that any new intercarrier compensation regime displace such contracts). By the same token, we decline to insulate existing interconnection agreements from the section 252 processes to the extent that some commenters propose that they remain in effect. See, e.g., Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 04-36, 06-122, 05-195, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, Attach. at 13 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (proposing that the Commission “order that those prior arrangements should at least presumptively remain in force after the implementation of a new, unified . . . rate regime”).

⁷⁶⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 251(a)(1).

⁷⁶⁵ Several commenters request that the Commission give them a fresh look at existing contracts. See, e.g., Letter from Richard R. Cameron and Teresa D. Baer, Counsel for Global Crossing, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 08-152; CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45 at 2 (filed Sept. 18, 2008) (asking that the Commission “provide an 18-month window within which carriers can reconfigure their interconnection facilities without incurring reconfiguration charges or early termination liabilities under existing transport contracts”); Ad Hoc *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 22–24 (arguing that customers should be allowed to opt out of existing contracts); Earthlink *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 7 (arguing that end users should have the opportunity to negotiate different terms and, if renegotiation is not possible, be permitted to terminate existing contracts without liability).

customers (whether wholesale or end-users) discounted and stable prices over the relevant term.⁷⁶⁶ Indeed, allowing for a fresh look could result in a windfall for customers that entered long-term arrangements, in exchange for lower prices, as compared to other customers that avoided early termination fees by electing shorter contract periods at higher prices.⁷⁶⁷ Rather than adopt a rule that these commercial arrangements must be reopened, we will leave such issues to any change-of-law provisions in these commercial arrangements, or to commercial negotiations among the parties.⁷⁶⁸

2. Revenue Recovery Opportunities

294. In the preceding sections of this order, we adopt fundamental changes to the existing intercarrier compensation regimes. These reforms are designed to unify and simplify these mechanisms, consistent with the framework Congress adopted in the 1996 Act. This new approach will result in overall reductions in interstate and intrastate intercarrier compensation rates.⁷⁶⁹ In this section, we address the extent to which revenue reductions from carrier-to-carrier charges may be replaced through end-user charges and new universal service support. In prior intercarrier compensation reforms, the Commission largely replaced reductions in intercarrier compensation revenues through a combination of increased end-user charges and new universal service funding.⁷⁷⁰ Our actions here carefully balance the need to ensure reasonable revenue recovery by carriers against the potential adverse impact on consumers of increased end-user charges, and the pressure placed on the universal service program to the extent that new subsidies are made available.

295. As an initial matter, we increase the caps on interstate SLCs, and we permit incumbent LECs to increase their SLCs up to the new caps to recover lost interstate and intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues. We also enlist the aid of the Separations Joint Board to evaluate the need for further increases in interstate end-user charges to recover any net loss in interstate and intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues, and to evaluate the conditions under which carriers may seek additional universal service funding. To limit the increase in the total universal service fund, we establish certain preconditions that carriers must satisfy before they can receive additional universal service funding to compensate for lost intercarrier compensation revenues.

a. End-User Charges

296. In this section, we consider whether revenue reductions from reformed carrier-to-carrier

⁷⁶⁶ See, e.g., *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17400, 17402–03, paras. 692, 697–99; see also, e.g., AT&T *ICC FNPRM Reply* at 17–19 (arguing against giving end users a fresh look at existing contracts). To the extent that there is evidence that particular termination penalties are inappropriate, the Commission can resolve such a matter through an enforcement proceeding. See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17403, para. 698.

⁷⁶⁷ See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17403, para. 699.

⁷⁶⁸ This situation is thus different than cases where the Commission found that certain contract provisions might adversely affect competition or where end-user customers would be denied the benefits of new Commission policy absent a fresh look opportunity. See, e.g., *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16044, para. 1094; *Expanded Interconnection with Local Telephone Company Facilities*, CC Docket No. 91-141, Second Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, 8 FCC Rcd 7341, 7350, para. 21 (1993) (allowing a fresh look at agreements in “situations where excessive termination liabilities would affect competition for a significant period of time”); *Competition in the Interstate Interexchange Marketplace*, CC Docket No. 90-132, Report and Order, 6 FCC Rcd 5880, 5907, para. 151 (1991) (giving customers of AT&T 90 days to terminate their contracts without penalty to let them “tak[e] advantage of 800 number portability when it arrives”).

⁷⁶⁹ See *supra* paras. 186–268.

⁷⁷⁰ See *supra* paras. 159–185.

charges should be replaced to any extent by increases in end-user charges, as the Commission has done in some prior intercarrier compensation reform proceedings.⁷⁷¹ The Commission has acknowledged that “[t]he concept that users of the local telephone network should be responsible for the costs they actually cause is sound from a public policy perspective and rings of fundamental fairness,” and also helps ensure “that ratepayers will be able to make rational choices in their use of telephone service.”⁷⁷² Importantly, however, the Commission also has maintained “safeguards that ensure that the rates consumers pay . . . remain well within a zone of reasonableness.”⁷⁷³ To permit carriers to recover at least part of their lost intercarrier compensation revenues, we raise the caps on interstate SLCs as described below, which we find to be within the “zone of reasonableness” and which should not have a significant adverse effect on telephone penetration. We also enlist the help of the Separations Joint Board to consider the need, if any, for further increases in end-user charges and certain other revenue recovery issues.

297. The record reveals a wide variety of proposals for modifying interstate end-user charges in response to reductions in intercarrier compensation rates. The majority of these proposals advocate increasing the caps on the interstate SLCs. The interstate SLC is a flat-rated charge that recovers the interstate portion of local loop costs from an end user. Under our current rules governing incumbent LECs, SLCs are subject to a cap that varies based upon whether the line is: (a) a primary residential or single-line business line; (b) a non-primary residential line; or (c) a multi-line business or Centrex line.⁷⁷⁴ Some parties propose specific increases in SLC caps to offset a portion of the revenues lost through mandated reductions in intercarrier compensation—including both reductions in interstate and intrastate revenues.⁷⁷⁵ Other parties contend that most or all of a carrier’s replacement of lost intercarrier compensation revenues should come from increased SLCs.⁷⁷⁶ On the other hand, some consumer groups assert that no increase in SLC caps is warranted in response to reductions in intercarrier compensation

⁷⁷¹ See, e.g., *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d 682; *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 15982; *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962; *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd 19613.

⁷⁷² *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d at 686, para. 7.

⁷⁷³ *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 12976, para. 33; see also, e.g., *1983 Access Charge Order*, 93 FCC 2d at 243, para. 4 (finding that a “transitional plan is necessary” in part because “[i]mmediate recovery of high fixed costs through flat end user charges might cause a significant number of local exchange service subscribers to cancel local exchange service despite the existence of a Universal Service Fund” and “[s]uch a result would not be consistent with the goals of the Communications Act”).

⁷⁷⁴ For price cap and rate-of-return carriers, the current SLC cap for residential and single-line business lines is \$6.50, 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1)(ii)(C), 69.152(d)(1)(ii)(D), and the current SLC cap for multi-line business and Centrex lines is \$9.20, 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(o)(1)(i); 69.152(k)(1)(i). Price cap carriers currently also have a SLC cap of \$7.00 for non-primary residential lines. 47 C.F.R. § 69.152(e)(1)(i).

⁷⁷⁵ See, e.g., ICF ICC FNPRM Comments, App. C at C-7; NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 7; Letter from Curt Stamp, President, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach at 2–3 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 6–7; Letter from Mary L. Henze, Executive Director—Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92; WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-112, 99-68, 07-135, Attach. at 2 (filed Oct. 9, 2008).

⁷⁷⁶ See, e.g., Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President of Government Affairs, Sprint, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 5 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham et al., Federal Regulatory Affairs, T-Mobile USA, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 8 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Cox ICC FNPRM Comments at 5–6; Eschelon ICC FNPRM Comments at 12.

rates.⁷⁷⁷

(i) Current Availability of End-User Charges for Revenue Recovery

298. As an initial matter, we permit incumbent LECs to increase their SLCs up to new caps to recover reductions in interstate intercarrier compensation revenues. In particular, we increase the SLC cap for residential and single-line business lines from \$6.50 to \$8.00, the non-primary residential line SLC cap from \$7.00 to \$8.50, and the multi-line business SLC cap from \$9.20 to \$11.50. We believe that these modest increases in the SLC caps continue to “ensure that the rates consumers pay for the SLC remain well within a zone of reasonableness.”⁷⁷⁸ Moreover, we believe that these SLC cap increases also address commenters’ concerns about the need for some end-user recovery in light of lost intercarrier compensation revenues. Although some commenters argue for more substantial increases in the SLC caps, we note that there is evidence that incumbent LECs charge rates below even the existing caps in a number of instances. For example, the primary residential and single-line business SLC cap is \$6.50, but the national average SLC for those lines is \$5.93 based on recent Commission data.⁷⁷⁹ Similarly, the non-primary residential line SLC cap is \$7.00, but the national average SLC for those lines is \$5.81.⁷⁸⁰ Further, the multi-line business and Centrex line SLC cap is \$9.20, but the national average SLC for those lines is \$6.30—nearly \$3.00 below the cap.⁷⁸¹ We therefore find it reasonable in the first instance to raise the interstate SLC cap and to allow carriers whose current SLCs are below the new caps to increase those SLCs to recover revenues lost from interstate and intrastate access charge reductions.⁷⁸²

299. To the extent that an incumbent LEC increases its SLCs to recover reductions in its interstate intercarrier compensation revenues and any of its SLCs are still below the relevant caps, we allow those carriers to raise their SLCs further, up to the caps, to recover any net loss in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues, at least on an interim basis.⁷⁸³ As a prerequisite for incumbent LECs to increase their SLCs in this manner, we require that the LEC’s state retail rates and any intrastate SLC

⁷⁷⁷ See Letter from Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. 2 at 22 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); Letter from David C. Bergmann, Assistant Consumer’s Counsel Chair, NASUCA Telecommunications Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Dockets Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 06-122, 05-337, 05-195, 04-36, 03-109, 02-60, CC Dockets Nos. 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 99-68, 96-262, 96-45, 80-286 at 10 (filed Sept. 30, 2008); Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 4 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).

⁷⁷⁸ *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 12976, para. 33. We note that section 54.403 of the Commission’s rules provides for Tier 1 lifeline support to cover the tariffed SLCs established by rate-of-return and price cap carriers pursuant to sections 69.104 and 69.152 of the Commission’s rules. 47 C.F.R. § 54.403.

⁷⁷⁹ 2008 TRENDS IN TELEPHONE SERVICE, tbl. 1.1 (providing national weighted average SLCs for price cap carriers and all LECs in the NECA pool as of June 30, 2008).

⁷⁸⁰ 2008 TRENDS IN TELEPHONE SERVICE, tbl. 1.1.

⁷⁸¹ 2008 TRENDS IN TELEPHONE SERVICE, tbl. 1.1

⁷⁸² Should a carrier agree to (or tariff) intercarrier charges below those that would be required by the reforms adopted in this order, the difference between the charges it sets and the maximum charges it is allowed to set may not be recovered through increased SLCs, nor may such carriers seek to obtain supplemental universal service support, as described in Part V.C.2, based on that difference.

⁷⁸³ As discussed below, we are referring to the Joint Board, among other things, the question of whether, and to what extent, net reductions in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues should be offset by revenues from interstate end-user charges. See *infra* paras. 303–310.

be set at the maximum level permitted under state regulations.⁷⁸⁴ This will ensure that revenues from interstate end-user charges will not be used to recover intrastate revenue requirements until the carrier has fully availed itself of all available intrastate revenue opportunities under existing law. We also mandate that any increase in interstate SLC revenues that are intended to recover lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues be used by the state in ratemaking to reduce costs or revenue requirements to be recovered in the intrastate jurisdiction.⁷⁸⁵

300. We find that we have authority to allow recovery of intrastate revenue requirements in this manner. For one, the legacy separations regime does not preclude this action. The Commission historically has provided federal funds to cover at least a portion of costs assigned to the intrastate jurisdiction.⁷⁸⁶ Although those decisions relied on the Commission's universal service authority pursuant to section 254, we find that we have authority under section 251(g) to allow recovery of intrastate revenue requirements through interstate SLC rates. Section 251(g) empowers the Commission to subject traffic previously encompassed by section 251(g) to the reciprocal compensation regime of section 251(b)(5), including providing for an orderly transition. Allowing incumbent LECs the option to recover certain lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues through increases in the interstate SLC, subject to the new caps, furthers such a transition. In particular, this option helps mitigate any need incumbent LECs might have to seek increases in state rates due to decreases in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues during the initial stages of the transition, pending the Separations Joint Board referral and subsequent Commission action. We also acknowledge that interstate SLC charges are governed by sections 201 and 202 of the Act, and that "the just and reasonable rates required by Sections 201 and 202 . . . must ordinarily be cost-based, absent a clear explanation of the Commission's reasons for a departure from cost-based ratemaking."⁷⁸⁷ In the past, the Commission has, in fact, adopted regulatory approaches that deviated from cost-based ratemaking.⁷⁸⁸ We find such an approach warranted here to help mitigate regulatory burdens during the transition, as described above.

301. In sum, we adopt increased SLC caps to allow incumbent LECs to recover some or all of their net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues resulting from rate reductions pursuant to this order. In particular, to recover those lost revenues, we permit incumbent LECs to increase each of their SLCs up to the new caps.

⁷⁸⁴ To the extent that a carrier's state retail rates have been deregulated, that carrier may not increase its SLCs to recover any net loss in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues.

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Ninth Report and Order and Eighteenth Order on Reconsideration, 14 FCC Rcd 20432, 20486-87, para. 106 (1999) (*Universal Service Ninth Report and Order*) (specifying that "hold-harmless" universal service support "should continue to operate through the jurisdictional separations process to reduce book costs to be recovered in the intrastate jurisdiction.").

⁷⁸⁶ See, e.g., *Universal Service Ninth Report and Order*, 14 FCC Rcd 20432 (providing high-cost universal service support for intrastate costs).

⁷⁸⁷ *Access Charge Reform Second Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16619-20, para. 44 (citing *Competitive Telecomms. Ass'n v. FCC*, 87 F.3d 522, 529 (D.C. Cir. 1996)).

⁷⁸⁸ See, e.g., *LEC Price Cap Order*, 5 FCC Rcd 6786 (adopting price cap regulation, under which rates are not tied directly to cost); *Pricing Flexibility Order*, 14 FCC Rcd 14221, 14307, para. 168 (once price cap carriers are granted pricing flexibility, they lose the option of a low end adjustment, which would permit incumbent LECs earning rates of return less than 10.25% in a given year to increase their price cap indices to a level that would enable them to earn 10.25%.); *MCI Telecomms. Corp. v. US WEST Commc'ns, Inc.*, File Nos. E-97-08, E-97-20 through 24, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 9328, 9334, para. 14 (2000) (finding that incumbent LECs' non-cost-based PICC did not violate section 201(b) given the Commission's prior establishment of a safe harbor).

302. With respect to non-incumbent LECs, we note that most interstate rates of such providers are not subject to *ex ante* regulation by the Commission. Thus, we allow those carriers to recover any net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues in any lawful manner.⁷⁸⁹

(ii) Joint Board Referral of Possible Changes to End-User Charges

303. We enlist the aid of the Separations Joint Board to evaluate the need for any additional increases in interstate end-user rates for carriers to recover any net loss in interstate and/or intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues as a result of the reform measures we adopt today. There are a range of widely divergent proposals in the record regarding the need for additional changes to the SLC caps adopted above as part of comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform. We believe that the information and analysis developed by the Separations Joint Board will be extremely valuable in evaluating these issues.

304. Our decision to seek input from the Separations Joint Board is consistent with section 410 of the Act. Section 410(c) of the Act requires the Commission to refer to the Separations Joint Board any changes to the separations rules being considered through a rulemaking proceeding. Although no changes to the separations rules are at issue here, section 410(c) also authorizes the Commission to refer matters “relating to common carrier communications of joint Federal-State concern to a Federal-State Joint Board.”⁷⁹⁰ We believe that recommendations from a Joint Board regarding these issues are important to striking the right balance among the various policy goals at stake, relating to traffic that historically has been regulated, in part, by both federal and state jurisdictions. Moreover, the issue of using revenues from interstate end-user charges to recover intrastate revenue requirements is sufficiently related to the underlying separations requirements themselves that we believe the Separations Joint Board possesses highly relevant expertise to provide recommendations on these issues.⁷⁹¹

305. As described in greater detail below, we refer to the Separations Joint Board certain specific issues regarding possible increases in interstate end-user charges: (i) whether SLC caps should be increased by a fixed amount to recover any net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues; (ii) whether a “flexible” SLC cap should be used in conjunction with an overall benchmark or threshold; or (iii) some combination of those options.

306. *Quantifying Any Increase in End-User Charges.* We refer to the Separations Joint Board several possible approaches for establishing any additional permissible increases in interstate end-user charges, to the extent that any are warranted. First, the Separations Joint Board could directly recommend

⁷⁸⁹ Cf. *Telephone Number Portability*, CC Docket No. 95-116, Third Report and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 11701, 11725–26, 11773–80, paras. 39, 135–49 (1998) (carriers other than incumbent LECs permitted to recover such costs in any lawful manner).

⁷⁹⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 410(c).

⁷⁹¹ The Commission has referred non-separations issues to the Separations Joint Board previously. See, e.g., *MTS and WATS Market Structure and Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket Nos. 78-72, 80-286, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 49 Fed. Reg. 18318, 18318, para. 1 (1984) (referring to a Separations Joint Board issues including: (1) the subscriber line charge for residential and single-line business customers; (2) the transition mechanism for implementing subscriber line charges for these customers; (3) an exemption from the subscriber line charge or other assistance for low income households; and (4) additional assistance for small telephone companies.); *MTS and WATS Market Structure and Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket Nos. 78-72, 80-286, Recommended Decision, 49 Fed. Reg. 48325, 48327, para. 9 n.20 (1984) (noting that “[s]ince these issues do not involve the allocation of costs between the jurisdictions, preparation of a Joint Board recommendation is not mandatory.”).

particular further increases in the SLC caps. Parties here have proposed various levels of SLC cap increases, and different ways to distribute those increases across the different SLC caps. For example, the ICF proposal would result in all SLC caps being increased to \$10.00 by the end of a transition period.⁷⁹² Under the Missoula Plan's initial proposal, SLC cap increases vary for the three "tracks" or categories of carriers defined in the plan.⁷⁹³ ITTA proposes a \$2.25 increase in each SLC cap by the end of a transition period, subject to a benchmark consisting of SLCs, retail rates, and certain other charges.⁷⁹⁴ Other parties, such as CTIA, contend that recovery of lost intercarrier compensation revenues by incumbent LECs should come solely from end-user charges.⁷⁹⁵ In contrast, Free Press, NASUCA, and Ad Hoc propose that SLC caps not be increased at all.⁷⁹⁶

307. Second, the Separations Joint Board could recommend a "flexible" SLC cap that would vary depending upon a carrier's other end-user rates and an overall benchmark or threshold. For example, under a recent Verizon proposal, the 'default' SLC caps all would increase to \$10.00 by the end of a transition period.⁷⁹⁷ However, to the extent that a carrier's relevant end-user rates still are below a proposed benchmark, that carrier's SLC cap would increase as much as needed to reach the benchmark.⁷⁹⁸ Thus, the Separations Joint Board could determine a particular benchmark or threshold and allow the SLC cap to vary for each carrier, depending upon how much "headroom" that carrier has under the benchmark, in light of the carrier's other rates. To the extent that the Separations Joint Board recommends this approach, it should specify which carrier rates should be included in the relevant benchmark or threshold.

308. Third, the Separations Joint Board could recommend some combination of the first and second options.

309. In making recommendations on these issues, the Separations Joint Board will consider the extent to which any recommended increases in interstate end-user charges should be used to offset lost intrastate intercarrier compensation, to the extent that decreases in interstate intercarrier compensation revenues already have been recovered. Most comprehensive reform proposals in the record assume that SLC cap increases will be used to offset at least some intrastate revenues.⁷⁹⁹ Logically, however, another alternative is for any increases in the SLC caps to be used only to recover reductions in interstate intercarrier compensation revenues, and to leave it to each state to address lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues as appropriate under state law.

⁷⁹² ICF ICC FNPRM Comments, App. C at C-7.

⁷⁹³ NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 7.

⁷⁹⁴ ITTA Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2-3.

⁷⁹⁵ CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 10. *See also, e.g.*, Letter from Norina Moy, Director, Government Affairs, Sprint, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 04-36, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Aug. 7, 2008).

⁷⁹⁶ Letter from Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press, Washington Office, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. 2 at 22 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 10; Letter from James S. Blaszk, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 4 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).

⁷⁹⁷ Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6-7.

⁷⁹⁸ Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

⁷⁹⁹ To the extent that interstate end-user charges are used to offset any lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues, we mandate that the states take account of those revenues in their state ratemaking by reducing the intrastate costs or revenue requirement to be recovered through intrastate rates.

310. *Timing.* We direct the Separations Joint Board to issue its recommended decision not later than one year from the effective date of this order. In light of that timetable, we limit the Separations Joint Board to consideration of specific issues we refer in this order.

b. Universal Service Support

(i) Policy Approach

311. We recognize that the actions we take to reform intercarrier compensation will result in reduced revenues for many carriers. As discussed above, carriers have the opportunity to replace certain of those lost revenues through end-user charges.⁸⁰⁰ We also acknowledge that, in the past, the Commission has sometimes provided new universal service support to replace reductions in intercarrier compensation revenues.⁸⁰¹ As the Fifth Circuit has recognized, however, “[b]ecause universal service is funded by a general pool subsidized by all telecommunications providers—and thus indirectly by customers - excess subsidization in some cases may detract from universal service by causing rates unnecessarily to rise, thereby pricing some consumers out of the market.”⁸⁰² Thus, excessive universal service subsidization could, perversely, cause undesirable increases in consumers’ bills.

312. We note that many companies—in particular price cap carriers—consistently are paying dividends and are using the same supported network to provide both regulated services and non-regulated services. Throughout the course of our comprehensive reform proceedings, commenters have identified this as a concern to be weighed carefully when evaluating the need for universal service support. For example, following the 2005 intercarrier compensation Further Notice, CTIA contended that some rural incumbent LECs already “are overcompensated by universal service support” based on evidence that their “stocks generate returns, measured by market-to-book ratios, far in excess of, and exhibit significantly lower risk premiums than, the supposedly more secure RBOCs.”⁸⁰³ Commenters continue to express concern that existing universal service subsidies too often lead simply to “high overhead, sumptuous earnings, [and] rich dividends.”⁸⁰⁴ For example, recent news reports indicate that CenturyTel and Embarq still “remain highly profitable – operating margins for both are 27 percent” notwithstanding any competition they face.⁸⁰⁵ Parties have argued that there continues to be evidence that “[i]nvestors place a higher value on RLEC earnings than on other ILEC earnings. In today’s market, the larger ILECs, which do not generate much of their revenues from federal subsidies, are valued much less highly per dollar of profit.”⁸⁰⁶ While there are “various factors in play” this suggests that “[m]illions of dollars in extra wealth end up in the hands of private investors” by “transferring income from telephone users to phone

⁸⁰⁰ In this order, we do not decide the maximum amount that incumbent LECs ultimately may charge customers in the form of interstate end-user charges. As discussed above, that will depend upon further Commission action based on recommendations from the Joint Board.

⁸⁰¹ See, e.g., *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962; *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd 19613; see also *MAG Second FNPRM*, 19 FCC Rcd 4122.

⁸⁰² *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620.

⁸⁰³ CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 37 citing Western Wireless Reply, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2–5 (filed Dec. 14, 2004) (attaching Economics and Technology, Inc., *Reforming Universal Service Funding for Rural ILECs: An Idea Whose Time Has Come*).

⁸⁰⁴ Thomas W. Hazlett, “*Universal Service Telephone Subsidies: What Does \$7 Billion Buy? (Universal Service Telephone Subsidies)*” at 33, attached to Core Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments, Tab B (quotation omitted).

⁸⁰⁵ *A Fair Copper*, FINANCIAL TIMES, Oct. 28, 2008, at 16.

⁸⁰⁶ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 34.

company stockholders.”⁸⁰⁷ Indeed, commenters note that “some carriers owned by co-ops pay their members annual dividends that exceed their members’ local phone charges.”⁸⁰⁸ In light of these concerns and the mandates of section 254, we agree with commenters that it is not appropriate to require all universal service contributors to pay into the fund so that these carriers can continue to pay dividends.⁸⁰⁹

313. Thus, rather than guaranteeing revenue neutrality, as some commenters propose,⁸¹⁰ we take steps here to ensure that any new universal service subsidies are targeted carefully to situations where they are most crucially needed. In particular, far from the regulated monopolies of years past, significant marketplace developments have resulted in additional revenue opportunities for carriers. As NASUCA observes, “[i]ntercarrier compensation, SLCs and the USF are but three of the numerous spigots from which dollars flow to fill up the telephone companies’ revenue buckets.”⁸¹¹ “By way of illustration,” NASUCA points out that “using their common local loop platform, carriers are now generating billions of dollars in digital subscriber line (“DSL”) revenues that they did not generate five or ten years ago.”⁸¹² Indeed, Time Warner Telecom has pointed to evidence that, for some carriers, “revenue derived from the ILECs’ advanced services more than doubles the revenue from switched access

⁸⁰⁷ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 34, 70. See also Julie Tanner, General Counsel, Chinook Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 08-10, Attach. 1 at 7 (filed Feb. 22, 2008) (arguing that incumbent LECs receiving universal service support “send a comfortable return on investment to investors (and rural cooperative members) with no accountability”); NTCH, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 08-10 at 8 (filed Feb. 22, 2008) (“The object of the [universal service] subsidy is not to prop up high cost legacy companies and technologies or assure their profitability, nor to add to the profits of wireless carriers.”).

⁸⁰⁸ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 70.

⁸⁰⁹ See, e.g., GCI *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 68 (“Even if excessive support does not lead to unaffordable increases in rates for non-subsidized subscribers, requiring those customers to pay more than is necessary in order to excessively subsidize rates for other [services] (or worse yet, to finance high dividend payments to owners of rural ILECs) is not consistent with maintaining just and reasonable rates.”); Time Warner Telecom *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 10 (noting that “RBOCs are already realizing substantial profits from [network] investments, easily compensating for any loss in access payments that they may face” and that “a high [universal service] contribution level may approach the point at which the USF charges imposed upon end-users actually threaten the goal of universal service”).

⁸¹⁰ See, e.g., CenturyTel Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5 (arguing that revenue neutrality should be a fundamental goal of comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from Stuart Polikoff, Director of Government Relations, OPASTCO, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, 06-122, Attach. at 3 (filed Sept. 16, 2008) (arguing that, if the Commission does not adopt the Missoula Plan, it should establish a mechanism for “rural RoR ILECs that allows for full recovery of the revenues lost as a result of the change in intrastate access rates and structure, on a revenue neutral basis.”). See also Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 21 (arguing that decreases in intercarrier compensation rate levels should be offset from the USF or another revenue replacement mechanism).

⁸¹¹ NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸¹² Comments of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates to Refresh the Record, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 96-262, 99-68, 80-256, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, 06-122, 05-195, 03-109, 02-60 at 6 (filed July 7, 2008) (NASUCA July 7, 2008 Supp. Comments). See also *id.* at 10 (“Adding insult to injury, there is no consideration in the Missoula Plan of the additional revenues that ILECs gain from serving new broadband lines which are outside of the current ICC system. In other words, ILECs are losing lines and MOU as consumers drop traditional landlines and add broadband lines to access the Internet. However, the revenue gains from broadband line additions are totally out of the picture as far as the Missoula Plan is concerned.”).

services.”⁸¹³ Thus, Free Press observes that “the unregulated revenue streams of rate-of-return and price cap Local Exchange Carriers serving in high-cost areas” are the “500 pound gorilla in the room,” and it contends that “these revenues” should be “considered in the discussions of ‘need’ for the purposes of universal service.”⁸¹⁴ We agree that such “new and growing source[s] of revenues should mitigate the impact of intercarrier compensation reform for rural and other carriers.”⁸¹⁵

314. We are concerned that universal service support be targeted to those companies whose reduced intercarrier compensation revenues truly are needed to continue providing quality service at affordable rates, and that it should not simply enable the company to pay bigger dividends to shareholders or pad a company’s bottom line. Therefore, for price cap carriers, we adopt the proposal of various commenters to consider all a company’s costs and revenues—both regulated and non-regulated—before providing new universal service support.⁸¹⁶ Thus, price cap incumbent LEC seeking universal service funding to replace lost intercarrier compensation revenues must make such a showing to the Commission when petitioning for such support. We recognize that rate-of-return carriers present a special situation, because under our rules they must be provided an opportunity to earn the rate of return established by our orders.⁸¹⁷ As a result, we do not impose a similar condition before rate-of-return carriers can recover universal service support.

315. We also agree with proposals that carriers fully avail themselves of existing opportunities for end-user recovery before collecting new universal service subsidies.⁸¹⁸ To the extent that regulators

⁸¹³ Time Warner Telecom *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 10 (“According to AT&T, the revenue derived from the ILECs’ advanced services more than doubles the revenue from switched access services. As AT&T stated in its Annual Report, ‘[w]e have found that when customers add broadband to a basic package, they are 40 percent less likely to switch to another provider, and average revenue per customer jumps nearly 120 percent.’ It would make little sense for the ratepayers to subsidize the ILECs’ already profitable business decisions.”).

⁸¹⁴ Free Press Oct. 13, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6. *See also id.* at 6–7 (“While we’d like the Commission to consider a carrier’s entire revenue stream before allowing increased USF support to offset lost access revenues” to the extent that there is such support it “should be confined to rate-of-return carriers only.”).

⁸¹⁵ NASUCA July 7, 2008 Supp. Comments at 6. Indeed, there is some indication that carriers may be earning excessive returns even with respect to their regulated services. *See, e.g.*, GCI *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 66–67 (asserting that ACS of Anchorage has regularly earned returns in excess of an 11.25% rate of return on its regulated interstate switched access services, including 32.12% for 1997–98, 30.26% for 1999–2000; 35.29% for 2001–02; and 15.01% for 2003–04).

⁸¹⁶ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Mary C. Albert, Assistant General Counsel, COMPTTEL, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 04-36 at 1 (filed Oct. 2, 2008); NASUCA July 7, 2008 Supp. Comments at 32–34; Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President of Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 7, 2008).

⁸¹⁷ *See, e.g.*, Free Press Oct. 13, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6–7 (noting that, to the extent that there is universal service support to address any net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues, it “should be confined to rate-of-return carriers only.”). *But see, e.g.*, GCI *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 66–67 (asserting that ACS of Anchorage has regularly earned returns in excess of an 11.25% rate of return on its regulated interstate switched access services).

⁸¹⁸ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 2, 2008); Letter from Robert W. Quinn, Jr., Senior Vice President—Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Kevin Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 07-135, 05-337 at 5–7 (filed July 17, 2008); Letter from Anthony M. Alessi, Senior Counsel, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 3–5 (filed May 23, 2008); Cox *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 12–13.

have determined that rates at a particular level are reasonable, we find it appropriate for carriers to charge those rates in the first instance, rather than pricing below those levels in order to foist recovery of the additional revenues on universal service contributors. Consequently, as additional preconditions for receiving new universal service support, any carrier—whether price cap or rate-of-return—must show that its federal SLC, state SLC (if any), and state retail local service rates are at the maximum levels permitted under existing applicable law.⁸¹⁹

316. In conjunction, we conclude that the conditions we adopt as prerequisites for obtaining new universal service support adequately target that support to carriers with a genuine need without unduly burdening consumers with excessive new universal service contribution burdens.⁸²⁰

(ii) Legal Authority

317. Consistent with our mandate to “ensure that universal service is available at rates that are just, reasonable, and affordable,” we establish a new supplement to IAS and ICLS universal service funding mechanism.⁸²¹ As we did recently in two other Commission orders that reformed interstate switched access charges, we include here additional universal service funding to keep retail rates affordable while ensuring that maintaining affordable rates does not unduly threaten the financial viability of rate-regulated incumbent LECs.⁸²² Our decision to establish a new funding mechanism is also consistent with our general authority under section 4(i) of the Act because it furthers our universal service objectives.⁸²³ Mindful of our obligation to ensure that these new subsidies are made available only where essential, however we make new universal service subsidies available subject to specific conditions that will target the support to only those carriers whose circumstances merit it.

(iii) Access to Universal Service Support

318. As discussed below, we limit access to universal service support to incumbent LECs that meet certain preconditions. As an initial matter, we find that limiting such support to incumbent LECs is consistent with their position in the marketplace and the resulting regulatory constraints on their pricing behavior. In a series of orders in the Competitive Carrier proceeding, the Commission distinguished two kinds of carriers—those with individual market power (dominant carriers) and those without market

⁸¹⁹ Although we do not adopt a particular revenue benchmark here, as some commenters propose, the Joint Board may well recommend such an approach. Thus, depending upon the Joint Board’s proposal, and the Commission’s subsequent action, maximum federal SLCs and/or state retail local rates might be determined, in part, by such a benchmark.

⁸²⁰ For these same reasons, should a carrier agree to (or tariff) intercarrier charges below those that would be required by the reforms adopted in this order, that carrier may not seek to obtain supplemental universal service support based on the difference between the charges it sets and the maximum charges it is allowed to set.

⁸²¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(i) (requiring that “[t]he Commission and the States should ensure that universal service is available at rates that are just, reasonable, and affordable.”); *see also* 47 U.S.C. §254(b)(1) (stating that “[q]uality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates”).

⁸²² *See, e.g., CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 12971, para. 24; *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19669–70, para. 132.

⁸²³ Section 4(i) provides that the Commission may “perform any and all acts, make such rules and regulations, and issue such orders, not inconsistent with this chapter, as may be necessary in the execution of its functions.” 47 U.S.C. § 154(i). Prior to the enactment of section 254 (as part of the 1996 Act), sections 1 and 4(i) provided authority for the Commission’s adoption of a universal service fund. *See Rural Telephone Coalition v. FCC*, 838 F.2d 1307 (D.C. Cir. 1988). *See also New England Telephone and Telegraph Co. v. FCC*, 826 F.2d 1101, 1107 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (describing section 4(i) as a “wide-ranging source of authority”), *cert. denied*, 490 U.S. 1039 (1989).

power (non-dominant carriers).⁸²⁴ The Commission found it appropriate to continue to subject dominant carriers to full regulation under Title II of the Communications Act.⁸²⁵ Incumbent LECs are dominant carriers in their provision of switched access services and, as a result, are subject to rate regulation.⁸²⁶ This rate regulation comes in two forms—regulation of intercarrier charges and regulation of end user charges. The Commission regulates interstate end-user charges of incumbent LECs, while the states generally regulate those carriers' intrastate end-user rates. Unlike incumbent LECs, competitive carriers (e.g., such as competitive LECs, CMRS providers, and non-dominant IXCs) lack market power and are considered non-dominant. As a result, their end-user charges are not subject to comparable rate regulation by the Commission and the states.⁸²⁷

319. Because incumbent LECs, as a result of their classification as dominant carriers, have had their end-user charges regulated (both in terms of rate levels and rate structures), they have less flexibility than other carriers to recover decreased intercarrier revenues through end-user charges. As a result, they are less likely to be able to recover reductions in intercarrier compensation revenues resulting from the actions we take today. Accordingly, we conclude that access to universal service support should be limited to incumbent LECs that meet the necessary preconditions. For this reason, we disagree with parties that advocate making funding available to all carriers, both incumbent and competitive⁸²⁸ or to all

⁸²⁴ *Policy and Rules Concerning Rates for Competitive Common Carrier Services and Facilities Authorizations Therefor*, CC Docket No. 79-252, Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 77 FCC 2d 308 (1979); First Report and Order, 85 FCC 2d 1 (1980) (*Competitive Carrier First Report and Order*); Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 84 FCC 2d 445 (1981); Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 82-187, 47 Fed. Reg. 17308 (1982); Second Report and Order, 91 FCC 2d 59 (1982) (*Competitive Carrier Second Report and Order*); Order on Reconsideration, 93 FCC 2d 54 (1983); Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 48 Fed. Reg. 28292 (1983); Third Report and Order, 48 Fed. Reg. 46791 (1983); Fourth Report and Order, 95 FCC 2d 554 (1983) (*Competitive Carrier Fourth Report and Order*), vacated, *AT&T v. FCC*, 978 F.2d 727 (D.C. Cir. 1992), Fifth Report and Order, 98 FCC 2d 1191 (1984) (*Competitive Carrier Fifth Report and Order*); Sixth Report and Order, 99 FCC 2d 1020 (1985), vacated, *MCI Telecomms. Corp. v. FCC*, 765 F.2d 1186 (D.C. Cir. 1985) (*Competitive Carrier Sixth Report and Order*), *aff'd*, *MCI v. AT&T*, 512 U.S. 218 (1994) (collectively, the *Competitive Carrier* proceeding); see 47 C.F.R. § 61.3(q), (y).

⁸²⁵ *Competitive Carrier First Report and Order*, 85 FCC 2d at 10–11, para. 26.

⁸²⁶ See Section 272(f)(1) *Sunset of the BOC Separate Affiliate and Related Requirements; 2000 Biennial Regulatory Review Separate Affiliate Requirements of Section 64.1903 of the Commission's Rules*, WC Docket No. 02-112; CC Docket No. 00-175, Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 16440, 16484, para. 90 (2007).

⁸²⁷ For instance, the Commission has declined to regulate the SLCs of competitive LECs. See *Cost Review Proceeding for Residential and Single-Line Business Subscriber Line Charge (SLC) Caps; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, Order, 17 FCC Rcd 10868, 10870 n.8 (2002) (subsequent history omitted); see also *CLEC Access Charge Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9955, para. 81 (stating that competitive LECs competing with CALLS incumbent LECs are free to build into their end-user rates a component equivalent to the incumbent LEC's SLC).

⁸²⁸ See, e.g., T-Mobile Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9 & n.14 (arguing that “any ICC replacement mechanism be fully portable to competitive carriers in order to fulfill the principles of competitive and technological neutrality.”). Sprint argues that a fund that compensates only incumbent LECs (and not competitive LECs, wireless carriers, and IXCs) for lost access revenues is “blatantly anti-competitive.” Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President of Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel Corp., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45; WC Docket No. 04-36 at 4 (filed Oct. 1, 2008). Many CMRS carriers maintain that any replacement mechanism must be fully portable to competitive carriers in order to fulfill the principles of competitive and technological neutrality. See, e.g., Leap *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 18; Allied National *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 10; CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 37; SouthernLINC *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 9; RCA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 4; US Cellular

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carriers that currently receive access charge revenues.⁸²⁹ As discussed above, competitive carrier end-user charges are not subject to rate regulation, and those carriers have the opportunity to recover lost access revenue through any legally permissible means.⁸³⁰ We also reject an approach that would limit funding to rural rate-of-return carriers.⁸³¹ Incumbent LECs subject to price cap regulation also are subject to regulatory constraints on end-user charges, and we therefore decline to categorically deny universal service funding to particular types of incumbent LECs.⁸³²

320. Consistent with the policy approach discussed above, we further find it necessary to establish certain requirements that an incumbent LEC must satisfy to receive the new universal service subsidies. Before seeking universal service funding, incumbent LECs must first demonstrate that their end-user charges are at the maximum allowable rate levels. Thus, incumbent LECs must show that they are charging the maximum interstate SLCs permitted under applicable law, and they must make the same showing with respect to any intrastate SLCs. In addition, incumbent LECs must demonstrate that their retail local rates are at the maximum allowable amount based on applicable state regulation. Incumbent LECs operating in states where retail rates are deregulated are not entitled to the new universal service

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ICC FNPRM Comments at 4; T-Mobile *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 26; Dobson and American *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 10.

⁸²⁹ See, e.g., ICF *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 32–33 (stating that any funding should be temporary and limited to those that lose access revenue because of intercarrier compensation reform); USTA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 40 (arguing that funding should not compensate wireless carriers and that it should not be portable); CCAP *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 14 (stating that funding “should not be portable to competitive eligible telecommunications carriers.”); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, Attach. at 7 (filed Oct. 12, 2008) (asserting that funding should compensate only LECs that have lost revenues because of intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from Curt Stamp, President, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, Docket Nos. 01-92, 04-36, 96-45, 05-337, Attach. at 9 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (arguing that the Commission should “limit duplicative networks” by prohibiting wireless carriers and other carriers that do not receive access compensation from benefiting from the fund); Letter from Alex J. Harris, Vice President—Regulatory, Frontier, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 16, 18 (filed May 11, 2005) (proposing that the funding be confined to incumbent LECs in rural study areas but available to all carriers that lost access revenues in non-rural study areas); see also Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel to XO Communications, Kelley Drye & Warren LLP, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122, Attach. at 4 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (contending that revenue replacement funding should either be “competitively neutral” or limited to only rate-of-return carriers).

⁸³⁰ Some competitive LECs claim that, in practice, they have little opportunity to recover their costs because the incumbent LEC, whose prices are regulated, effectively sets a ceiling on the prices they charge. See, e.g., COMPTEL *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 7. Although we acknowledge that, in a homogeneous goods market with a single price, such an argument might be plausible, we do not find such assumptions apply in modern telecommunications markets. In particular, with modern telecommunications technology, carriers are offering an expanding number of new services and marketing them through a variety of bundled service offerings. As a result, telecommunications services are becoming much more of a differentiated product, and competitors have greater opportunity to offer niche services. In light of these developments, we find unpersuasive arguments that competitors are effectively price regulated and thus do not have an opportunity to recover lost access revenues.

⁸³¹ See, e.g., NCTA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 11 (arguing that funding should be limited to “non-Tier 1 rural carrier[s]”); NTCA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 56 (asserting that funding “should be targeted at rural ILECs exclusively”); Comments of the Rural Alliance, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 4 (filed Jun. 27, 2008) (stating that the fund should only compensate rural rate-of-return carriers that lose access revenues).

⁸³² For these same reasons, should a carrier agree to (or tariff) intercarrier charges below those that would be required by the reforms adopted in this order, that carrier may not seek to obtain supplemental universal service support based on the difference between the charges it sets and the maximum charges it is allowed to set.

funding adopted here. In this case, these incumbent LECs will be similarly situated to competitive carriers, because without regulation, they have the opportunity to recover lost access revenues due to intercarrier compensation reform through increased end-user charges.

321. As discussed below, there are additional requirements to qualify for universal funding that vary depending on whether a carrier is subject to price cap or rate-of-return regulation. In either case, the incumbent LEC bears the burden of demonstrating that it is entitled to such funding based on the following criteria.

322. *Rate-of-Return Incumbent LECs.* For incumbent LECs subject to rate-of-return regulation, a carrier may qualify for universal service funding if it can demonstrate that, it will not have a reasonable opportunity to earn its authorized rate of return as a result of its net loss of revenues caused by the changes in intercarrier compensation rates resulting from this order, even after having increased its interstate SLC, state SLC (if any), and state retail local rates to the maximum permitted by applicable law.

323. *Price Cap Incumbent LECs.* For incumbent LECs subject to price cap regulation, a carrier may qualify for universal service funding if it can demonstrate that, as a result of reduced and reformed intercarrier charges, and after accounting for increased end-user charges, it is still unable to earn a “normal profit.” In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission discussed the concept of normal profit and defined it as the “total revenue required to cover all the costs of a firm, including its opportunity costs.”⁸³³

324. As described above, many companies—in particular, price cap carriers—consistently are paying dividends and are using the same supported network to provide both regulated services and non-regulated services.⁸³⁴ We do not find it appropriate to require all universal service contributors to pay into the fund to provide for “high overhead, sumptuous earnings, [and] rich dividends” on the part of these carriers.⁸³⁵ Indeed, as discussed above,⁸³⁶ “[i]ntercarrier compensation, SLCs and the USF are but three of the numerous spigots from which dollars flow to fill up the telephone companies’ revenue buckets”⁸³⁷ in addition to other nonregulated services that use “their common local loop platform.”⁸³⁸ . Therefore, in determining whether this criterion is met, the Commission will evaluate the total costs and total revenues of the company as a whole, including those from both regulated and non-regulated sources.⁸³⁹ While this is a more stringent showing than that required of rate-of-return carriers, we find such differences warranted by the different rate regulation frameworks. In light of our reforms, we find it appropriate, upon request, to allow price cap carriers to make a one-way election of rate-of-return regulation.⁸⁴⁰

⁸³³ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15854, para. 699.

⁸³⁴ *See supra* para. 312.

⁸³⁵ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 33.

⁸³⁶ *See supra* para. 313.

⁸³⁷ NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸³⁸ NASUCA July 7, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸³⁹ The non-regulated costs and revenues to be included in this calculation are those associated with non-regulated activities involving the common or joint use of assets or resources in the provision of both regulated and non-regulated products and services.

⁸⁴⁰ Pursuant to section 61.41(d) of the Commission’s rules, once a carrier is subject to price cap regulation, it may not “withdraw from such regulation.” 47 C.F.R. § 61.41(d); *see also* 47 C.F.R. § 61.41(b), (c) (requiring conversion from rate-of-return to price cap regulation under certain circumstances). Under section 1.3 of the Commission’s

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325. We recognize that the conditions by which we would make universal service funding available may not ensure that all carriers recover all reduced intercarrier compensation revenues that result from the reforms we adopt here. We reject the assertion by some carriers that any revenue replacement mechanism adopted by the Commission in the context of intercarrier compensation reform must ensure absolute revenue neutrality.⁸⁴¹ We agree with commenters who maintain that the Commission has no legal obligation to ensure that carriers recover every dollar in access revenues lost as a result of reform, absent a showing of a taking.⁸⁴² We conclude that certain increased end-user charges and narrowly targeted supplemental IAS or ICLS universal service support will provide a reasonable opportunity to recover revenues lost as a result of our intercarrier compensation reform, and to earn a reasonable profit. Such recovery, however, is not automatic and whether a particular carrier is entitled to any revenue recovery will be considered on a case-by-case basis based on the criteria outlined here.

D. Measures to Ensure Proper Billing

1. Introduction

326. As explained in Part V.A., the current disparity of rates under existing intercarrier compensation mechanisms presents service providers⁸⁴³ with the opportunity and the incentive to misidentify or otherwise conceal the source of traffic to avoid or reduce payments to other service providers. In this Part, we amend our rules to help ensure the ability of service providers to receive the appropriate compensation for traffic terminated on their networks.⁸⁴⁴ More importantly, we believe that

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rules, however, “any provision of the Commission’s rules may be waived by the Commission . . . if good cause therefore is shown.” 47 C.F.R. § 1.3. As interpreted by the courts, this requires that a petitioner demonstrate that “special circumstances warrant a deviation from the general rule and that such a deviation will serve the public interest.” *Northeast Cellular Telephone Co. v. FCC*, 897 F.2d 1164 (D.C. Cir. 1990) (citing *WAIT Radio v. FCC*, 418 F.2d 1153, 1158 (D.C. Cir. 1969)). In other circumstances in the past, the Commission has found good cause to waive section 61.41(d) and other related provisions of the Commission’s rules to enable operations subject to price cap regulation to convert to rate-of-return regulation. See, e.g., *ALLTEL Corp. Petition for Waiver of Section 61.41 of the Commission’s Rules and Application for Transfer of Control*, CCB/CPD No. 99-1, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 14 FCC Rcd. 14191 (1999); *CenturyTel of Northwest Arkansas, LLC et al., Joint Petition for Waiver of Definition of “Study Area” Contained in the Part 36 Appendix-Glossary of the Commission’s Rules, Petition for Waiver of Sections 61.41(c) and 69.3(g)(2) of the Commission’s Rules*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 25437 (Acc. Pol. Div. 2000); *ALLTEL Service Corporation, Petition for Waiver of Section 61.41 of the Commission’s Rules*, Order, 8 FCC Rcd 7054 (Com. Car. Bur. 1993) (granting waiver of sections 61.41(c), (d) of the Commission’s rules). Likewise, as noted above, we find it appropriate, upon request, to allow price cap carriers to make a one-way election of rate-of-return regulation.

⁸⁴¹ See *supra* para. 313.

⁸⁴² See, e.g., Ad Hoc *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 10–11 (arguing that the Commission has no legal obligation to allow revenue neutrality); CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 46; Nextel *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 20; T-Mobile *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 13 (intercarrier compensation was not intended to guarantee an ILEC revenue stream or preserve low local rates for a given industry segment, doing so would perpetuate inefficiencies); NASUCA *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 34–38 (arguing that the Commission is not required to provide for revenue neutrality and that revenue neutrality deviates from the Commission’s past policy).

⁸⁴³ We use the term “service providers” in this section to refer both to carriers that provide telecommunications services and to providers of services that originate calls on IP networks and terminate them on circuit switched networks.

⁸⁴⁴ Parties frequently use the term “phantom traffic” in describing this problem. We will not use that term in the regulations we adopt here because there is no consensus as to how it should be defined, nor is such a definition necessary for us to address the underlying issues faced by service providers in billing for traffic they receive.

the comprehensive compensation reforms we adopt today should significantly reduce service providers' incentives to mislabel traffic or otherwise to try to avoid their financial obligations.⁸⁴⁵ Nonetheless, we balance a desire to facilitate resolution of billing disputes with a reluctance to regulate in areas where industry resolution has, in many cases, proven effective. We find that the requirements we adopt here will facilitate the transfer of information to terminating service providers, and improve their ability to identify providers from whom they receive traffic, without imposing burdensome costs. In the event that traffic does not contain the information required by our rules, or the provider delivering the traffic does not otherwise provide the required call information, for example by providing an industry-standard billing record, to the provider receiving it, we allow the terminating service provider to charge its highest terminating rate to the service provider delivering the traffic. To the extent that a provider acting simply as an intermediate provider (such as a transit provider) becomes subject to a charge under this provision, that intermediate provider can charge the rate it was charged to the provider that delivered the improperly labeled traffic to it. This will ensure that providers are paid for terminating traffic in those instances, and gives financial incentives for upstream providers in the call path to ensure that the traffic includes proper information in the first instance.

2. Background

327. Problems related to traffic arriving for termination with insufficient identification information arise from the technical systems and processes used to create, transfer, and gather intercarrier compensation billing information. To bill for termination of traffic, a terminating service provider must be able to identify the appropriate upstream service provider, and the location of the caller (or a proxy for the caller's location) in order to determine jurisdiction, which is necessary to determine the appropriate charge under existing intercarrier compensation rules.⁸⁴⁶ Calls frequently traverse several networks to connect the calling and called parties. When the originating and terminating networks are not directly connected, as is the case when calls are delivered via tandem transit service, complications with transmitting and receiving billing information related to a call can arise.⁸⁴⁷ Terminating service providers that are not directly connected to originating service providers receive information about calls sent to their networks for termination from two sources: Signaling System 7 (SS7) signaling streams⁸⁴⁸ and industry

⁸⁴⁵ Similarly, we believe that the transition to a uniform intercarrier compensation rate based on the additional costs methodology described above also will address the access stimulation concerns that have recently been raised. *See supra* para. 185. In the unlikely event that service providers persist in these activities, however, we note that the Commission has an open proceeding in which appropriate responses to such actions may be considered. *See generally Access Stimulation NPRM*, 22 FCC Rcd 17989.

⁸⁴⁶ This order initiates a process of unifying terminating intercarrier compensation rates, thereby eliminating the rate distinctions between local and long distance calls. Although knowing the origination point of a call remains important, especially during the period of transition to a unified terminating rate, the origination point is less significant for the purpose of determining intercarrier compensation due.

⁸⁴⁷ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Patrick J. Donovan, Counsel for PacWest Telecomm, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3-4 (filed Oct. 14, 2005).

⁸⁴⁸ SS7 is an out-of-band signaling system that is separate from, but runs parallel to, the public switched telephone network (PSTN) and is used to set up call paths between calling and called parties. The following steps typically occur when SS7 sets up a call path for a wireline LEC to wireline LEC call originating and terminating on the PSTN. When a wireline LEC customer dials a call destined for an end user served by a different wireline LEC, the calling party's LEC determines, based on the dialed digits, that it cannot terminate the call. The SS7 call signaling system then begins the process of identifying a path that the call will take to reach the called party's network. SS7 identifies each service provider in the call path and provides each with the called party's telephone number and other information related to the call, including message type and nature of connection indicators, forward call indicators, calling party's category, and user service information if that information was correctly populated and not altered

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standard billing records,⁸⁴⁹ which typically are provided by the intermediate service provider connecting the terminating provider to the originating provider.⁸⁵⁰

328. One significant source of billing problems is traffic routed through an intermediate provider that does not include calling party number (CPN) or other information identifying the calling party.⁸⁵¹ In addition, commenters describe several examples of other situations where traffic arrives for termination with insufficient information to identify the originating service provider.⁸⁵² Another source of disputes occurs when terminating service providers find differences when attempting to reconcile SS7

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during the signaling process. *See* Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Sept. 13, 2005) (Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter). SS7 was designed to facilitate call routing and was not designed to provide billing information to terminating carriers. *See* Verizon, *Verizon's Proposed Regulatory Action to Address Phantom Traffic* at 5–7 (Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper), attached to Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Dec. 20, 2005). Technical content and format of SS7 signaling is governed by industry standards rather than by Commission rules, although Commission rules require carriers using SS7 to transmit calling party number (CPN) to subsequent carriers on interstate calls where it is technically feasible to do so. 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601.

⁸⁴⁹ Industry standard billing records are the other common source of information that terminating service providers not directly connected to originating service providers receive about calls sent to their networks for termination. Billing records are typically created by a tandem switch that receives a call for delivery to a terminating network via tandem transit service. Tandem switches create billing records by combining CPN or Charge Number (CN) information from the SS7 signaling stream with information identifying the originating service provider to provide terminating service providers with information necessary for billing. *See* Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 5–7. The tandem switch creating the billing record identifies service providers from whom it receives traffic using the trunk group number (TGN) of the trunk on which a call arrives. *See* Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 4; *see also* Letter from Glenn T. Reynolds, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, BellSouth, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 5 (filed Jan. 12, 2006) (BellSouth Jan. 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter). The tandem switch translates the TGN into one of two codes identifying the originating the service provider: Carrier Identification Code (CIC) if the originating service provider is an IXC, or Operating Company Number (OCN) for non-IXC calls. The appropriate CIC or OCN is then added, by the tandem switch, if it is equipped to record such information, to the billing record for the call, which is then forwarded to the terminating service provider. *See* Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 5–7; *see also* Verizon *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 16. Service providers delivering billing records typically use the Exchange Message Interface (EMI) format created and maintained by the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions Ordering and Billing Forum (ATIS/OBF), an industry standards setting group. *See* ATIS Exchange Message Interface 22 Revision 2, ATIS Document number 0406000-02200 (July 2005).

⁸⁵⁰ *See* Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 5–7.

⁸⁵¹ The Commission recognized that the ability of service providers to identify the provider to bill appropriate intercarrier compensation payments depends, in part, on billing records generated by intermediate service providers. Thus, the Commission sought comment on whether current rules and industry standards create billing records that are sufficiently detailed to permit determinations of the appropriate compensation due. *See Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4743, para. 133.

⁸⁵² For example, when a call bound for a number that has been ported to a different service provider is delivered without the responsible service provider performing a local number portability (LNP) query, the call may be delivered to the wrong end office and then may be re-routed to a tandem switch for delivery to the correct end office. *See* Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 18–19. According to Verizon, neither the end office that re-routes the call nor the tandem switch receiving the rerouted call are able to route the call over an access trunk; the call must be sent over a local interconnection trunk. *See id.* In this scenario, the terminating carrier may have difficulty billing the appropriate charges to the IXC that sent the call.

data they record and billing records they receive.⁸⁵³ Such a reconciliation process will likely be inexact, because SS7 streams were not designed to provide billing information.⁸⁵⁴ Similarly, at least one commenter asserts that “problems arise” when terminating service providers “second guess tandem traffic reports and generate their own billing statements for carriers with whom they are indirectly interconnected.”⁸⁵⁵ In addition to unidentifiable traffic caused by unintended network routing circumstances, as described above, several commenters allege that they receive traffic in which the billing information intentionally has been altered or stripped before the call reaches the terminating service provider.⁸⁵⁶ Indeed, numerous parties have described experiencing problems of the sort described above.⁸⁵⁷ Several proposals suggesting how the Commission should address this problem have been filed in the record in this proceeding in recent years.⁸⁵⁸ Recently, the United States Telecom Association (USTelecom) filed a proposal that appears to enjoy the broadest industry support of any filed to date.⁸⁵⁹ For reasons detailed below, we agree that traffic that lacks sufficient information to enable proper billing of intercarrier compensation charges is a problem. Consequently, we take steps to address the problem

⁸⁵³ See Letter from Stephen T. Perkins, General Counsel, Cavalier Telephone, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1 (filed Sept. 29, 2005). See also Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 10 (filed Oct. 21, 2005).

⁸⁵⁴ See Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President—Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 5 (filed Aug. 1, 2005); Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁸⁵⁵ Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3.

⁸⁵⁶ See, e.g., Balhoff and Rowe *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 10; California Small LECs *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 9; ITCI *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 7; Montana Independent Telecommunications Systems (MITS) et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 14, 20; MITS et al. *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 23–24, 33; NECA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 16; Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 108; SureWest *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7; TDS *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 10; BellSouth Jan. 11, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸⁵⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Glenn T. Reynolds, Vice President, Policy, USTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Feb. 12, 2008) (USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal). See *Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, NECA Petition for Interim Order (filed Jan. 22, 2008) (NECA Petition).

⁸⁵⁸ See, e.g., NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2; Letter from Supporters of the Missoula Plan to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Nov. 6, 2006) (Missoula Plan Supporters Nov. 6 *Ex Parte* Letter or Missoula Plan Call Signaling Proposal); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Apr. 4, 2006); Letter from Jeffrey S. Lanning, Associate General Counsel, USTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Mar. 30, 2006) (MCC/USTA Proposal); Letter from Karen Brinkmann, Attorney for the MidSize Carrier Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Mar. 31, 2006) (supporting MCC/USTA Proposal).

⁸⁵⁹ See USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal; see also Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Sept. 24, 2008); Letter from Curt Stamp, President, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2, filed Sept. 19, 2008); Letter from Eric Einhorn, Vice president, Federal Government Affairs, Windstream, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 et al. (filed Sept. 24, 2008); Comments of Windstream, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 04-36, 06-122, 05-337 at 16 (filed Aug. 21, 2008); Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Aug. 6, 2008); Letter from Henry Hultquist, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed July 17, 2008).

and help ensure proper functioning of the intercarrier compensation system.⁸⁶⁰

3. Discussion

329. We amend our rules as described below to facilitate the transfer of necessary information to terminating service providers, particularly in cases where traffic is delivered through indirect interconnection arrangements. These new requirements will assist in determining the appropriate service provider to bill for any call. We note that these new requirements generally reflect standard industry practice, as recommended by several commenters.⁸⁶¹ We also amend our rules to establish payment obligations for service providers that send traffic that lacks the information required by our amended call signaling rules to intermediate or terminating service providers or that does not otherwise provide the required call information to the recipient. Incorporating these practices into our rules will facilitate resolution of billing disputes, will provide incentives to help prevent manipulation or deletion of information from signaling streams, and will provide incentives for service providers to ensure that traffic traversing their networks is properly labeled and identifiable, in compliance with the rules we adopt in this order.⁸⁶²

a. Signaling Information

330. We agree with the USTelecom Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal concerning the importance of call signaling obligations.⁸⁶³ CPN is a critical component of call signaling information. When CPN is populated in the SS7 stream by an originating service provider and passed, unaltered, along a call path to a terminating service provider, the terminating provider can use the CPN information to help determine the applicable intercarrier compensation.

331. We agree with commenters⁸⁶⁴ that assert that the best way to ensure that complete and accurate information about a call gets to the terminating service provider for that call is to require providers to populate, and to prohibit them from stripping or altering, CPN information in the SS7 call signaling stream.⁸⁶⁵ In an environment where numerous service providers may be involved in the

⁸⁶⁰ The rules we adopt herein reflect the Commission's determinations regarding how to address call signaling problems as they relate to unidentified and unbillable traffic. Therefore, we disagree with commenters requesting that we adopt alternative proposals such as the NECA petition or the Missoula Plan Call Signaling Proposal. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Robert F. Aldrich, Counsel to the American Public Communications Council, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 (filed Oct. 21, 2008).

⁸⁶¹ *See, e.g.,* Letter from Paul Garnett, Director, Regulatory Policy, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3 (filed Jan. 3, 2006); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Mar. 30, 2006).

⁸⁶² The rules we amend in this order were adopted in a 1995 order addressing Caller ID services. *See Rules and Policies Regarding Calling Number Identification Service – Caller ID*, CC Docket No. 91-281, Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, Second Report and Order and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 10 FCC Rcd 11700, 11728, para. 79 (1995) (*Caller ID Order*). In the *Caller ID Order*, the Commission found, inter alia, that the CPN based services to which the rules adopted apply are “jurisdictionally mixed” and the Commission therefore preempted an inconsistent state statute. *Id.* at 11722–23, paras. 62, 85. For these same reasons, to the extent the amendments we make to our call signaling rules in this order conflict with any current or future state statutes, those statutes are preempted. *See id.* at 11728–34, paras. 78–95.

⁸⁶³ *See* USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal.

⁸⁶⁴ *See, e.g.,* USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal; NECA Petition.

⁸⁶⁵ Because we agree that requiring population of CPN is the best way to ensure that complete and accurate information about a call gets to the terminating service provider for that call, we disagree with proposals to exclude

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completion of a call, this SS7 signaling information must be passed, unaltered, from one to the next in a call path until it reaches the terminating service provider. We therefore modify our rules to prohibit stripping or altering information in the SS7 call signaling stream. We do not, however, make any changes to the designation of particular fields as mandatory or optional, nor do we otherwise intend to change industry standards that govern the population of the SS7 signaling stream.⁸⁶⁶

332. The record also makes clear that we must expand the scope of our existing rule regarding passing CPN,⁸⁶⁷ which currently applies only to service providers using SS7 and only to interstate traffic. We therefore extend these requirements to all traffic originating or terminating on the PSTN, including jurisdictionally intrastate traffic.⁸⁶⁸ We also amend our rules to require service providers using MF signaling to pass CPN information, or the charge number (CN) if it differs from the CPN, in the Multi Frequency Automatic Number Identification (MF ANI) field.⁸⁶⁹ This rule change will ensure that information identifying the calling party is included in call signaling information for all calls.

333. In addition, we agree with commenters who suggest that our call signaling rules should address CN as well as CPN.⁸⁷⁰ Verizon states that, in accordance with industry practice, the CN parameter is not populated in the SS7 stream when it is the same as CPN, but that when the CN parameter is populated, CN is included in billing records in place of CPN.⁸⁷¹ We therefore clarify that populating a CN field with information other than the charge number to be billed for the call, consistent with industry standards, falls within this prohibition. This clarification is not intended to disrupt standard industry practice with regard to using CN in the signaling stream and in billing records. But, we also clarify that the prohibition on altering or stripping signaling information applies to CN as well as CPN. The prohibition on altering or stripping SS7, MF ANI, or CN signaling information obligates intermediate service providers to pass, unaltered, whatever signaling information they receive.

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certain types of traffic from this requirement. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Jim Kohlenberger, Executive Director, The VON Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket 04-36 at 6 (filed Oct. 28, 2008). We note that parties are free to contract with third parties to ensure that these requirements are met. *Cf., e.g., LNP Order*, 22 FCC Rcd 19531 (holding that, where interconnected VoIP providers rely on other carriers for access to numbers, both parties must take the steps needed to comply with the number porting obligations established in that order); *Interconnected VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 10245 (finding that interconnected VoIP providers might elect to comply with their 911 obligations in part by relying on services provided by third parties).

⁸⁶⁶ We take a cautious approach in considering any new or revised signaling requirements. SS7 was designed to facilitate call setup and routing, and action we take here is not intended to interfere with the ability of calls to reach their intended recipient. As Verizon Wireless explains, certain SS7 fields are considered mandatory, while others (including CPN, CN, and JIP) are considered optional. *See Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 Ex Parte Letter* at 2. The distinction is significant, because a call will not be completed if a mandatory field has not been populated. *See Letter from Thomas Goode, Associate General Counsel, ATIS, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. (filed Feb. 10, 2006)*. Although CPN is considered optional in the industry standard, our rules, before and after amendment pursuant to this order, require service providers to pass CPN in specified circumstances. *See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601*.

⁸⁶⁷ *See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601*.

⁸⁶⁸ *See supra* note 862.

⁸⁶⁹ *See Missoula Plan* at 56; Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel for XO, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 11–12 (filed Feb. 14, 2006).

⁸⁷⁰ *See, e.g., NECA Petition*; Letter from Cheryl A. Tritt, Counsel for T-Mobile USA, Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 6 (filed Feb. 2, 2006); Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 8–10.

⁸⁷¹ *See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper* at 8.

334. The call signaling rules we adopt in this order will help ensure that signaling information is passed completely and accurately to terminating service providers. These rules are not intended to affect existing agreements between service providers regarding how to “jurisdictionalize” traffic when traditional call identifying parameters are missing, as long as such agreements are not inconsistent with the rules adopted in this order.

335. We find that some very limited exceptions to these new rules are needed. We agree with Verizon, for example, that a limited exception is needed in situations where industry standards permit, or even require, some alteration in signaling information by an intermediate service provider.⁸⁷² As noted above, we do not intend to change standard industry practice with respect to the content of the signaling stream. Service providers that follow standard industry practice in this way will not be considered in violation of the prohibition on altering signaling information. We also note that the exemptions from our existing call signaling requirements described in section 64.1601(d) remain necessary for their limited purposes, and will continue to apply.⁸⁷³

b. Financial Responsibilities

336. We also impose financial responsibilities that will work in step with our amended signaling rules to give service providers financial incentives to ensure that they, and the providers whose traffic they carry, comply with the signaling obligations. We find that these requirements will significantly reduce any existing incentives to avoid compliance by substantially eliminating any financial benefits of noncompliance.

337. We agree with commenters who propose that we permit service providers that terminate traffic lacking sufficient information to bill the service provider that delivered the traffic to the terminating provider.⁸⁷⁴ In particular, we require that a service provider, e.g., transit provider, delivering traffic that lacks any of the signaling information required by our rules as amended herein, or that does not otherwise provide the required call information, for example by providing an industry standard billing record, to the recipient, must pay the terminating service provider’s highest termination rate in effect at the time the traffic is delivered to the terminating service provider.⁸⁷⁵ By making intermediate service

⁸⁷² See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 9–10. For example, Verizon states that on a call to a party that has forwarded its number, the called party’s service provider will replace the caller’s CN with the called party’s CN before sending the call to the forward location.

⁸⁷³ 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601(d).

⁸⁷⁴ See, e.g., EPG Proposal at 2 (“All messages that are not properly labeled would be billed at the highest prevailing intercarrier compensation rate to the interconnecting carrier delivering the traffic.”); ARIC Plan at 55; CenturyTel ICC FNRPM Comments at 6; Hickory ICC FNRPM Comments at 2; JSI ICC FNRPM Comments at 4–6; Colorado Telecom Ass’n et al. ICC FNRPM Reply at 13, TDS Telecom ICC FNRPM Reply 14, JSI Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments at 4–6; RICA Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments at 2–3; TexalTel Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments at 7–8; Cavalier Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments at 2–3; PAPUC Missoula Phantom Traffic Reply at 8.

⁸⁷⁵ We agree with commenters who note that intermediate service providers that provide, to subsequent service providers in a call path, information sufficient to identify the provider that delivered the traffic to the intermediate provider should not be responsible for terminating intercarrier payments for that traffic. See, e.g., Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President – Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Chairman Kevin Martin et al., FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); Letter from Mark D. Schneider, Counsel, Neutral Tandem, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel, Zayo Group, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008).

providers financially responsible in these circumstances, we ensure that service providers are compensated for terminating traffic.

338. We also permit those intermediate service providers, in turn, to pass along the termination charges to the provider that delivered the applicable traffic to them, in addition to any otherwise-applicable charge for their services. We agree with commenters that the providers delivering traffic are in a better position than the terminating service provider “to know which carriers are routing improperly or incompletely identified traffic”⁸⁷⁶ and to recover the termination charges from them. Moreover, by permitting intermediate service providers to pass along those charges on top of their otherwise-applicable rates, we create disincentives for service providers who might otherwise originate, or act as a “pass through” for mislabeled or unidentifiable traffic.

339. We are unpersuaded by the objections to imposing such financial obligations on intermediate service providers.⁸⁷⁷ For example, one objection is based on the assumption that transit providers will be the only intermediate service providers subject to such liability, and will be unable to pass along those charges.⁸⁷⁸ The financial responsibility under this order for traffic that lacks sufficient billing information is not limited to transit service providers, however. Rather, any service provider that passes traffic lacking sufficient billing information becomes responsible for intercarrier payments to the receiving provider. Additionally, we expressly permit service providers subject to this charge to pass it along to the service provider that delivered the applicable traffic to them.

340. Another commenter objects to any proposal that “gives . . . [ILECs] the authority to impose new rates based on their own interpretation of the sufficiency of data received or interpretation of jurisdictional parameters.”⁸⁷⁹ Under our amended rules, service providers will not be able to impose rates based on their own interpretation of the sufficiency of data received. Instead, our amended rules set the standard for what information must be included and passed.

341. We also disagree with commenters who suggest that imposing liability on intermediate service providers implies that the problem is the result of transiting service providers altering call detail information.⁸⁸⁰ The financial obligations we impose on intermediate service providers are triggered by passing traffic that does not comply with the call signaling rules, regardless of whether the traffic was originated or altered by the passing service provider. Accordingly, any service provider, not just a provider who stripped or altered traffic signaling, who is not taking steps to ensure that traffic carried on their network is properly labeled and identifiable could be held responsible for payment by the provider to whom it delivered traffic.

342. In addition to call signaling, the USTelecom Feb. 12, 2008 proposal seeks Commission action related to routing traffic, local number portability queries, and providing incumbent LECs with

⁸⁷⁶ ARIC Plan at 55.

⁸⁷⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed July 7, 2007); Letter from Charles W. McKee, Director—Government Affairs, Federal Regulatory, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Apr. 20, 2007) (Sprint Nextel April 20, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Charon Phillips, Director—Government Affairs, Federal Regulatory, Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Mar. 13, 2007).

⁸⁷⁸ See, e.g., Verizon *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 5–6.

⁸⁷⁹ See Sprint Nextel April 20, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁸⁸⁰ See Missoula Plan Supporters *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 11–12.

certain rights with regard to the section 251 and 252 negotiation and arbitration processes.⁸⁸¹ Although a broad cross section of the industry supports the USTelecom Feb. 12, 2008 proposal in its entirety, several commenters objected to the section 251 and 252 negotiation and arbitration provisions.⁸⁸² In light of the lack of consensus on some of these issues and the changes to the intercarrier compensation system adopted in this order we are not persuaded that the other specific actions sought in the USTelecom Feb 12, 2008 proposal are necessary at this time.⁸⁸³

VI. FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

A. Universal Service Contributions

343. As we explain above, an assessment methodology based solely on telephone numbers would not require certain business services to equitably contribute to the universal service fund.⁸⁸⁴ We, therefore, determine that universal service contributions for business services will be based on connections as opposed to numbers. We seek comment on how best to implement a connection-based mechanism for business services, and whether that mechanism should be based solely on connections or on a combination of Assessable Numbers and connections.

344. We also seek comment on expanding our NRUF data collection to all providers who are required to contribute to the universal service fund based on Assessable Numbers. At present, our NRUF reporting rules require “reporting carriers” to file reports. A “reporting carrier” is defined as “a telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the NANPA, a Pooling Administrator or another telecommunications carrier.”⁸⁸⁵ “Reporting carriers” file reports regarding six categories of numbers, the descriptions of some of which refer to “telecommunications carriers” or “telecommunications services.”⁸⁸⁶ We seek comment on whether we should amend our rules to require all providers who assign numbers or otherwise make numbers available to end users to file NRUF reports. Would such an expansion assist the Commission and the fund administrator with monitoring and enforcing universal service contribution requirements? What modifications would the Commission need to make to its rules to effectuate this kind of policy change?

⁸⁸¹ See USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal.

⁸⁸² See, e.g., Letter from Brad Mutschelknaus, Counsel to Broadview Networks et al. to Kevin J. Martin et al., FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 22, 2008); Letter from Henry T. Kelly, Counsel to Peerless Networks to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92 et al. (filed Sept. 16, 2008); Letter from Charles W. McKee, Director—Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Apr. 16, 2008); Letter from Thomas Cohen, Edward A. Yorkgitis, Jr., Counsel for NuVox Communications et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Mar. 11, 2008); Letter from Daniel L. Brenner, Senior Vice President, Law and Regulatory Policy, NCTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Feb. 29, 2008); Letter from Paul Garnett, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Feb. 25, 2008).

⁸⁸³ The USTA Feb 12, 2008 Proposal also sought certain enforcement commitments related to our call signaling rules. In this regard, USTA’s proposal did not seek anything beyond the ordinary course of business. As with any of our rules, the Commission is committed to resolving complaints expeditiously and will not hesitate to initiate enforcement proceedings against rule violators.

⁸⁸⁴ See *supra* para. 130.

⁸⁸⁵ 47 C.F.R. § 52.12(f)(2).

⁸⁸⁶ E.g., 47 C.F.R. § 52.12(e)(i) (“*Administrative numbers* are numbers used by telecommunications carriers”); *id.* § 52.12(e)(v) (“*Intermediate numbers* are numbers that are made available . . . for the purpose of providing telecommunications service”).

B. Intercarrier Compensation Further Notice

345. In this Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Further Notice) we seek comment on certain additional issues not resolved in our accompanying order.

346. *Originating Access.* In this order, we conclude that retention of originating access charges would be inconsistent with our new regulatory approach to intercarrier compensation.⁸⁸⁷ Accordingly, we find that originating charges for all telecommunications traffic subject to our comprehensive intercarrier compensation framework must be eliminated by the conclusion of the transition to the new regime. We seek comment on issues relating to the transition for the elimination of originating access.

347. *Transit Traffic.* Transiting occurs when two carriers that are not directly interconnected exchange traffic by routing the traffic through an intermediary carrier's network.⁸⁸⁸ We request comment on whether the reforms we adopt today necessitate the adoption of any rules or guidelines governing transit service.

348. *Universal Service Rules Applicable to Rate-of-Return Carriers.* In this order, we conclude that under certain circumstances, rate-of-return carriers will be able to receive universal service support to recover net reduced revenues from intercarrier compensation as a result of reforms adopted in this order that they do not otherwise recover through SLC increases or other revenue increases. We seek comment on what rule changes are necessary to allow rate-of-return carriers to receive universal service support in this manner.

349. *Parts 51, 54, 61 and 69.* Part 51 of the Commission's rules contain requirements applicable to interconnection, including reciprocal compensation.⁸⁸⁹ Part 54 of the Commission's rules describe universal service programs and administration.⁸⁹⁰ Part 61 of the Commission's rules prescribes the framework for the initial establishment of and subsequent revisions to tariff publications.⁸⁹¹ Part 69 of the rules governs the Commission's access charge regulations for interstate or foreign access services.⁸⁹² We solicit comment on the need to revise the rules set forth in Parts 51, 54, 61 and/or 69, or any other rules, as a result of the reforms we adopt today.

VII. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A. Ex Parte Presentations

350. The rulemaking this Further Notice initiates shall be treated as a "permit-but-disclose" proceeding in accordance with the Commission's ex parte rules.⁸⁹³ Persons making oral ex parte presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentations must contain summaries of the

⁸⁸⁷ See *supra* para. 229.

⁸⁸⁸ *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4737-38, para. 120. Typically, the intermediary carrier is an incumbent LEC and the transited traffic is routed from the originating carrier through the incumbent LEC's tandem switch to the terminating carrier. The intermediary (transiting) carrier then charges a fee for use of its facilities. See *id.* We note that carriers have various agreements governing the provision of transit traffic. See *id.*

⁸⁸⁹ See 47 C.F.R. Part 51.

⁸⁹⁰ See 47 C.F.R. Part 54.

⁸⁹¹ See 47 C.F.R. Part 61.

⁸⁹² See 47 C.F.R. Part 69.

⁸⁹³ 47 C.F.R. § 1.200 *et seq.*

substance of the presentations and not merely a listing of the subjects discussed. More than a one or two sentence description of the views and arguments presented generally is required.⁸⁹⁴ Other requirements pertaining to oral and written presentations are set forth in section 1.1206(b) of the Commission's rules.⁸⁹⁵

B. Comment Filing Procedures

351. Pursuant to sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules,⁸⁹⁶ interested parties may file comments and reply comments regarding the Further Notice on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this document. **All filings related to the intercarrier compensation Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking should refer to CC Docket No. 01-92. All filings related to the universal service contributions Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking should refer to WC Docket No. 06-122. All filings related to numbering reporting issues of the universal service contributions Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking should refer to CC Docket No. 99-200.** Comments may be filed using: (1) the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS), (2) the Federal Government's e-Rulemaking Portal, or (3) by filing paper copies. *See* Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings, 63 FR 24121 (1998).

352. Electronic Filers: Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the ECFS: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/> or the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Filers should follow the instructions provided on the website for submitting comments.

353. ECFS filers must transmit one electronic copy of the comments for CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-200, or WC Docket No. 06-122, respectively. In completing the transmittal screen, filers should include their full name, U.S. Postal Service mailing address, and the applicable docket number. Parties may also submit an electronic comment by Internet e-mail. To get filing instructions, filers should send an e-mail to ecfs@fcc.gov, and include the following words in the body of the message, "get form." A sample form and directions will be sent in response.

354. Paper Filers: Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and four copies of each filing. Filings can be sent by hand or messenger delivery, by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail (although we continue to experience delays in receiving U.S. Postal Service mail). All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Marlene H. Dortch, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554.

355. The Commission's contractor will receive hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary at 236 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Suite 110, Washington, D.C. 20002. The filing hours at this location are 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. All hand deliveries must be held together with rubber bands or fasteners. Any envelopes must be disposed of before entering the building.

356. Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9300 East Hampton Drive, Capitol Heights, MD 20743.

357. U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail should be addressed to 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington D.C. 20554.

358. Parties should send a copy of their filings in CC Docket No. 01-92 to Victoria Goldberg, Pricing Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-

⁸⁹⁴ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206(b)(2).

⁸⁹⁵ 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206(b).

⁸⁹⁶ 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.415, 1.419.

A266, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

359. Parties should send a copy of their filings in WC Docket No. 06-122 to Jennifer McKee, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A423, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

360. Parties should send a copy of their filings in WC Docket No. 99-200 to Marilyn Jones, Competition Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A423, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

361. Documents in CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-200, and WC Docket No. 06-122 will be available for public inspection and copying during business hours at the FCC Reference Information Center, Portals II, 445 12th Street S.W., Room CY-A257, Washington, D.C. 20554. The documents may also be purchased from BCPI, telephone (202) 488-5300, facsimile (202) 488-5563, TTY (202) 488-5562, e-mail fcc@bcpiweb.com.

C. Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

362. As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980,⁸⁹⁷ the Commission has prepared an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on small entities of the policies and rules addressed in this document. The IRFA is set forth in Appendix E. Written public comments are requested on this IRFA. Comments must be identified as responses to the IRFA and must be filed by the deadlines for comments on the Notice provided on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this Notice.

D. Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

363. Pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA),⁸⁹⁸ the Commission has prepared a Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (FRFA) for the Report and Order concerning the possible significant economic impact on small entities by the policies and actions considered in the Report and Order.

E. Paperwork Reduction Act

364. This document contains proposed new or modified information collection requirements. The Commission, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork burdens, invites the general public and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to comment on the information collection requirements contained in this document, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13. In addition, pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107-

⁸⁹⁷ See 5 U.S.C. § 603.

⁸⁹⁸ See 5 U.S.C. § 603. The RFA, *see* U.S.C. § 601 *et seq.*, has been amended by the Contract with America Advancement Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-121, 110 Stat. 847 (1996) ("CWAAA"). Title II of the CWAAA is the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 ("Small Business Act").

198,⁸⁹⁹ we seek specific comment on how we might “further reduce the information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees.”

F. Accessible Formats

365. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice) or 202-418-0432 (TTY). Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations for filing comments (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by e-mail: FCC504@fcc.gov; phone: 202-418-0530 or TTY: 202-418-0432.

G. Congressional Review Act

366. The Commission will include a copy of this Order on Remand and Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in a report to be sent to Congress and the Government Accountability Office pursuant to the Congressional Review Act. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 801(a)(1)(A).

VIII. ORDERING CLAUSES

367. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that, pursuant to Sections 1–4, 201–209, 214, 218–220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, and 503 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and Sections 601 and 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151–154, 157 nt, 201–209, 214, 218–220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, 503, and sections 1.1, 1.411–1.429, and 1.1200–1.1216 of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.1, 1.411–1.429, 1.1200–1.1216, the ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING ARE ADOPTED.

368. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Parts [] of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. § [] are AMENDED as set forth in Appendix A hereto.

369. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, in light of the opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in *WorldCom v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429 (D.C. Cir. 2002), we consider our obligations met from the writ of mandamus issued in *In re Core Communications, Inc. on Petition for Writ of Mandamus to the Federal Communications Commission*, D.C. Cir. No. 07-1446 (decided July 8, 2008).

370. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING shall become effective 30 days after publication of the text of a summary thereof in the Federal Register, pursuant to 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.4, 1.13, except for the information collections, which require approval by OMB under the PRA and which shall become effective after the Commission publishes a notice in the Federal Register announcing such approval and the relevant effective date(s).

371. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Commission’s Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, SHALL SEND a copy of this REPORT AND ORDER AND ORDER ON REMAND, including the Final Regulatory Flexibility Analyses and Final Regulatory Flexibility Certifications, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

372. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Commission’s Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, SHALL SEND a copy of this FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING, including the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analyses and Initial Regulatory Flexibility Certifications, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

⁸⁹⁹ *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(4).

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary

APPENDIX B

Narrow Universal Service Reform Proposal

In the Matter of)	
)	
High-Cost Universal Service Support	)	WC Docket No. 05-337
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service	)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Universal Service Contribution Methodology	)	WC Docket No. 06-122

REPORT AND ORDER

Adopted: [insert date]

Released: [insert date]

By the Commission

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In enacting the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act),¹ Congress sought to introduce competition into local telephone service, which traditionally was provided through regulated monopolies. Recognizing that in introducing such competition, it was threatening the implicit subsidy system that had traditionally supported universal service, it directed the Commission to reform its universal service program to make support explicit and sustainable in the face of developing competition.

2. The resulting development of competition and the rapid development of Internet protocol (IP)-based networks have challenged the outdated regulatory assumptions underlying our universal service programs, forcing us to reassess our existing approaches. We have seen unprecedented growth in the universal service fund, driven in significant part by increased support for competitive eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs). The growth of competition also has eroded the universal service contribution base as the prices for interstate and international services have dropped, and, with the growth of the Internet, the very definition of interstate and international traffic has been called into question.

3. At the same time, universal service distributions have continued to grow to support legacy telecommunications networks. In many cases, support is used to offset the increasing revenue losses to these incumbent carriers as the gap between legacy technology and more efficient technologies has widened. Moreover, our method of distributing support even to new competitive carriers is not designed to bring those competitive choices to all Americans, but, rather, it has created incentives for multiple competitive carriers to avail themselves of “identical support” in areas where the legacy network provider receives the largest subsidies.

4. In short, we are spending more and more of contributors’ universal service dollars, with less and less to show for it. That stops today. Today we adopt a comprehensive approach that stabilizes the universal service fund and directs universal service dollars to the most efficient provider so that Americans in rural and high-cost areas can have access to reasonably comparable services at affordable rates. First, we cap the high-cost fund, and move expeditiously to adopt a reverse auction approach to better target high-cost support to high-cost areas. Then we broaden and stabilize our universal service contribution base through equitable and non-discriminatory contributions.

II. REFORM OF HIGH-COST UNIVERSAL SERVICE SUPPORT

A. Background

5. The 1996 Act amended the Communications Act of 1934 (the Act) with respect to the provision of universal service.² Congress sought to preserve and advance universal service, while at the same time opening all telecommunications markets to competition.³ Section 254(b) of the Act directs the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) and the Commission to base policies for the preservation and advancement of universal service on several general principles, plus other principles that the Commission may establish.⁴ Among other things, section 254(b) directs that there should be specific,

¹ Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996) (1996 Act).

² 47 U.S.C. § 254 (added by the 1996 Act).

³ 47 U.S.C. § 254.

⁴ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b).

predictable, and sufficient federal and state universal service support mechanisms; quality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates; and access to advanced telecommunications and information services should be provided in all regions of the nation.⁵

6. The Commission implemented the universal service provisions of the 1996 Act in the 1997 *Universal Service First Report and Order*.⁶ In considering methods to determine universal service support in rural, insular, and high-cost areas, the Commission examined the use of competitive bidding, and identified several advantages of competitive bidding as a method for allocating high-cost universal service support.⁷ First, the Commission found that “a compelling reason to use competitive bidding is its potential as a market-based approach to determining universal service support, if any, for any given area.”⁸ Second, “by encouraging more efficient carriers to submit bids reflecting their lower costs, another advantage of a properly structured competitive bidding system would be its ability to reduce the amount of support needed for universal service.”⁹ Despite these advantages, the Commission determined that the record at the time was insufficient to support adoption of a competitive bidding mechanism.¹⁰ Moreover, the Commission found it unlikely that competitive bidding mechanisms would be useful at that time because there likely would be no competition in a significant number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas in the near future.¹¹ The Commission, therefore, declined to adopt a competitive bidding mechanism at that time, but found that competitive bidding warranted further consideration as a potential mechanism for determining levels of high-cost support in the future.¹²

7. Pursuant to section 254(e) of the Act, an entity must be designated as an ETC to receive high-cost universal service support.¹³ ETCs may be incumbent local exchange carriers (LECs), or non-incumbent LECs, which are referred to as “competitive ETCs.”¹⁴ Under the existing high-cost support distribution mechanism, incumbent LEC ETCs receive high-cost support for their intrastate services

⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1), (2), (5).

⁶ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, 8780-88, paras. 1-20 (1997) (*Universal Service First Report and Order*) (subsequent history omitted).

⁷ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320.

⁸ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320 (agreeing with the Joint Board). The Commission also agreed with the Joint Board that “competitive bidding is consistent with section 254, and comports with the intent of the 1996 Act to rely on market forces and to minimize regulation.” *Id.* at 8951, para. 325.

⁹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320 (“In that regard, the bidding process should also capture the efficiency gains from new technologies or improved productivity, converting them into cost savings for universal service.”).

¹⁰ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8949-50, paras. 322-23. Only GTE had proposed a detailed competitive bidding plan, which it characterized as an outline rather than a final proposal. See GTE’s Comments in Response to Questions, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. 1 (filed Aug. 2, 1996).

¹¹ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8950, para. 324.

¹² See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320.

¹³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(e). The statutory requirements for ETC designation are set out in section 214(e) of the Act. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e).

¹⁴ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (“A ‘competitive eligible telecommunications carrier’ is a carrier that meets the definition of ‘eligible telecommunications carrier’ below and does not meet the definition of an ‘incumbent local exchange carrier’ in § 51.5 of this chapter.”).

based on their costs.¹⁵ Competitive ETCs, on the other hand, receive support for each of their lines based on the per-line support the incumbent LEC receives in the service area.¹⁶ This support to competitive ETCs is known as “identical support.” The Commission’s universal service high-cost support rules do not distinguish between primary and secondary lines; therefore, high-cost support may go to a single end user for multiple connections.¹⁷ Further, the Commission’s rules may result in multiple competitors in the same high-cost area receiving identical per-line support.

8. High-cost support for competitive ETCs has grown rapidly over the last several years, which has placed extraordinary pressure on the federal universal service fund.¹⁸ In 2001, high-cost universal service support totaled approximately \$2.6 billion.¹⁹ By 2007, the amount of high-cost support had grown to approximately \$4.3 billion per year.²⁰ In recent years, this growth has been due mostly to increased support provided to competitive ETCs, which pursuant to the identical support rule receive high-cost support based on the incumbent LEC’s per-line support. Competitive ETC support, in the six years from 2001 through 2007, has grown from under \$17 million to \$1.18 billion—an annual growth rate of over 100 percent.²¹ This “funded competition” has grown significantly in a large number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas; in some study areas, more than 20 competitive ETCs currently receive support.²²

9. To address the growth in competitive ETC support, the Joint Board recommended an

¹⁵ Non-rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support for their intrastate supported services based on the forward-looking economic cost of providing the services. 47 C.F.R. § 54.309. Rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support based on their loop costs, as compared to a national average. 47 C.F.R. Part 36, sbpt. F; 47 C.F.R. § 54.305. Incumbent LEC ETCs that serve study areas with 50,000 or fewer lines receive support based on their local switching costs. 47 C.F.R. § 54.301. Additionally, incumbent LEC ETCs that are subject to price cap or rate-of-return regulation receive interstate access support based on their revenue requirements. 47 C.F.R. Part 54, sbpts. J, K.

¹⁶ 47 C.F.R. § 54.307(a).

¹⁷ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8828–30, paras. 94–96.

¹⁸ Support for the fund derives from assessments paid by providers of interstate telecommunications services and certain other providers of interstate telecommunications. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706. Fund contributors are permitted to, and almost always do, pass those assessments though to their end-user customers. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.712. Fund assessments paid by contributors are determined by applying the quarterly contribution factor to the contributors’ contribution base revenues. In the second quarter of 2007, the contribution factor reached 11.7%, which is the highest level since its inception. See *Proposed Second Quarter 2007 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 5074, 5077 (OMD 2007). The contribution factor has since declined to 11.4% in the fourth quarter of 2008. *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD 2008).

¹⁹ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 3.2 (2007) (2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-279226A1.pdf.

²⁰ UNIVERSAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPANY, 2007 ANNUAL REPORT 43 (2007) (USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT), available at <http://www.usac.org/res/documents/about/pdf/usac-annual-report-2007.pdf>.

²¹ 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 3.2; USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 45.

²² See USAC Quarterly Administrative Filings for 2008, Fourth Quarter (4Q) Appendices, HC03—Rural Study Areas with Competition—4Q2008, available at <http://www.usac.org/about/governance/fcc-filings/2008/Q4/HC03%20-%20Rural%20Study%20Areas%20with%20Competition%20-%204Q2008.xls> (showing 24 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom North (study area code 351167), and 22 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom Systems (study area code 351170)).

interim cap on the amount of high-cost support available to competitive ETCs, pending comprehensive high-cost universal service reform. The Commission adopted this recommendation in 2008.²³

10. For the past several years, the Joint Board and the Commission have been exploring ways to reform the Commission's high-cost program. In the most recent high-cost support comprehensive reform efforts, the Joint Board issued a recommended decision on November 20, 2007.²⁴ The Joint Board recommended that the Commission address reforms to the high-cost program and make "fundamental revisions in the structure of existing Universal Service mechanisms."²⁵ Specifically, the Joint Board recommended that the Commission should: (1) deliver high-cost support through a provider of last resort fund, a mobility fund, and a broadband fund;²⁶ (2) cap the high-cost fund at \$4.5 billion, the approximate level of 2007 high-cost support;²⁷ (3) reduce the existing funding mechanisms during a transition period;²⁸ (4) add broadband and mobility to the list of services eligible for support under section 254 of the Act;²⁹ (5) eliminate the identical support rule;³⁰ and (6) "explore the most appropriate auction mechanisms to determine high-cost universal service support."³¹

11. On January 29, 2008, the Commission released three notices of proposed rulemaking addressing proposals for comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service support.³² In the *Identical Support NPRM*, the Commission sought comment on the Commission's rules governing the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to competitive ETCs.³³ It tentatively concluded that the

²³ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 8998, 8999-9001, paras. 4-7 (JB 2007) (*Interim Cap Recommended Decision*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 8834 (2008) (*Interim Cap Order*). As recommended by the Joint Board, the Commission capped competitive ETC support for each state. *Interim Cap Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 9002, para. 9; *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8846, paras. 26-28. The Commission set the cap at the level of support competitive ETCs were eligible to receive during March 2008. *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8850, para. 38.

²⁴ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (JB 2007) (*Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*).

²⁵ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 1.

²⁶ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20480-81, para. 11.

²⁷ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26.

²⁸ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 27.

²⁹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20481-82, paras. 12-18.

³⁰ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20486, para. 35.

³¹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, paras. 1-6.

³² *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1467 (2008) (*Identical Support NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1495 (2008) (*Reverse Auctions NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1531 (2008) (*Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*) (collectively the *High-Cost Reform NPRMs*).

³³ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1468, para. 1.

Commission should eliminate the identical support rule.³⁴ The Commission also tentatively concluded that support to a competitive ETC should be based on the competitive ETC's own costs of providing the supported services, and it sought comment on how the support should be calculated, the reporting obligations to be applied, and whether the Commission should cap such support at the level of the incumbent LEC's support.³⁵ In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, the Commission tentatively concluded that reverse auctions offer several potential advantages over current high-cost mechanisms and sought comment on whether they should be used as the disbursement mechanism to determine the amount of high-cost universal service support for ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas, and it sought comment on how to implement reverse auctions for this purpose.³⁶ The Commission also sought comment on a number of specific issues regarding auctions and auction design.³⁷ The Commission also released the *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, seeking comment on the Joint Board's Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision and incorporating by reference the *Identical Support NPRM* and the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*.³⁸ The discussion that follows represents our response to the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, pursuant to section 254(a)(2).³⁹

B. Discussion

12. Today we comprehensively reform the high-cost universal service support mechanism. First, we cap the overall size of the high-cost mechanism to protect customers in all areas of the nation from increasing universal service contribution assessments. Second, we conclude that we will use a reverse auction to distribute both incumbent LEC ETC and competitive ETC support, with such auctions to conclude within one year of the effective date of the order.

13. The requirements that we adopt for disbursement of high-cost universal service support do not apply to providers operating in Alaska, Hawaii, or any U.S. Territories and possessions.⁴⁰ We find that these areas have very different attributes and related cost issues than do the continental states.⁴¹ For

³⁴ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1468, para. 1.

³⁵ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1473–78, paras. 12–25.

³⁶ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1495, para. 1.

³⁷ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500–12, paras. 10–50.

³⁸ *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1531, para. 1.

³⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(a)(2). Pursuant to that section, the Commission shall complete any proceeding to implement a Joint Board recommendation within one year after receiving it. The Commission has acted on the *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* prior to the November 20, 2008 one-year statutory deadline.

⁴⁰ Providers operating in U.S. Territories and possessions, such as Puerto Rico and Guam, are not subject to the requirements adopted in this order. See Letter from Earl Comstock, Comstock Consulting LLC, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-377 at 1 (dated Oct. 15, 2008) (asking the Commission to recognize the higher costs and lower income levels in Puerto Rico in any reform efforts it may take); Letter from Eric N. Votaw, Vice President-Marketing & Regulatory, GTA Telecom, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (asking the Commission to recognize that Guam's costs are higher than the continental United States and that Guam should be treated separately, along with Alaska and Hawaii, for reform purposes).

⁴¹ E.g., *Verizon Commc'ns, Inc., Transferor, and América Móvil, S.A. de C.V., Transferee*, WT Docket No. 06-113, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Declaratory Ruling, 22 FCC Rcd 6195, 6211, para. 36 (2007) (*Verizon/América Móvil Transfer Order*) (describing “difficult to serve terrain and dramatic urban/rural differences” in Puerto Rico); *Integration of Rates and Services for Provision of Communications by Authorized Common Carriers between the Contiguous States and Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands*, CC Docket No.

(continued...)

this reason,⁴² we are exempting providers in Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. Territories and possessions from the requirements and rules adopted herein with respect to the disbursement of high-cost support, and we will address changes to the high-cost support disbursement mechanism in these areas in a subsequent proceeding.⁴³

1. Controlling the Growth of the High-Cost Fund

14. Consistent with the recommendation of the Joint Board, we cap the total amount of high-cost universal service support at 2007 levels.⁴⁴ As the Joint Board recognized, high-cost support currently accounts for more than half of total federal universal service support.⁴⁵ Since 1997, when the Commission implemented the universal service requirements of section 254 of the Act, high-cost support has increased by 240 percent.⁴⁶ Although, earlier this year, we took an initial step to address high-cost fund growth by capping support to competitive ETCs, that cap was an interim, emergency measure, pending a closer examination of the steps necessary to achieve comprehensive reform.⁴⁷ Many commenters have urged the Commission to cap the overall amount of high-cost support, rather than limiting the cap only to competitive ETCs.⁴⁸ Although other commenters oppose the adoption of a cap on

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83-1376, Supplemental Order Inviting Comments, 4 FCC Rcd 395, 396, paras. 7–8 (1989) (*Rates and Services Integration Order*) (describing the unique market conditions and structure in Alaska); Letter from Brita D. Strandberg, Counsel for General Communication, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 2 (Oct. 3, 2008) (discussing Alaska’s particular service needs and network architecture).

⁴² Cf. *The Establishment of Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service at the 17.3-17.7 GHz Frequency Band and at the 17.7-17.8 GHz Frequency Band Internationally, and at the 24.75-25.25 GHz Frequency Band for Fixed Satellite Services Providing Feeder Links to the Broadcasting-Satellite Service and for the Satellite Services Operating Bi-directionally in the 17.3-17.8 GHz Frequency Band*, IB Docket No. 06-123, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 8842, 8860, para. 47 (2007) (*Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service Order*) (“The Commission is committed to establishing policies and rules that will promote service to all regions in the United States, particularly to traditionally underserved areas, such as Alaska and Hawaii, and other remote areas.”).

⁴³ The rules and requirements adopted in this order for universal service contributions will apply to these areas.

⁴⁴ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, 20481, 20484, paras. 2, 11, 26.

⁴⁵ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26. In 2007, total federal universal service disbursements amounted to approximately \$6.95 billion. Of that amount, approximately \$4.29 billion, 62%, was disbursed as high-cost support. USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 51.

⁴⁶ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at 3-14, tbl. 3.1 (high-cost support in 1997 was approximately \$1.26 billion, compared with approximately \$4.29 billion in 2007). Even taking into account the fact that additional interstate support mechanisms, Interstate Access Support (IAS) and Interstate Common Line Support (ICLS), were created in 2000 and 2001, respectively, high-cost support has still increased by more than 45%, from approximately \$2.94 billion in 2002 to its current level of approximately \$4.29 billion. *Id.*

⁴⁷ See *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8834, para. 1.

⁴⁸ See CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 18 (existing high-cost support mechanisms should be frozen at the study area level or on a statewide basis to provide funding certainty and encourage investment); Chinook *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments, Attach. at 5–6 (any cap on universal service support should apply to all ETCs, including incumbent LECs); Connecticut Dep’t of Pub. Util. Control *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5 (supporting a cap on high-cost support set at the 2007 level); Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2 (supporting the recommendation to cap the overall size of the high-cost fund); Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (an overall cap should be applied to control the size of the high-cost mechanism); NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19 (the Joint Board’s

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the total amount of high-cost support or on the amount of support available to incumbent LEC ETCs,⁴⁹ we find that, to manage the high-cost support mechanism effectively, we must control its growth.⁵⁰

15. We find it necessary to cap the high-cost mechanism as a first step toward fulfilling our statutory obligation to create specific, predictable and sufficient universal service support mechanisms.⁵¹ As the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held in *Alenco*: “[t]he agency’s broad discretion to provide sufficient universal service funding includes the decision to impose cost controls to avoid excessive expenditures that will detract from universal service.”⁵² The *Alenco* court also found that “excessive funding may itself violate the sufficiency requirements,”⁵³ and the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit has stated that “excessive subsidization arguably may affect the affordability of telecommunications services for unsubsidized users, thus violating the principle in [section] 254(b)(1).”⁵⁴ Given the excessive growth in high-cost support, we find it necessary to cap this mechanism to ensure that unsubsidized users who contribute to the fund are not harmed by excessive subsidization.

16. In addition to capping the overall high-cost fund at the total amount of high-cost support disbursed by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) for 2007, consistent with the Joint Board’s recommendation, we take a number of other steps to limit the growth of high-cost support. We also eliminate the identical support rule for competitive ETCs.

17. Consistent with section 254(b)(5) of the Act, we find that capping high-cost support and (continued from previous page) _____ proposal to cap the overall size of the high-cost mechanism is “a welcome dose of fiscal responsibility”); National Consumer Law Center *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 2–3 (supporting the Joint Board’s proposal to cap the overall high-cost fund); Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2–3, 6–9 (Commission should cap the overall high-cost fund).

⁴⁹ See Frontier *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 6–7; JSI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 6; Montana Telecommunications Ass’n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21–22; NECA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 17–20; TCA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10–11; TDS *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8–9; Missouri Small Telephone Company Group (MSTC) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5–7; Utah Rural Telecom Ass’n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5.

⁵⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5); see CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 18; Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3, 11; Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8–9; National Consumer Law Center *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 2; NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4–6; New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 52–54; Oregon PUC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2–3; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7; New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 64–65; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 8–9; State Commissioners *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 2; Texas Office of Public Utility Counsel *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Reply at 2; Virgin Mobile *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 3–4. The Commission has already implemented caps on the schools and libraries and rural health care universal service mechanisms. *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9054, 9140, paras. 529, 704 (establishing a \$2.25 billion annual cap for the schools and libraries mechanism and a \$400 million annual cap for the rural health care mechanism); see also 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.507(a), 54.623(a).

⁵¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5); see also *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9054, 9140, paras. 529, 704.

⁵² *Alenco Commc’ns, Inc. v. FCC*, 201 F.3d 608, 620–21 (5th Cir. 2000) (*Alenco*).

⁵³ *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620.

⁵⁴ *Qwest Commc’ns Int’l Inc. v. FCC*, 398 F.3d 1222, 1234 (10th Cir. 2005).

using a reverse auction to distribute that support to an entity capable of meeting all ETC requirements at or below the capped amount will enable ETCs to predict the specific level of support that they will receive should they choose to participate in the program.⁵⁵ In fact, through the reverse auction process, it will be the bidders, not the Commission, that determine how much support they need to offer service. Finally, as discussed below, if the reverse auction process does not yield a winning bidder, the Commission will reexamine whether it needs to take further action with regard to this situation, should it arise.

2. Reverse Auctions

18. We sought comment in our *Reverse Auctions NPRM* on the merits of using reverse auctions, a form of competitive bidding, to decide how much high-cost support to provide to ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas.⁵⁶ In a reverse auction, support generally would be determined by the lowest bid to serve the auctioned area.⁵⁷ We conclude that using a reverse auction method for identifying both the recipient of high-cost support for a study area, as well as the amount of support, is appropriate because the winning bid should approach the minimum level of subsidy required to achieve our universal service goals.⁵⁸ In contrast, a support mechanism based on cost or on a cost model provides little incentive for an ETC to provide supported services at the minimum possible cost.⁵⁹ In addition, a reverse auction provides a fair and efficient means of eliminating or reducing the subsidization of multiple ETCs in a given region.⁶⁰ For these reasons, we find that a reverse auction offers advantages over the current high-cost support distribution mechanisms and we adopt a reverse auction plan, as discussed below.⁶¹

19. In the *Identical Support NPRM*, the Commission tentatively concluded that it should eliminate the current identical support rule for competitive ETCs, because the rule bears no relationship to the amount of money competitive ETCs have invested in rural and other high-cost areas of the country.⁶²

⁵⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5).

⁵⁶ See *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 10.

⁵⁷ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11.

⁵⁸ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11; see Connecticut Commission *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (supports reverse auctions as a means of controlling and reducing the size of the universal service fund, while putting the burden on providers to estimate bid amounts); Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (noting that the use of reverse auctions could reduce the size of the high-cost fund significantly).

⁵⁹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11; see Letter from Grover Norquist, Americans for Tax Reform, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45 and WC Docket No. 05-337 at 1 (filed Apr. 14, 2008) (reverse auctions will create incentives to invest in rural communities and will not finance and subsidize wasteful carriers).

⁶⁰ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11.

⁶¹ Several commenters, in particular those representing rural telephone companies, oppose the use of reverse auctions to award high-cost support to carriers of last resort in rural areas. See, e.g., ATA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 13–15; Alexicon *Reverse Auctions NPRM* Comments at 2–3; NTCA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30–46; OPASTCO *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 16–21. None of these commenters, however, present a compelling reason justifying why we should not ensure that universal service funds are properly spent where needed to further the goals of universal service. If these companies are making efficient use of these funds today, there is no reason that they cannot effectively compete in a reverse auction to remain the provider of last resort.

⁶² *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5.

In that notice, the Commission tentatively concluded that a competitive ETC should receive high-cost support based on its own costs, which better reflect real investment in rural and other high-cost areas of the country, and which create greater incentives for investment in those areas.⁶³

20. In this order, we adopt the first tentative conclusion, and eliminate the identical support rule. However, we reject our tentative conclusion that a competitive ETC should receive high-cost support based on its own costs, and we conclude, instead, that support for competitive ETCs should be awarded in the same manner as incumbent LEC ETC support, via reverse auction.⁶⁴

21. To implement the reverse auctions, there are several issues that must be addressed. We describe in this part: (1) the geographic area to be auctioned; (2) the reserve price for the reverse auction; (3) what a winning bidder will receive; (4) how the winning bidder will be selected; and (5) the qualifications a bidder must demonstrate before it may participate in a reverse auction.

a. Geographic Area

22. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we sought comment on whether we should use the study area⁶⁵ as the geographic area for reverse auctions.⁶⁶ We observed that high-cost support today is generally based on the wireline incumbent LEC's study area.⁶⁷ We tentatively concluded that the wireline incumbent LEC's study area would be the appropriate geographic area on which to base reverse auctions.⁶⁸ We adopt our tentative conclusion that the study area is the best geographic area to use for several reasons. First, if we allowed bidders to bid to provide service in smaller geographic areas, we would encourage bidders to bid on areas that are easier or cheaper to serve, leaving our most difficult-to-serve populations still without comparable service.⁶⁹ Conversely, if we required bidders to bid on even larger geographic areas, we might discourage bidders from entering the auction because of the difficulty in committing to serve a larger area. Although some commenters oppose using the incumbent LEC's

⁶³ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5.

⁶⁴ As of the effective date of this order, a competitive ETC will no longer receive high-cost support based on the identical support rule, and will receive high-cost support only to the extent it is a winning bidder in a reverse auction.

⁶⁵ A study area is a geographic segment of an incumbent LEC's telephone operations. Generally, a study area corresponds to an incumbent LEC's entire service territory within a state. *Direct Communications Cedar Valley, LLC and Qwest Corporation Joint Petition for Waiver of the Definition of "Study Area" of the Appendix-Glossary of Part 36 of the Commission's Rules, Petition for Waiver of Section 69.2(hh) and 69.605(c) of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 19180, 19181, para. 2 (WCB 2005). Section 54.207 of the Commission's rules provides that a rural telephone company's service area will be its study area "unless and until the Commission and the states, after taking into account recommendations of a Federal-State Joint Board instituted under section 410(c) of this Act, establish a different definition of service area for such company." 47 C.F.R. § 54.207(b); 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(5).

⁶⁶ *See Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1503, para. 20.

⁶⁷ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1503, para. 20.

⁶⁸ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1504, para. 21.

⁶⁹ Thus, we disagree with commenters' arguments that we should hold auctions for small geographic areas, such as counties, census block groups, or zip codes. *See, e.g., Comcast High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments at 9; NCTA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments at 16; SouthernLINC High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments at 24-25; TracFone High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments at 6.*

study area as the auction area,⁷⁰ use of the study area is consistent with the area on which support is currently based, and it permits a rational basis on which to set the reserve price for the auction. Finally, selecting smaller geographic areas for auction would increase the number of auctions to be held, potentially delaying the conduct of the auction and, therefore, the proper targeting of support to areas of need.⁷¹ For these reasons, we conclude that the study area is the best available geographic area to consider for the auction. We will conduct a reverse auction for each study area for which the incumbent LEC receives high-cost support.

b. Reserve Price

23. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we noted that we should establish a reserve price—a maximum level of high-cost support that participants in the auction would be allowed to place as a bid.⁷² We observed that a reserve price that is set too low is likely to discourage bidders from participating, while one that is set too high raises the possibility of providing too much support.⁷³ We conclude that the reserve price should be the amount of high-cost support received by the incumbent LEC for 2007.

24. We set the reserve price in each study area at the incumbent LEC's 2007 level of high-cost support for several reasons. First, we are capping the overall high-cost fund at this level. Setting a reserve price will help ensure that overall high-cost funding remains within the cap. In addition, setting a reserve price at this level will ensure that, even in reverse auctions for particular study areas that do not garner many bids, those bids will be made by providers who are confident that they can assume all the obligations of the carrier of last resort (COLR)⁷⁴ and provide service more efficiently than the incumbent LEC.⁷⁵ Indeed, we expect that bidders frequently will offer to provide service using newer and more efficient technologies than the incumbent LEC uses today. For these reasons, we set the reserve price at the level described above.

c. Auctioned Support

25. We will award high-cost support in each study area to a winning bidder capable of providing all supported services to the entire study area, on a COLR basis, consistent with the requirements of this order. The award amount is conditioned on the winning bidder's providing all

⁷⁰ See, e.g., Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8–9; NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 16; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 25; TracFone *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5.

⁷¹ See Ohio PUC *Reverse Auctions NPRM* Comments at 6–7 (generally agreeing that the incumbent LEC's study area is the appropriate geographic area on which to base reverse auctions because further disaggregation could add cost and delays, and increase the opportunity for creamskimming).

⁷² *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1509, para. 36.

⁷³ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1509, para. 36.

⁷⁴ Carrier of last resort obligations for incumbent LECs are a matter of state law. Under section 214(e)(6) of the Act, when the state lacks jurisdiction, the Commission shall make the public interest determination on whether to designate a carrier an ETC. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6). The ETC requirements include a requirement to provide supported services throughout the service area. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1).

⁷⁵ Some commenters oppose setting the reserve price at incumbent LEC support levels, or setting any reserve price. See OPASTCO *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19–20; MSTC Group *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 17–18; North Dakota PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5. We find that setting the reserve price at the incumbent LEC support level will provide certainty to bidders and enable bidders with more efficient technologies to provide service at lower levels of support.

supported services as a COLR, as the incumbent LEC does today under state law, and meeting the ETC requirements set forth in the *ETC Designation Order*.⁷⁶

26. Competitive ETCs are currently required to provide supported services throughout their service area, even though they may not be, under state law, the COLR.⁷⁷ In the *ETC Designation Order*, the Commission adopted additional requirements for ETC designation proceedings in which the Commission acts pursuant to section 214(e)(6).⁷⁸ The Commission requires that applicants seeking ETC designation from this Commission demonstrate the following: (1) a commitment and ability to provide services, including providing service to all customers within its proposed service area; (2) that it will remain functional in emergency situations; (3) that it will satisfy consumer protection and service quality standards; (4) that it offers local usage comparable to that offered by the incumbent LEC; and (5) an understanding that it may be required to provide equal access if all other ETCs in the designated service area relinquish their designations pursuant to section 214(e)(4).⁷⁹ We find that the universal service obligations in the *ETC Designation Order* will apply to all competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions. Also, we find that, as a condition of receiving support, the auction winner must accept all of the COLR obligations of the incumbent LEC for that study area, whether such obligations are imposed on the LEC pursuant to state or federal law.

27. We recognize that a transition mechanism is needed to shift high-cost support from the incumbent LEC currently receiving it to another ETC that wins an award amount. A flash cut would be harmful in at least two ways. First, the incumbent LEC would immediately lose support upon which it may rely to maintain supported services as a carrier of last resort to consumers today.⁸⁰ It is possible that removing support from the incumbent LEC would, in some cases, jeopardize its provision of services to some users. In addition, granting a full award amount immediately to a winning ETC would provide little incentive for the competitive ETC to build out new facilities to difficult-to-serve areas until the last possible moment, as in many cases those areas will be the most expensive to serve. As a result, we conclude that, prior to the initiation of an auction, the incumbent LEC for the study area will be required to identify the distribution of support by geographic area for purposes of the auction and the transfer of support to the winning bidder. As the winning ETC builds out to those geographic areas and certifies that it complies with all its obligations under this order for that area, it will receive high-cost support for that portion of the study area, and the incumbent LEC will no longer receive such support for that area.⁸¹ As

⁷⁶ *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, 20 FCC Rcd 6371 (2005) (*ETC Designation Order*). Section 214(e)(6) of the Act gives the Commission authority to designate carriers as ETCs when those carriers are not subject to the jurisdiction of a state commission. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6). The requirements in the *ETC Designation Order* currently apply only to Commission-designated ETCs, although the Commission, in that order, encouraged state commissions to adopt similar requirements. *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6372, 6379, paras. 1, 19.

⁷⁷ See 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1).

⁷⁸ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6380, para. 20.

⁷⁹ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6380, para. 20; 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4).

⁸⁰ Competitive ETCs are not carriers of last resort, and loss of support would not jeopardize the provision of basic phone service to consumers in the study area. In fact, maintaining current levels of support to competitive ETCs pending a reverse auction is not necessary. Therefore, and consistent with our elimination of identical support to competitive ETCs, as of the effective date of this order, competitive ETCs are only entitled to support awarded via reverse auction.

⁸¹ The amount of support to be awarded to the winning bidder most likely will be less than the amount of support received by the incumbent LEC for that same area. The transfer of support will be based on the amount of support,

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the winning bidder takes on COLR obligations and obtains high-cost support for an area, the incumbent LEC will no longer receive high-cost support for that area and will be relieved of its COLR obligations at both the state and federal levels. We require winning auction bidders to comply fully with all the requirements of this order by the end of a ten-year build-out period.

28. Finally, we address the question of transferability of the award amount. We conclude that auction winners may transfer their right to the award amount. This transfer could take one of several forms—an auction winner could be purchased by another entity, the winner could sell assets used to provide the supported services, or the auction winner could transfer just the right to the award amount itself. The transferee will, in all events, step into the shoes of the auction winner and will be responsible for meeting all obligations as if it had been the original auction winner. Any such transfer, however, must be authorized by the Commission before it is consummated.

d. Selecting a Winning Bid

29. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we sought comment on whether the reverse auction should award high-cost support to a single winner or to multiple winners.⁸² We observed that if only one winner receives support, this could provide a fair and efficient means of eliminating the subsidization of multiple ETCs in a region, particularly in areas in which costs are prohibitive.⁸³ We tentatively concluded that universal service support auctions should award high-cost support to a single winner.⁸⁴ We now conclude that the single winner format will provide the most effective mechanism for determining the support amount sufficient to meet the universal service goals in any given area.⁸⁵ We therefore adopt our tentative conclusion to select one winner in each reverse auction.

30. We will evaluate bids simply, based on the bidder who meets all applicable service obligations at the lowest level of support. To qualify for consideration, a bid must be equal to or less than the reserve price.

31. If a particular reverse auction produces no winner, the Commission will reexamine any such study area to determine what further actions should be taken to ensure that the study area is served by a provider that will meet the applicable ETC and COLR requirements. For example, the Commission may consider disaggregating the study area on a wire center basis for reverse auction purposes. To ensure continued service to customers during the limited period of time in which the Commission examines these issues, the existing incumbent LEC will continue to have all COLR and ETC obligations, and it will continue to receive high-cost support pending transfer of such support to the winning bidder of the reverse auction. There shall be no interim support in any study area to an existing competitive ETC pending the
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relative to support for the entire study area, received by the incumbent LEC for the area to be transferred; that same relative percentage will be used to calculate the amount of award support the auction winner should receive for the same area. In no event will an incumbent LEC who is not an auction winner continue to receive support for an area once an auction winner begins to receive support for that same area.

⁸² *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 13.

⁸³ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 14.

⁸⁴ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 14.

⁸⁵ See, e.g., Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4–5; New York PSC *Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 2–3; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21–22, App. at 12. We disagree with commenters who support multiple winner auctions. See, e.g., Alltel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 40–41; Atlantic Tele-Network *Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 13. We find that supporting a single auction winner is a more efficient use of universal service support.

completion of the reverse auction.

e. Bidder Qualifications

32. We adopt a number of conditions that bidders must meet before they can participate in any auction. We adopt these requirements to help ensure that any bidder who wins an auction will be capable of meeting the commitments that flow from being a winning bidder.

33. First, we require that a bidder be an ETC, certified by the Commission or by a state. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we tentatively concluded that an auction bidder must be an ETC covering the relevant geographic area prior to participating in the auction.⁸⁶ We hereby adopt that tentative conclusion. Winning bidders must be designated as ETCs before receiving high-cost support pursuant to sections 214 and 254 of the Act; therefore, requiring bidders to receive this designation prior to participating in an auction entails only a small additional burden. This burden is offset by the potential abuse and delay that could result if a non-ETC were to bid on and win the auction, but then be ineligible for support.⁸⁷ We note that ETCs are not required to provide all supported services with their own facilities.⁸⁸ ETCs may enter into contracts with other entities to provide some supported services in part or all of the study area.

34. As a general matter, in our spectrum auctions we require an upfront payment to deter frivolous or insincere bidding.⁸⁹ In the reverse auctions we adopt today, we are not requiring an upfront payment. Instead, we are requiring participants to demonstrate to the Commission financial capability to undertake the construction of facilities necessary to meet ETC requirements and to satisfy COLR obligations. In addition, in areas where the bidder does not currently offer telecommunications services, we will require the bidder to submit a plan demonstrating the timetable for building the necessary facilities and obtaining any required permits.

35. *Milestones for Auction Winners.* To ensure that auction winners make good progress toward meeting their obligation to become fully compliant with the requirements of this order, we require every auction winner to be capable of serving 10 percent of the potential customers in the service area by the end of year two, 25 percent by the end of year three, 50 percent by the end of year four, 65 percent by the end of year five, 75 percent by the end of year six, 85 percent by the end of year seven, 90 percent by the end of year eight, 95 percent by the end of year nine, 100 percent by the end of year ten. The absence of a milestone at the end of year one is intended to allow new service providers sufficient time to plan their network and to start deploying and marketing it within some parts of the service area. Similarly, the ascending milestones in the remaining years are intended to permit the auction winner a reasonable time in which to build its network and services while ensuring that it does not delay in reaching customers who

⁸⁶ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500–01, para. 12; *see also, e.g., Florida PSC High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 5; *Indiana Util. Reg. Comm'n High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 12; *MSTC Group High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 12; *Verizon/Verizon Wireless High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments*, App. at 8.

⁸⁷ For this reason, we disagree with commenters who argue that we should not require bidders to be ETCs. *See GCI High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 89; *Consumers Union (CU), et al. High-Cost Reform NPRMs Reply* at 17.

⁸⁸ Pursuant to section 214(e)(1)(A) of the Act, a common carrier designated as an ETC must offer the services supported by the federal universal service mechanisms throughout the designated service area either by using its own facilities or by using a combination of its own facilities and resale of another carrier's services (including the services offered by another ETC). 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1)(A).

⁸⁹ *See, e.g., Auction of LPTV and TV Translator Digital Companion Channels Scheduled for November 5, 2008*, AU Docket No. 08-22, Public Notice, DA 08-1944, para. 53 (WTB 2008).

need this vital service. The ten-year build-out period starts on the date on which that carrier wins the auction.

36. *Consequences of Not Meeting Milestones.* For all ETCs receiving high-cost support, failure to achieve any milestone will result in loss of eligibility for support (and, where this Commission has jurisdiction over the designation of ETC status, loss of ETC status) for that service area. If the auction winner loses its eligibility for support, the study area will be subject to re-auction. If at the end of the build-out period, the ETC is not fully compliant with all its obligations under this order, the ETC will forfeit its eligibility for support and, if its ETC designation was made by this Commission, lose its ETC status.

37. *Milestone Audits.* All milestone data will be subject to audit by the Commission's Office of Inspector General and, if necessary, investigated by the Office of Inspector General, to determine compliance with the build-out requirements, the Act, and Commission rules and orders.⁹⁰ Service providers will be required to comply fully with the Office of Inspector General's audit requirements, including, but not limited to, providing full access to all accounting systems, records, reports, and source documents of the service providers and their employees, contractors, and other agents, in addition to all other internal and external audit reports that are involved, in whole or in part, in the administration of this program.⁹¹ Such audits or investigations may provide information showing that a service provider failed to comply with the Act or the Commission's rules, and thus may reveal instances in which universal service support was improperly distributed or used.

38. We emphasize that we retain the discretion to evaluate the uses of monies disbursed through the high-cost program and to determine on a case-by-case basis whether waste, fraud, or abuse of program funds occurred and whether recovery is warranted. We remain committed to ensuring the integrity of the universal service program and will aggressively pursue instances of waste, fraud, and abuse under the Commission's procedures and in cooperation with law enforcement agencies. In doing so, we intend to use any and all enforcement measures, including criminal and civil statutory remedies, available under law.⁹²

III. REFORM OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE CONTRIBUTIONS

39. In this order, we adopt a telephone numbers-based methodology under which contributors will contribute based on the number of telephone numbers they have assigned to end users (Assessable Numbers) and dedicated access connections for business customers. The new contribution methodologies will be implemented beginning on January 1, 2010.

A. Background

⁹⁰ See *Comprehensive Review of the Universal Service Fund Management, Administration, and Oversight, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Lifeline and Link-Up, Changes to the Board of Directors for the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.*, WC Docket No. 03-109, Report and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 16372, 16383-84, para. 24 (*Comprehensive Review Report and Order*) (requiring "recipients of universal service support for high-cost providers to retain all records that they may require to demonstrate to auditors that the support they received was consistent with the Act and the Commission's rules, assuming that the audits are conducted within five years of disbursement of such support."). The term "service provider" includes any participating subcontractors.

⁹¹ This includes presenting personnel to testify, under oath, at a deposition if requested by of the Office of Inspector General.

⁹² See, e.g., 41 U.S.C. §§ 51-58 (Anti-Kickback Act of 1986); 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (False Claims Act).

40. In implementing the universal service requirements of the 1996 Act, the Commission established a method for collecting funds to be disbursed through the various universal service support mechanisms. Specifically, the Commission determined that contributions to the universal service fund would be assessed on telecommunications providers based on their interstate and international end-user telecommunications revenues.⁹³ The Commission concluded that basing providers' universal service contributions on their revenues would be competitively neutral, easy to administer, and explicit.⁹⁴

41. When the Commission adopted the revenue-based contribution system, assessable interstate revenues were growing. The total assessable revenue base has declined in recent years, however, from about \$79.0 billion in 2000 to about \$74.5 billion in 2006,⁹⁵ while universal service disbursements grew over that same time period from approximately \$4.5 billion in 2000 to over \$6.6 billion in 2006.⁹⁶ Declines in assessable contribution revenues combined with growth in universal service disbursements have increased the contribution factor applied to determine universal service contribution amounts.⁹⁷ This upward pressure jeopardizes the stability and sustainability of the support mechanisms, demonstrating the need for long-term fundamental reform of the contribution methodology.⁹⁸

42. In addition, interstate end-user telecommunications service revenues are becoming increasingly difficult to identify as customers migrate to bundled packages of interstate and intrastate telecommunications and non-telecommunications products and services.⁹⁹ The integration of local and

⁹³ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206–07, paras. 843–44; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Access Charge Reform*, Sixteenth Order on Reconsideration and Eighth Report and Order in CC Docket No. 96-45 and Sixth Report and Order in CC Docket No. 96-262, 15 FCC Rcd 1679, 1685, para. 15 (1999) (*Fifth Circuit Remand Order*) (establishing a single contribution for all universal service support mechanisms based on interstate and international revenues).

⁹⁴ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206–08, 9211, paras. 843, 845–48, 854.

⁹⁵ Compare JIM LANDE & KENNETH LYNCH, FCC, 2000 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY REVENUES, tbl. 4 (2002), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/IAD/telrev00.pdf with JIM LANDE & KENNETH LYNCH, FCC, 2006 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY REVENUES, tbl. 4 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284929A1.pdf. But see Letter from David C. Bergmann, Chair, NASUCA Telecommunications Committee, to Chairman Kevin Martin *et al.*, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 06-122, 05-337, 05-195, 04-36, 03-109, 02-60, CC Docket Nos. 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 99-68, 96-262, 96-45, 80-286, at 7 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (arguing that the growth in the contribution factor is “almost entirely” due to the growth in universal service disbursement requirements).

⁹⁶ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 1.2a (2001) (2001 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/Monitor/mrs01-0.pdf; 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 1.11; see also USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 3, 51 (detailing universal service disbursements for 2007 at approximately \$6.9 billion).

⁹⁷ The contribution factor grew from 5.9% in the first quarter of 2000 to 11.3% for the fourth quarter of 2008. See *Proposed First Quarter 2000 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 15 FCC Rcd 3660 (WCB 1999); *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD Sept. 12, 2008) (*Fourth Quarter 2008 Contribution Factor Public Notice*).

⁹⁸ See 47 U.S.C. §§ 254(b), (d).

⁹⁹ Although the Commission has established safe harbors for the reporting of interstate telecommunications revenues derived from interstate telecommunications services bundled with customer premises equipment (CPE) or information services, it has not established guidelines for reporting interstate telecommunications service revenues for flat-rated bundles of wireline interstate and intrastate services. See *Policy and Rules Concerning the Interstate, Interexchange Marketplace; Implementation of Section 254(g) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended; 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review—Review of Customer Premises Equipment and Enhanced Local Exchange*

(continued....)

long-distance wireline services into packages that allow customers to purchase buckets of long distance minutes and local service for a single price blurs the distinction between revenue derived from intrastate telecommunications service and interstate telecommunications service. Similarly, the availability of mobile wireless calling plans that allow customers to purchase buckets of minutes on a nationwide network without incurring roaming or long-distance charges also makes it difficult for providers and the Commission to identify the amount of revenue derived from interstate telecommunications service.¹⁰⁰ Further, migration to interconnected voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) services complicates the distinctions that serve as the basis for current contribution obligations.¹⁰¹

43. In 2001 and 2002, the Commission sought comment on modifications to the existing revenue-based contribution methodology, and on replacing that methodology with one that assesses contributions on the basis of a flat-fee charge, such as a per-line charge.¹⁰² The Commission also sought comment on other universal service contribution methodologies, including moving to a numbers-based methodology.¹⁰³ Finally, in May 2008, the Commission encouraged commenters to refresh the record in several pending proceedings, including the contribution methodology proceeding.¹⁰⁴

B. Discussion

44. The system of contributions to the universal service fund is broken. The Commission has repeatedly patched the current system to accommodate decreasing interstate revenues, a trend toward “all-you-can-eat” services that make distinguishing interstate from other revenues difficult if not impossible,

(continued from previous page) _____

Markets, CC Docket Nos. 96-61, 98-183, Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 7418, 7446–48, paras. 47–54 (2001) (*CPE Bundling Order*).

¹⁰⁰ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 13 FCC Rcd 21252, 21258–59, paras. 13–15 (1998) (*First Wireless Safe Harbor Order*); see also *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 17 FCC Rcd 24952, 24965–67, paras. 21–25 (2002) (*Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*).

¹⁰¹ See *Universal Service Contribution Methodology*, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 04-36, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 21 FCC Rcd 7518 (2006) (*2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*); *aff'd in part, vacated in part sub nom. Vonage Holdings Corp. v. FCC*, 489 F.3d 1232 (D.C. Cir. 2007).

¹⁰² See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 16 FCC Rcd 9892 (2001) (*2001 Contribution NPRM*); see also *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Report and Order, 17 FCC Rcd 3752, 3765, para. 31, 3766–89, paras. 34–83 (2002) (*Contribution First FNPRM*).

¹⁰³ *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24983–97, paras. 66–100 (seeking comment on capacity-based proposals that had been developed in the record and on telephone-number proposals advocated by certain parties); *Commission Seeks Comment on Staff Study Regarding Alternative Contribution Methodologies*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Public Notice, 18 FCC Rcd 3006 (2003) (*Contribution Staff Study*) (seeking comment on a Commission staff study that estimated potential contribution assessment levels under the then-newly modified revenue-based method and the three connection-based proposals in the further notice portion of the *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*).

¹⁰⁴ *Interim Cap Clears Path for Comprehensive Reform: Commission Poised to Move Forward on Difficult Decisions Necessary to Promote and Advance Affordable Telecommunications for All Americans*, News Release (May 2, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-281939A1.pdf.

and changes in technology. While the service developments that precipitated these changes have enormous consumer benefits, they have also severely strained the contributions system.¹⁰⁵ We therefore adopt today a system of contributions that will assess all telephone numbers, and dedicated access connections for business services.

1. Legal Authority

45. The Commission has ample authority to require contributions from the variety of providers discussed below. The Commission's authority derives from several sections of the Act: section 254(d), Title I, and section 251(e). These sections of the statute provide us authority to require contributions from the kinds of service providers we address below in our discussions of the new numbers-based and business connections-based approach.

46. Section 254 is the cornerstone of the Commission's universal service program. Section 254(d) first provides that "[e]very telecommunications carrier that provides interstate telecommunications services shall contribute, on an equitable and nondiscriminatory basis, to the specific, predictable, and sufficient mechanisms established by the Commission to preserve and advance universal service."¹⁰⁶ Under this "mandatory contribution" provision, every provider of telecommunications services¹⁰⁷ must contribute, although the Commission has authority to exempt a carrier or class of carriers if their contributions would be *de minimis*.¹⁰⁸

47. Section 254(d) also provides that the Commission may require "[a]ny other provider of interstate telecommunications . . . to contribute to the preservation and advancement of universal service if the public interest so requires."¹⁰⁹ The Commission has relied on this "permissive authority" to require various providers of telecommunications,¹¹⁰ but not necessarily telecommunications *services*,¹¹¹ to contribute. For example, the Commission has required entities that provide interstate telecommunications

¹⁰⁵ We agree with commenters who argue that the contribution methodology requires a comprehensive overhaul. *See e.g.*, Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. 1 at 1 (filed Sept. 11, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Roger C. Sherman, Director, Government Affairs—Wireless Regulatory, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1 (filed June 14, 2006) (Sprint Nextel June 14, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (Verizon Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 1 (filed Oct. 20, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

¹⁰⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

¹⁰⁷ Section 254(d) refers to "telecommunications carriers," which are defined as "any provider of telecommunications services." 47 U.S.C. § 153(44).

¹⁰⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

¹⁰⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

¹¹⁰ "Telecommunications" is defined as "the transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user's choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received." 47 U.S.C. § 153(43).

¹¹¹ "Telecommunications service" is defined as "the offering of telecommunications for a fee directly to the public, or to such classes of users as to be effectively available directly to the public, regardless of the facilities used." 47 U.S.C. § 153(46).

to others on a private contractual basis to contribute to the universal service fund,¹¹² as well as payphone aggregators.¹¹³ Most recently, we required interconnected VoIP providers to contribute even though the Commission has not determined that they are telecommunications carriers. Specifically, in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, we used our permissive authority under section 254(d) to require interconnected VoIP providers to contribute, and we noted that they “provide” telecommunications to their end users.¹¹⁴ We also noted that in some cases, the interconnected VoIP provider may be “providing” telecommunications even if it arranges for the end user to have access to the public switched telephone network (PSTN) through a third party.¹¹⁵

48. The Commission also has authority under Title I to require other service providers to contribute. In general, the Commission can rely on its ancillary jurisdiction under Title I when the Commission has subject matter jurisdiction over the service to be regulated, and the assertion of jurisdiction is “reasonably ancillary to the effective performance of [its] various responsibilities.”¹¹⁶ The Commission relied on this authority before section 254 was added by the 1996 Act to establish a high-cost support fund,¹¹⁷ which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit found to be a permissive exercise of Title I authority.¹¹⁸ And more recently in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, the Commission relied on its ancillary jurisdiction under Title I as an additional source of authority to require contributions from interconnected VoIP providers.¹¹⁹ In that order, the Commission noted that the Act grants subject matter jurisdiction over interconnected VoIP because it involves “transmission” of voice by wire or radio,¹²⁰ and that imposing contribution obligations on interconnected VoIP providers was “reasonably ancillary” to the effective performance of the Commission’s responsibilities to establish

¹¹² See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a); *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9183–84, paras. 794–95. We note that private service providers that provide interstate connections solely to meet their internal needs (i.e., self-providers) will not be required to contribute under the new methodology. This is consistent with our current policy. In the *Universal Service First Report and Order*, the Commission reasoned that, for self-providers of interstate telecommunications, the telecommunications is incidental to their primary non-telecommunications business. See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9185, para. 799.

¹¹³ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a); *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9184–85, paras. 796–98. But see Letter from Robert F. Aldrich, Counsel for the American Public Communications Council (APCC), to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. (filed Oct. 23, 2008).

¹¹⁴ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7538–40, paras. 39–41; 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a).

¹¹⁵ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7539, para. 41 (“To provide this capability [telecommunications], interconnected VoIP providers may rely on their own facilities or provide access to the PSTN through others.”).

¹¹⁶ See *United States v. Southwestern Cable Co.*, 392 U.S. 157, 177–78 (1968); *United States v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 406 U.S. 649, 667–68 (1972); *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 440 U.S. 689, 700 (1979); see also *American Library Ass’n v. FCC*, 406 F.3d 689 (D.C. Cir. 2005).

¹¹⁷ See *Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission’s Rules and Establishment of a Joint Board*, CC Docket No. 80-286, Decision and Order, 96 F.C.C.2d 781, (1984), *aff’d sub nom. Rural Tel. Coalition v. FCC*, 838 F.2d 1307 (D.C. Cir. 1988).

¹¹⁸ *Rural Tel. Coalition*, 838 F.2d at 1315.

¹¹⁹ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7541–43, paras. 46–49.

¹²⁰ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 47 & n.160 (citing *IP-Enabled Services, First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, 20 FCC Rcd 10245 (2005) (*VoIP 911 Order*), *aff’d sub nom. Nuvio Corp. v. FCC*, 473 F.3d 302 (D.C. Cir. 2006); 47 U.S.C. § 152(a)).

“specific, predictable, and sufficient mechanisms . . . to preserve and advance universal service.”¹²¹ In particular, the Commission noted that interconnected VoIP providers “benefit from their interconnection to the PSTN.”¹²²

49. In addition, Congress provided the Commission with “plenary authority” over numbering in section 251(e). Specifically, the Commission has “exclusive jurisdiction over those portions of the North American Numbering Plan [NANP] that pertain to the United States.”¹²³ The Commission relied on its authority under section 251(e) to support its action to require interconnected VoIP providers to provide E911 services.¹²⁴ The Commission noted that it exercised its authority under section 251(e) because, among other reasons, “interconnected VoIP providers use NANP numbers to provide their services.”¹²⁵

50. These sections of the Act provide the Commission ample authority to require contributions from all providers subject to the new numbers-based and connections-based approaches described in more detail below. These methodologies may require some providers to contribute directly to universal service when in the past they may have been contributing only indirectly or not at all. For example, under the numbers-based approach, any provider who assigns an Assessable Number to an end user must contribute.¹²⁶ Providers such as VoIP providers who are not “interconnected VoIP” providers, electronic facsimile service providers, unified messaging service providers, Internet-based TRS providers, one-way and two-way paging service providers, and telematics providers may assign Assessable Numbers to and maintain the retail relationship with the end users.¹²⁷ Not all of these providers are “telecommunications carriers” subject to the mandatory contribution obligation of section 254(d). Nonetheless, we have authority to require them to contribute. First, all of these providers provide—directly or indirectly—some amount of interconnection to the PSTN, the network that universal service supports. Interconnection to the PSTN benefits the consumers of each of these types of services by facilitating communication (even if just one-way communication) between the end user and PSTN users. As we noted in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, interconnected VoIP providers often provide access to the PSTN via third parties¹²⁸ and this is sufficient to permit the Commission to rely on its authority to require contributions from “other provider[s] of interstate telecommunications.”¹²⁹ And as we explain below, it is in the public interest (as required by section 254(d)) that these providers contribute. Furthermore, the prerequisites for the use of our Title I ancillary jurisdiction unquestionably are met here. All the services that rely on assignment of an Assessable Number to an end user come within the Commission’s broad subject matter jurisdiction because they involve in some manner

¹²¹ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 48 (quoting 47 U.S.C. § 254(d)).

¹²² *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 48.

¹²³ 47 U.S.C. § 251(e)(1).

¹²⁴ *See VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 10265, para. 33.

¹²⁵ *See VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 10265, para. 33.

¹²⁶ The term Assessable Number is defined below. *See infra* paras. 62-77.

¹²⁷ This list is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Other providers may also have to contribute to the universal service fund based on the criteria described in this order.

¹²⁸ *See 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7539, para. 41.

¹²⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

“interstate . . . communication by wire or radio.”¹³⁰ And similar to our explanation in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, requiring contributions from providers who take advantage of PSTN connectivity whether directly or indirectly makes sense because their end users benefit from the ubiquity of that network and from being somehow interconnected with it.¹³¹ Finally, our plenary authority over numbering supports our actions here with regard to a numbers-based methodology. The purpose of a uniform system of numbering is to facilitate communication on interconnected networks based on a standardized system of identifiers—telephone numbers. Those customers who are assigned telephone numbers, whether for plain old telephone service (POTS) or for any other service, are using the number to take advantage of some feature of the PSTN, whether it is the capability to be called, to have their locations automatically relayed to emergency call handlers, to be faxed from anywhere, or for some other reason. Because customers are receiving this benefit, it is appropriate that their service providers (and ultimately, likely, the customers themselves) contribute to the ubiquity and support of the network from which they are benefiting.

51. We reject suggestions that we do not have authority to require contributions based on numbers or connections because we lack authority over intrastate services.¹³² The same number typically is used for both interstate and intrastate services. The Commission and courts have rejected the assertion that simply because a single facility has the capacity to provide both interstate and intrastate services, the Commission lacks authority to regulate any aspect of the facility.¹³³ In fact, the subscriber line charge (SLC) that the Commission established is intended to capture the interstate cost of the local loop.¹³⁴ The contribution methodologies we adopt are thus limited to assessments on services that can provide interstate service. We will only require providers to contribute to universal service based on the number of Assessable Numbers that are capable of originating or terminating interstate or international communications.¹³⁵

2. The New Numbers-Based Assessment Methodology

52. As discussed above, we adopt a new contribution methodology based on assessing telephone numbers, rather than interstate and international services revenue. We find that this change will benefit contributors and end users by simplifying the contribution process and providing predictability as to the amount of universal service contributions and pass-through charges for end users. We set the contribution amount per telephone number initially at \$0.85 per number per month.

a. Benefits of a Numbers-Based Contribution Methodology

53. We find that adoption of a telephone number-based methodology, in conjunction with the

¹³⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 152(a); *see also VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 10261–62, para. 28 (providing detailed explanation of why interconnected VoIP falls within the Commission’s subject matter jurisdiction).

¹³¹ *Compare 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7540, para. 43.

¹³² *See, e.g., American Association of Paging Carriers (AAPC) Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 7; Alaska Communication Systems (ACS) Contribution First FNPRM Reply at 6–7; Allied Personal Communications Industry Association of California (Allied) Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 6–7; National ALEC Association/Prepaid Communications Association (NALA/PCA) Contribution First FNPRM Reply at 3.*

¹³³ *See, e.g., NARUC v. FCC*, 737 F.2d 1095, 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1984) (“The same loop that connects a telephone subscriber to the local exchange necessarily connects that subscriber into the interstate network as well.”).

¹³⁴ *NARUC v. FCC*, 737 F.2d at 1113–14.

¹³⁵ Services that provide only intrastate communications and do not traverse a public interstate network will not be required to contribute under the new assessment methodology. *See supra* para. 63.

business access connections contributions explained below, will help preserve and advance universal service by ensuring a specific, predictable, and sufficient funding source, consistent with the universal service principles of section 254(b) of the Act.¹³⁶ Changes in technology and services have made the revenue-based contribution mechanism difficult to administer. As commenters have noted, the distinction between intrastate and interstate revenues is blurring as providers move from their traditional roles as pure LECs or interexchange carriers (IXCs) to businesses that offer consumers the choice of purchasing their telecommunications needs from a single source.¹³⁷ Additionally, these providers are offering consumers greater flexibility, such as bundling of local and long distance service at a flat rate.¹³⁸ Moreover, technologies such as wireless and interconnected VoIP have emerged that provide voice and data services that know no jurisdictional boundaries.¹³⁹ Consumers benefit from the opportunity to obtain bundled services, and the universal service contribution mechanism should reflect and complement those marketplace and technological developments as much as possible. Our decision to use numbers as a basis for assessing contributions will enhance the specificity and predictability of entities' contributions.

54. Our adoption of a numbers-based contribution methodology will benefit both consumers and contributors by simplifying the basis for assessments at an amount per month per telephone number.¹⁴⁰ Contributors are allowed, and in most cases do, recover their universal service contribution costs from fees assessed on their end-user customers.¹⁴¹ Under the revenue-based contribution mechanism, providers' revenues fluctuated from quarter to quarter, causing consumers' universal service fees to fluctuate not only to meet fund demands, but also based on the fluctuation of a provider's revenues as well. A simple per-number contribution assessment is simple and predictable for both contributors and for consumers. To the extent a contributor elects to recover its contribution costs through end-user fees, its customers will pay one assessment on each telephone number each month, making the assessment simple and predictable.¹⁴²

55. A numbers-based contribution methodology also benefits end users because it is technologically and competitively neutral. A consumer will pay the same universal service charge regardless of whether the consumer receives residential service from a cable provider, an interconnected

¹³⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5).

¹³⁷ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1.

¹³⁸ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1; see also Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 5 (filed Nov. 19, 2007) (Ad Hoc Nov. 19, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter) (discussing the convergence of different applications for business and residential customers onto a single integrated network with bundled pricing).

¹³⁹ See *Vonage Holdings Corporation Petition for Declaratory Ruling Concerning an Order of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission*, 19 FCC Rcd 22404, 22412-14, paras. 16-18 (2004) (*Vonage Order*), *aff'd sub nom. Minnesota Pub. Utils. Comm'n v. FCC*, 483 F.3d 570 (8th Cir. 2007).

¹⁴⁰ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2.

¹⁴¹ Contributors are prohibited from passing through to subscribers more than their contribution cost. 47 C.F.R. § 54.712.

¹⁴² See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2; see also Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 6; NCTA 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5; Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy (SBA) 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 8; Vonage 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 7-8; Letter from Gregory V. Haledjian, Regulatory and Governmental Relations, Counsel to IDT Corporation and USF By the Numbers Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, Attach. at 3-4 (filed Jan. 30, 2007).

VoIP provider, a wireless provider, or a wireline provider. This will enable residential consumers to choose the providers and provider types they want without regard to any artificial distortions that would otherwise be caused by differing contribution charges.¹⁴³ In a marketplace characterized by increased competition within and between different technology platforms, residential consumers will receive the same universal service charge regardless of the type of service the customer chooses.

56. Similarly, by subjecting contributors to the same regulatory framework for assessments regardless of technology, the numbers-based methodology will eliminate incentives under the current revenue-based system for providers to migrate to services and technologies that are either exempt from contribution obligations or are subject to safe harbors.¹⁴⁴ The elimination of such incentives will result in a more competitively and technologically neutral marketplace and a more predictable source of funding for the universal service mechanisms.

57. The adoption of a per number per month contribution assessment is specific and predictable and will simplify the administration of universal service contributions. Interstate end-user telecommunications revenues have become increasingly difficult to identify, particularly for residential services, due to increased bundling of local and long distance service and the growth of consumer interconnected VoIP offerings.¹⁴⁵ In contrast, telephone numbers provide an easily identifiable basis for contribution.¹⁴⁶ The amount of NANP telephone numbers in use has shown steady, stable growth, providing a fairly constant basis for estimating universal service support amounts.¹⁴⁷ The new methodology will be easier to administer, facilitating greater regulatory compliance. A numbers-based contribution methodology will also be readily applicable to emerging service offerings. The new methodology minimizes the potential for providers to avoid contributions by bundling intrastate revenues with interstate revenues or engaging in other bypass activities.¹⁴⁸

58. Further, assessing universal service contributions based on telephone numbers will promote number conservation.¹⁴⁹ Telephone numbers are a finite, public resource. If contributors are assessed based on the telephone numbers they have assigned to end users, they will have an incentive to efficiently manage their numbering resources in a manner that minimizes their costs. We expect that this

¹⁴³ See, e.g., NCTA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5; Vonage 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; Letter from Grace E. Koh, Policy Counsel, Cox Enterprises, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 05-337, 01-92, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 96-262 at 2 (filed July 15, 2008).

¹⁴⁴ See AT&T 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 4.

¹⁴⁵ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 1.1.

¹⁴⁶ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1; see also ALEXANDER BELINFANTE, FCC, TELEPHONE SUBSCRIBERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, tbl. 1 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284923A1.pdf.

¹⁴⁷ See CRAIG STROUP AND JOHN VU, FCC, NUMBERING RESOURCE UTILIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, tbl. 12 (2008) (showing number utilization from December 2000 to December 2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284926A1.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ See Ad Hoc Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 6–7; Coalition for Sustainable Universal Service (CoSUS) Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 38; Sprint Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 8–9. Because numbers-based contribution assessments will no longer be assessed based on revenues, contributors may not mark-up or otherwise adjust the Assessable Number per month residential contribution assessment in response to uncollectible revenues.

¹⁴⁹ See, e.g., ITI 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; Vonage 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 7.

will result in the need for fewer area code splits or overlays due to number exhaust.¹⁵⁰

59. Our adoption of a numbers-based contribution methodology is consistent with the goal of ensuring just, reasonable, and affordable rates.¹⁵¹ The initial per-number assessment of \$0.85 per number per month will represent a reduction in pass-through charges for many residential customers.¹⁵² Although an \$0.85 per number per month assessment may represent an increase in universal service charges for residential customers that make few or no long distance calls, this increase should be slight. Under the current revenue-based contribution mechanism, providers may assess a federal universal service fee on the basis of the customer's SLC. The residential SLC may be as high as \$6.50 per month.¹⁵³ Based on the most recent contribution factor of 11.4 percent, even a customer who made no long distance calls could thus be assessed \$0.74 per month in universal service charges under the existing revenue-based methodology.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the potential increase for a customer who makes no long distance calls could be as little as \$0.11 per month. In addition, we have separate protections to ensure that telephone service remains affordable for low-income subscribers.¹⁵⁵

60. Some commenters assert that assessing a per-number universal service charge is inherently unfair because it does not take into account the fact that some people make many interstate and international calls, while others make few if any such calls in a given month.¹⁵⁶ We disagree. We find that imposition of a flat charge per number is warranted because all contributors and their subscribers receive a benefit from being connected to the public network, enabling them to make and receive interstate calls.¹⁵⁷ The ability to make or receive interstate calls over a public network is a significant benefit and it is reasonable to assess universal service contributions for customers based on access to the

¹⁵⁰ See *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket No. 99-200, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 15 FCC Rcd 7574, 7625, para. 122 (2000) (*NRO I Order*) (determining that implementation of thousands-block number pooling is essential to extending the life of the NANP by making the assignment and use of NXX codes more efficient); see also *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 96-98, 95-116, Fourth Report and Order, 18 FCC Rcd 12472, 12474, para. 5 (2003) (*NRO IV Order*) (explaining further that thousands-block number pooling is a numbering resource optimization measure in which 10,000 numbers in an NXX are divided into ten sequential blocks of 1,000 numbers and allocated to different service providers (or different switches) within a rate center).

¹⁵¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1).

¹⁵² See Letter from Jean L. Kiddoo and Tamar E. Finn, Counsel to IDT Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 5 (filed Aug. 2, 2007) (IDT Aug. 2, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter) (showing that the average residential household paid about \$1.37 in universal service fees in 2006). IDT claims the data show that the lowest-income consumers paid an average of \$1.09 in universal service fees for wireline telephone bills. *Id.* at 6.

¹⁵³ 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1), 69.152(d)(1). The SLC is referred to as the End User Common Line Charge in the Commission's rules.

¹⁵⁴ The revenue from the \$6.50 SLC would be multiplied by the 11.4% contribution factor, resulting in a contribution amount and corresponding assessment of \$0.74. See *Fourth Quarter 2008 Contribution Factor Public Notice* at 1; AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 3.

¹⁵⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.400 *et seq.*; *infra* para. 90 (describing contribution exemptions for services to low-income consumers).

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., Letter from Maureen A. Thompson, Executive Director, Keep USF Fair Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 5-7 (filed Mar. 27, 2006) (Keep USF Fair Mar. 27, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9.

¹⁵⁷ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8783, para. 8.

network. Customers who do not make any interstate calls still receive the benefit of accessing the network to receive interstate calls. The per month per number assessment reflects our finding that it is equitable for providers to contribute a fixed amount based on the ability to access and utilize a ubiquitous public network.

61. Some commenters allege that changing from the current revenue-based methodology to a new mechanism based on telephone numbers would not be equitable because it could reduce contributions from certain industry segments and increase them for others.¹⁵⁸ Although the change to a numbers-based contribution methodology will result in changes in the relative contribution obligations of industry segments, the new contribution methodology is not inequitable or discriminatory. The evolving nature of the telecommunications marketplace and of its participants requires the Commission periodically to review and revise the contribution methodology to ensure that providers continue to be assessed on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis. We find that, given the difficulties in continuing to assess contributions entirely on a revenue-based methodology and the benefit to consumers of access to the public network, it is equitable to adopt a numbers-based contribution methodology that assesses \$0.85 per month per number.

b. Assessable Numbers

62. Below, we describe the telephone numbers for which service providers are obligated to contribute to the universal service fund. We call these Assessable Numbers. The Commission has addressed certain reporting based on telephone numbers in other contexts. In the number utilization context, the Commission requires that each telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA), the Pooling Administrator, or another telecommunications carrier report its numbering resources in each of six defined categories of numbers set forth in section 52.15(f) of our rules.¹⁵⁹ In the

¹⁵⁸ See, e.g., *FW&A Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 13–15; *NRTA and OPASTCO Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7–11; *SBC Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 18; *Verizon Contribution First FNPRM Reply* at 6; *Verizon Wireless Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 5–6.

¹⁵⁹ These six categories of numbers are defined as follows:

- (i) Administrative numbers are numbers used by telecommunications carriers to perform internal administrative or operational functions necessary to maintain reasonable quality of service standards.
- (ii) Aging numbers are disconnected numbers that are not available for assignment to another end user or customer for a specified period of time. Numbers previously assigned to residential customers may be aged for no more than 90 days. Numbers previously assigned to business customers may be aged for no more than 365 days.
- (iii) Assigned numbers are numbers working in the Public Switched Telephone Network under an agreement such as a contract or tariff at the request of specific end users or customers for their use, or numbers not yet working but having a customer service order pending. Numbers that are not yet working and have a service order pending for more than five days shall not be classified as assigned numbers.
- (iv) Available numbers are numbers that are available for assignment to subscriber access lines, or their equivalents, within a switching entity or point of interconnection and are not classified as assigned, intermediate, administrative, aging, or reserved.
- (v) Intermediate numbers are numbers that are made available for use by another telecommunications carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer. Numbers ported for the purpose of transferring an established customer's service to another service provider shall not be classified as intermediate numbers.

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regulatory fee context, the Commission used the category of “assigned numbers” as the starting point for determining how to assess fees on certain providers, but found it necessary to modify that definition to account for the different regulatory contexts. Specifically, in assessing regulatory fees for commercial mobile radio service (CMRS) providers that report number utilization to NANPA based on the reported assigned number count in their Numbering Resource Utilization and Forecast (NRUF) data, the Commission requires these providers to adjust their assigned number count to account for number porting. The Commission found that adjusting the NRUF data to account for porting was necessary for the data to be sufficiently accurate and reliable for purposes of regulatory fee assessment.¹⁶⁰

63. We adopt a new term based on the category of assigned numbers to represent the numbers being assessed for universal service contribution purposes—“Assessable Numbers.” The definition of Assessable Numbers that we adopt focuses on those numbers that are actually in use by end users for services that traverse a public interstate network. Specifically, we define an Assessable Number as a NANP telephone number or functional equivalent identifier¹⁶¹ in a public or private network that is in use by an end user and that enables the end user to receive communications from or terminate communications to (1) an interstate public telecommunications network or (2) a network that traverses (in any manner) an interstate public telecommunications network.¹⁶² Assessable Numbers include geographic as well as non-geographic telephone numbers (such as toll-free numbers and 500-NXX numbers) so long as they meet the other criteria described in this part for Assessable Numbers.

64. The provider with the retail relationship to the end user is the entity responsible for contributing.¹⁶³ We impose the contribution obligation on the provider with the retail relationship to the end user for several reasons. First, this provider will have the most accurate and up-to-date information about how many Assessable Numbers it currently has assigned to end users. Also, this provider, and its users, are benefiting from a supported PSTN, and thus it is sound policy to require them to contribute to

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(vi) Reserved numbers are numbers that are held by service providers at the request of specific end users or customers for their future use. Numbers held for specific end users or customers for more than 180 days shall not be classified as reserved numbers.

47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)

¹⁶⁰ See *Assessment and Collection of Regulatory Fees for Fiscal Year 2005, Assessment and Collection of Regulatory Fees for Fiscal Year 2004*, MD Dockets No. 05-59, 04-73, Report and Order and Order on Reconsideration, 20 FCC Red 12259, 12271, paras. 39–40 (2005).

¹⁶¹ “Functional equivalent identifier” means an identifier used in place of and with the same PSTN access capability as a NANP number; it is not intended to capture identifiers used in conjunction with NANP numbers, such as internal extensions that cannot be directly dialed from the PSTN. Nor is “functional equivalent identifier” intended to capture routing identifiers used for routing of Internet traffic, unless such identifiers are used in place of a NANP number to provide the ability to make or receive calls on the PSTN.

¹⁶² For purposes of the definition of Assessable Numbers, we include only the NANP telephone numbers used in the United States and its Territories and possessions.

¹⁶³ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Red at 9206, para. 844; see also, e.g., Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President-Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 7 (filed Sept. 24, 2008) (Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008, *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 1–2; Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel for XO Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket No. 04-36, Attach. at 9 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Letter from Donna N. Lampert, Counsel for Google, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (defining “contributor” as “an entity required to contribute to the universal service support mechanism pursuant to § 54.706 [of the Commission’s rules]”).

its support.¹⁶⁴ We note that today, providers are permitted to pass through their contribution assessments to end users, and we understand that they typically do so.¹⁶⁵ Under the new methodologies, they may continue to do so, subject to the same requirement that they will not pass through more than their contribution amount.¹⁶⁶

65. We also continue to define an “end user” for universal service contribution purposes as any purchaser of interstate services that is not itself a direct contributor to universal service.¹⁶⁷ For example, under this definition, a reseller that offers local exchange service to an end user would be assessed for that telephone number, not the incumbent LEC whose service is being resold.¹⁶⁸ We recognize that, in some situations, the entity with the direct relationship with the ultimate end user may not be an entity over which the Commission has exercised its mandatory or permissive authority under section 254(d). In such situations, we will treat that entity as the end user and its underlying carrier or telecommunications provider as the contributor. This approach ensures that each Assessable Number will be assessed its appropriate universal service contribution, while also ensuring that the Commission does not exceed its authority under section 254(d).¹⁶⁹

66. Next, we specify whether certain types of numbers are included in the definition of Assessable Numbers. First, numbers used for intermittent or cyclical purposes are included in the definition of Assessable Numbers. Numbers used for cyclical purposes are numbers designated for use that are typically “working” or in use by the end user for regular intervals of time. These numbers include, for example, an end user’s summer home telephone number that is in service for six months out of the year.¹⁷⁰ In the *NRO III Order*, the Commission clarified that these types of numbers should generally be categorized as “assigned” numbers if they meet certain thresholds and that, if they do not meet these thresholds, they “must be made available for use by other customers” (i.e., they are “available” numbers).¹⁷¹ Because these numbers are assigned to end users, we find they should be included in the

¹⁶⁴ See *supra* para. 50 (discussing the public interest in requiring these entities to support the network).

¹⁶⁵ See e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2; see also *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24978, para. 50.

¹⁶⁶ 47 C.F.R. § 54.712.

¹⁶⁷ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206-07, para. 843-44; 9179-80, para. 788; see also Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1.

¹⁶⁸ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206-07, paras. 843-45. For universal service contribution purposes, a “reseller” is a telecommunications carrier or telecommunications provider that incorporates purchased telecommunications services into its own telecommunications offerings. See FCC, INSTRUCTIONS TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET, FCC Form 499-A, at 11, 15 (Feb. 2008) (FCC Form 499-A Instructions), available at <http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form499-A/499a-2008.pdf>.

¹⁶⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

¹⁷⁰ See *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 96-98, 95-116, Third Report and Order and Second Order on Reconsideration in CC Docket No. 96-98 and CC Docket No. 99-200, 17 FCC Rcd 252, 303, para. 119 (2001) (*NRO III Order*).

¹⁷¹ *NRO III Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 304, para. 122 (“With this requirement, we seek to limit the amount of numbers that are set aside for use by a particular customer, but are not being used to provide service on a regular basis. Thus, in order to categorize such blocks of numbers as assigned numbers, carriers may have to decrease the amount [of] numbers set aside for a particular customer. We also clarify that numbers ‘working’ periodically for regular intervals of time, such as numbers assigned to summer homes or student residences, may be categorized as assigned numbers, to the extent that they are ‘working’ for a minimum of 90 days during each calendar year in which they are

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definition of Assessable Numbers we adopt today.

67. We exclude from our definition of Assessable Numbers those telephone numbers that satisfy the section 52.15 definition of “assigned numbers” solely because the “numbers [are] not yet working but hav[e] a customer service order pending” for five days or less.¹⁷² Providers generally do not bill for services that have yet to be provisioned and therefore are not compensated for services during the pendency of the service order. Moreover, such numbers are not yet operational to send or receive calls. Thus, under the existing contribution methodology, providers would not contribute for services they are about to provide (but have not yet provided) under a pending service order. We continue to find it appropriate for contributors not to be required to contribute to the universal service fund for pending service orders.

68. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those telephone numbers that telecommunications providers have transferred or ported to a carrier using resale or the unbundled network element platform. Under prior numbering orders, such telephone numbers would still be included in the NRUF assigned number count of the transferring-out carrier.¹⁷³ Consistent with our definition of Assessable Numbers, because the underlying provider no longer maintains the retail relationship with the end user, the provider should not include these numbers in its Assessable Number count. Conversely, the receiving provider of such transferred customers would include the associated telephone numbers in its count of Assessable Numbers.

69. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those numbers that meet the definition of an Available Number, an Administrative Number, an Aging Number, or an Intermediate Number as those terms are defined in section 52.15(f) of the Commission’s rules.¹⁷⁴ For a particular carrier, the carrier will not have an end user associated with a number in any of these categories of numbers. For example, an intermediate number is a number that is “made available for use by another telecommunications carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer.”¹⁷⁵ The receiving provider will be responsible for including the number as an Assessable Number once it provides the number to an end user.¹⁷⁶

70. We exclude non-working telephone numbers from the definition of Assessable Number.

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assigned to a particular customer. Any numbers used for intermittent or cyclical purposes that do not meet these requirements may not be categorized as assigned numbers, and must be made available for use by other customers.”).

¹⁷² See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(iii).

¹⁷³ *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7586–87, para. 18. Ported-out numbers, a subcategory of assigned numbers, are not reported to NANPA although NRUF reporting carriers are required to maintain internal records associated with these numbers for five years. *Id.* at 7592, 7601, paras. 36, 62.

¹⁷⁴ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f); see also Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 7 (arguing, among other things, that numbers used for administrative purposes and numbers that are not “actively” working, such as aging, unassigned, reserved numbers, and numbers donated back to the industry pool should be excluded from the contributor’s base).

¹⁷⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(v).

¹⁷⁶ See *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7587, para. 21 (2000) (“We agree with commenters who opine that [intermediate] numbers should not be categorized as *assigned* numbers because they have not been assigned to an end user. . . . We therefore conclude that numbers that are made available for use by another carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer should be categorized as *intermediate* [numbers].”).

Carriers report as assigned numbers for NRUF purposes entire codes or blocks of numbers dedicated to specific end-user customers if at least fifty percent of the numbers in the code or block are working in the PSTN.¹⁷⁷ Consistent with our definition of Assessable Numbers, carriers should not include the non-working numbers in these blocks in their Assessable Number counts, because the non-working numbers portion of these blocks are not providing service to the end user.

71. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Number those numbers that are used merely for routing purposes in a network, so long as such numbers are always—without exception—provided without charge to the end user, are used for routing only to Assessable Numbers for which a universal service contribution has been paid, and the ratio of such routing numbers to Assessable Numbers is no greater than 1:1. For example, a NANP number used solely to route or forward calls to a residential number, office number, and/or mobile number would be excluded from our definition of Assessable Number if such routing number were provided for free, and such number routes calls only to Assessable Numbers. If, however, such routing or forwarding is provided for a fee, such as with remote call forward service or foreign exchange service, both the routing number and the end user number to which calls are routed or forwarded would be considered Assessable Numbers.

72. In addition, incumbent LECs need not include numbers assigned to wireless providers that interconnect at the end office of an incumbent LEC and have obtained numbers directly from the incumbent LEC.¹⁷⁸ Because the incumbent LEC does not have the retail relationship with the end user, it should not include these numbers in its Assessable Number count. The wireless carriers that have the retail relationship with the end users must include these telephone numbers in their Assessable Number count.

73. Finally, we exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those numbers associated with Lifeline services for the reasons described below.¹⁷⁹

74. We do not restrict our definition to numbers that exclusively use the PSTN.¹⁸⁰ Evolution in communications technology away from the PSTN to alternative networks that may only partially (if at all) traverse the PSTN is one of the causes in the erosion of the contribution base under the current revenue-based methodology. As more service providers migrate to alternative networks that partially access the PSTN, continuing to assess universal service contributions based only on traffic that exclusively traverses the PSTN will not account for this migration; nor will it allow us to meet our principle of competitive neutrality.¹⁸¹ Moreover, if a service provider connects a private network to a

¹⁷⁷ *NRO III Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 304, para. 122.

¹⁷⁸ When a wireless carrier interconnects at an incumbent LEC end office it is known as a Type 1 interconnection. *See Federal Communications Commission Seeks Comment on Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis in Telephone Number Portability Proceeding*, CC Docket No. 95-116, Public Notice, 20 FCC Rcd 8616, 8632, App. B at para. 19 n.53 (2005) (“Type 1 numbers reside in an end office of a LEC and are assigned to a Type 1 interconnection group, which connects the wireless carrier's switch and the LEC's end office switch.”).

¹⁷⁹ *See infra* para. 90.

¹⁸⁰ The record is split over whether the definition of an assessable number should be restricted to the PSTN. AT&T and Verizon, for example, do not include such a requirement in their proposed definitions. *See* AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1. Other commenters, however, argue for such a requirement. *See* Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (the definition of an assessable number should be “premised on a telephone number acting as a proxy for an underlying two-way PSTN connection”). As we explain herein, such a restriction is not warranted.

¹⁸¹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9207, paras. 845–46.

public network, the service provider and its customers benefit from the connection to the PSTN. Because universal service supports the PSTN and these parties connect to the PSTN, they benefit from universal service.¹⁸² Thus, it is increasingly important that we conform our regulatory definitions to recognize this reality. Indeed, the Commission has already begun to recognize the need to create a level regulatory playing field. For example, calls to end users that utilize interconnected VoIP service are not wholly within the PSTN. Indeed, calls between two interconnected VoIP users may not touch the PSTN at all. Yet we found in 2006 that interconnected VoIP providers must contribute to the universal service fund.¹⁸³ For these reasons, we conclude that our definition must account for public or private interstate networks, regardless of the technology of the network (e.g., circuit-switched, packet-switched) or the transmission medium of the network (e.g., wireline, wireless).

75. Finally, we recognize that, by declining to adopt for contribution purposes verbatim the definition of “assigned numbers” in section 52.15(f) of our rules, which is used by carriers to file NRUF reports,¹⁸⁴ we may nominally increase some of the administrative burden associated with universal service contribution filings. We find, however, that any minor administrative cost increases arising from not using the pre-existing definition are outweighed by the benefits of modifying the definition to achieve sound universal service policy. For example, as stated above, the existing definition of assigned numbers would not enable us to meet our universal service contribution goal of ensuring that the provider with the retail relationship to the end user be the one responsible for contributing.¹⁸⁵

76. Under our numbers-based approach, certain providers will be required to contribute to the universal service fund based on Assessable Numbers even though they are not today required to submit NRUF data. Section 52.15(f) of the Commission’s rules requires only “reporting carriers” to submit NRUF data to the NANPA.¹⁸⁶ A “reporting carrier” is defined as a telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the NANPA, the Pooling Administrator, or another telecommunications carrier.¹⁸⁷ In the case of numbers provided by a telecommunications carrier to a non-carrier entity, the carrier providing the numbers to such entities must report NRUF data to the NANPA for those numbers. Thus, non-carrier entities that use telephone numbers in a manner that meets our definition of Assessable Numbers do not report NRUF data yet must contribute.¹⁸⁸ For example, interconnected VoIP providers may use telephone numbers that meet our definition of Assessable Numbers even though these providers do not report NRUF data.¹⁸⁹ These non-carrier entities that use numbers in a manner that meets our definition of Assessable Number will be required to determine their Assessable Number count based on their internal records (e.g., billing system records) and will be

¹⁸² *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9184, para. 796.

¹⁸³ *See 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7536–37, paras. 33-34.

¹⁸⁴ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(iii).

¹⁸⁵ *See Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206, para. 844.

¹⁸⁶ 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f).

¹⁸⁷ 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(2).

¹⁸⁸ *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7587, para. 21.

¹⁸⁹ *See Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, CC Docket No. 99-200, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 2957, 2961–62, para. 9 (2005) (*SBCIS Waiver Order*) (noting that most VoIP providers’ numbering utilization data are embedded in the NRUF data of the LEC). In the *SBCIS Waiver Order*, the Commission granted SBCIS, an Internet service provider, permission to obtain numbering resources directly from the NANPA and/or Pooling Administrator, conditioned on, among other things, SBCIS reporting NRUF data. *Id.* at 2959, para. 4.

required to report such numbers to USAC.¹⁹⁰

77. We are mindful that our move to a numbers-based contribution methodology may encourage entities to try to avoid their contribution obligations by developing ways to bypass the use of NANPA-issued numbers.¹⁹¹ To the extent, however, these alternative methods are the functional equivalent of numbers and otherwise meet our definition of Assessable Numbers, such entities must report these functional equivalents as Assessable Numbers to the universal service fund administrator.

3. Additional Contribution Assessment Methodology for Business Services

78. Although we find that a numbers-based contribution mechanism is superior to the existing revenue-based mechanism for residential services, applying a pure numbers-based approach to business services would result in inequitable contribution obligations. Specifically, certain business services that do not utilize numbers, or that utilize them to a lesser extent, would not be contributing to the universal service fund on an equitable basis.¹⁹² Section 254(d) of the Act requires “every carrier” that provides interstate telecommunications services to contribute to the universal service fund.¹⁹³ Thus, providers of business services, including non-numbers based services, must continue to contribute. We conclude that these services should be assessed based on their connection to the public network.

79. A number of commenters supported moving to a methodology that would assess telephone numbers for those services that are associated with a telephone number and assess based on capacity of the connection to the public switched network those services not associated with a telephone number.¹⁹⁴ Other commenters supported retaining a revenue-based methodology for these services.¹⁹⁵ As

¹⁹⁰ See *infra* paras. 95-101.

¹⁹¹ See Letter from Jeanine Poltronieri, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, BellSouth D.C., Inc, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2 (filed July 6, 2005) (“If voice service is provided without using telephone numbers, but with IP address or other identifier, FCC will need to establish a ‘functional equivalency’ test.”).

¹⁹² Business services such as private line and special access services do not typically utilize telephone numbers in the same manner as residential services, and would not contribute equitably to the universal service fund under a numbers-based approach. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel to Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, at 3 (filed Oct. 9, 2002); Letter from Robert Quinn, Vice President Federal Government Affairs, AT&T, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, at 2 (filed Oct. 22, 2002). Moreover, unlike residential services, which usually have one telephone number assigned per access line, business services do not usually have a number of telephone numbers assigned that aligns with the number of access lines utilized.

¹⁹³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d). Therefore, we disagree with those parties that continue to support a numbers-only based approach because we find such an approach would be inconsistent with the statutory requirement that every telecommunications carrier must contribute to the universal service fund. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, Attach. at 5 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).

¹⁹⁴ See *Contribution Staff Study*; see also Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee 2003 Staff Study Reply; Letter from John Nakahata, Counsel for the Coalition for Sustainable Universal Service, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Oct. 31, 2002).

¹⁹⁵ See Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 6 (filed Mar. 21, 2006) (Qwest Mar. 21, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

discussed above, a revenue-based contribution methodology is no longer sustainable in today's telecommunications marketplace.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, a connections-based contribution methodology will provide a basis for assessing services not associated with telephone numbers, and will recognize the greater utility derived by business end users from these high capacity business service offerings.¹⁹⁷ Further, in contrast to the revenues on which contributions are currently based, the number and capacity of connections continues to grow over time, providing a contribution base that is more stable than the current revenue-based methodology. Moreover, a connections-based mechanism can be easily applied to all business services. We, therefore, conclude that a connections-based contribution mechanism is the better option for business services.

80. We find that it is equitable and nondiscriminatory, consistent with the requirements of section 254(d) of the Act, to establish different contribution methodologies based on numbers and connections.¹⁹⁸ Although the statute states that “[a]ll providers of telecommunications services should make an equitable and nondiscriminatory contribution to the preservation and advancement of universal service,” it does not require that all contributors or all services be assessed in the same manner.¹⁹⁹ Under the current revenue-based mechanism, the Commission has established different contribution methodologies through the use of proxies for wireless and interconnected VoIP services.²⁰⁰ As noted above, continuing to use a revenues-based contribution methodology has become increasingly complex, and a numbers-based system would avoid many of those complexities.²⁰¹ At the same time, however, if we relied exclusively on a numbers-based contribution methodology, there are some business services—such as private line and special access—that would escape contribution requirements entirely. That result would be inconsistent with the obligation that all providers of interstate telecommunications services contribute to universal service, and would impose an unfair burden on providers that contribute on the basis of numbers.²⁰² We therefore conclude that adopting different contribution assessment methodologies for residential and business services will result in equitable and nondiscriminatory contribution obligations.

81. We hereby find that business access connections should be assessed based on “Assessable Connections.” An Assessable Connection is defined as an interstate telecommunications service or an interstate service with a telecommunications component that connects a business end-user's physical location (e.g., premises) on a dedicated basis to the contributor's network or the PSTN. Assessable Connections up to 64 kbps will be assessed a fixed amount, set at \$5.00 per dedicated connection, and Assessable Connections over 64 kbps will be assessed a flat amount, set at \$35.00 per dedicated connection. This approach will ensure a specific, predictable, and sufficient funding source for

¹⁹⁶ See *supra* para. 44.

¹⁹⁷ Time Warner 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2.

¹⁹⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

¹⁹⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(4).

²⁰⁰ The proxies offer an alternative to contributions assessed on actual interstate revenues; they are intended to approximate the portion of revenues derived from the provision of interstate telecommunications services. *First Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 13 FCC Rcd at 21258–60, paras. 13–15 (establishing safe harbors for wireless service providers); *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 14954, para. 1 (modifying the wireless safe harbors); *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7532, 7545, paras. 23, 53 (revising the wireless safe harbor and establishing a safe harbor for interconnected VoIP providers).

²⁰¹ See *supra* para. 42.

²⁰² 47 U.S.C. §§ 254(b)(4), (d).

the Commission's universal service mechanisms.

82. We set the initial contribution amounts, as explained above, at \$0.85 per Assessable Number, \$5.00 per Assessable Connection up to 64 kbps, and \$35.00 per Assessable Connection over 64 kbps. Any adjustments to these contribution amounts necessary to meet funding requirements of the universal service program shall be applied by USAC fairly to Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections, in a manner proportional to the percentage of total contribution paid by each at the above-set amounts.

4. Wireless Prepaid Plans

83. We adopt an alternative methodology for telephone numbers assigned to handsets under a wireless prepaid plan. Certain commenters that offer prepaid wireless services argue that the Commission should adopt a discounted numbers-based assessment for these services. For example, prepaid wireless providers argue that their customers are typically low-income or low-volume consumers and, as such, should be subject to a lesser assessment.²⁰³ Verizon and TracFone further assert that prepaid wireless providers may have difficulty administering a per-number assessment.²⁰⁴ They, therefore, recommend that any new contribution methodology accommodate prepaid wireless service providers by adopting a per-number assessment that “reflects the unique characteristics of [the] service.”²⁰⁵ Finally, CTIA argues that the sheer number of prepaid wireless end users—over 44 million—combined with the likelihood that most of these end users would see a rise in their pass-through assessments warrants an exception.²⁰⁶

84. To accommodate the unique situation of prepaid wireless service providers, we find it appropriate to create a limited modification in contribution assessments for providers of prepaid wireless services and their end users. We agree with commenters that it is considerably more difficult for wireless prepaid providers to pass-through their contribution assessments in light of their “pay-as-you-go” service offerings.²⁰⁷ Because of this significant practical issue, we will modify the numbers-based assessment for prepaid wireless providers with regard to their offering of these services. Further, we note that, just as with Lifeline customers, many prepaid wireless end users are low income consumers. For example, TracFone states that about half of its customers have incomes of \$25,000 or less.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Letter from Mitchell F. Brecher, Counsel for TracFone, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2 (filed Sept. 17, 2008) (TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; Leap Wireless 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4; Letter from John M. Beahn and Malcolm Tuesley, Counsel to Virgin Mobile USA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 4–7 (filed June 12, 2006) (Virgin Mobile June 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²⁰⁴ See, e.g., Verizon Mar. 28, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3; TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2; Virgin Mobile June 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 7.

²⁰⁵ See TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach; Letter from Antoinette Bush, Counsel for Virgin Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 11 (filed Mar. 18, 2005) (Virgin Mobile Mar. 18, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, at 6.

²⁰⁶ See CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (raising a concern that current proposals could harm the large number of prepaid wireless customers).

²⁰⁷ See Letter from Mitchell F. Brecher, Counsel for TracFone, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 3 (filed June 15, 2007) (TracFone June 15 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²⁰⁸ TracFone June 15, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3. TracFone also asserts that an exception is warranted because it provides service to low volume end users (i.e., end users that do make a small amount of calls, measured in

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85. We find that TracFone's "USF by the Minute" proposal best addresses the concerns of prepaid wireless providers within the context of the numbers-based contribution methodology we adopt today.²⁰⁹ TracFone's proposed USF by the Minute Plan would calculate universal service contribution assessments on prepaid wireless services by dividing the per-number assessment by the number of minutes used by the average postpaid wireless customer in a month. This per-minute number would then be multiplied by the number of monthly prepaid minutes generated by the provider. This amount would be the provider's monthly universal service contribution obligation. The per-minute assessment, however, would be capped at an amount equal to the current per month contribution per Assessable Number, established as set forth above.²¹⁰ We illustrate the proposal below.

86. According to CTIA data submitted by TracFone, the average wireless postpaid customer used 826 minutes per month for the period ending December 2007.²¹¹ A per-number assessment of, for example \$0.85 would be divided by 826 minutes to calculate a per-minute assessment of \$0.00102905569. The wireless prepaid provider's contribution obligation would be calculated by multiplying the per-minute assessment by the number of prepaid minutes generated for the month. If the wireless prepaid provider generated a billion prepaid minutes in a month, its contribution for that month would be \$1,029,056.²¹² If the prepaid provider had 10 million prepaid customers that month, the average contribution per customer would be \$0.1029 and its contribution obligation would remain at \$1,029,056. If, on the other hand, it had only 1 million customers, the average contribution per-customer would be \$1.03, which exceeds the current per number contribution at \$0.85. In this case, because the per-customer contribution amount under the calculation would exceed the per-number assessment established by the Commission, the prepaid provider's contribution obligation would be capped at \$850,000, which is the per-number assessment of \$0.85 multiplied by the 1 million monthly prepaid customers. Under this scenario, the average per-customer contribution for the prepaid wireless provider would be equal to a per-number contribution of \$0.85 for non-prepaid wireless residential numbers.

87. We find the TracFone discount approach superior to other forms of a discount proposed by parties. For example, CTIA proposed a fifty percent discount for prepaid wireless providers.²¹³ The TracFone approach is based on actual wireless calling data, whereas the CTIA approach represents a more arbitrary half-off discount. Moreover, the CTIA proposal makes no allowance for the type of end user that is using the prepaid wireless service. This contrasts with the TracFone proposal, which would not provide any discount to those end users that use more than the average monthly post-paid number of minutes. As explained above, for those customers whose usage would result in more than the allowable per Assessable Number pass-through, the assessment on the provider and the pass-through would be (continued from previous page) _____ minutes). *Id.* However, as explained below, we decline to provide a contribution exception for low-volume users. *See infra* para. 91.

²⁰⁹ AT&T and Verizon support the TracFone discount approach for prepaid wireless providers. AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 3; *see also* Letter from David L. Sieradzki, Counsel to OnStar Corp., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (dated Oct. 28, 2008) (OnStar "strongly supports" the TracFone per-minute of use proposal for prepaid wireless services) (OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²¹⁰ TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 4-5.

²¹¹ *See* TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5. We use these data because they are the most recent publicly available data.

²¹² To the extent that the prepaid wireless subscriber is a Lifeline customer for the prepaid service, the prepaid provider should exclude prepaid minutes associated with the qualifying Lifeline customer. *See infra* para. 90.

²¹³ CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5.

capped at the contribution amount month per Assessable Number. Thus, high volume users would neither benefit from, nor be penalized by, the discount mechanism. Finally, we make clear that if the prepaid provider is an ETC and is providing service to qualifying Lifeline customers, the provider is exempt from contribution assessments on the qualifying Lifeline customers and we prohibit the provider from assessing any universal service pass-through charges on their Lifeline customers.

88. We find that prepaid calling cards, which will be assessed on Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections by their underlying access provider, are different from prepaid wireless providers in that these providers do not assign a telephone number to their end users. Thus, prepaid calling card providers shall be considered end users for purposes of determination of Assessable Connections and Assessable Numbers.

5. Exceptions to Contribution Obligations

89. A number of parties have asked for exceptions from the contribution obligation. We find that, in general, providing an exception or exemption to a particular provider or to a particular category of end users would complicate the administration of the numbers-based methodology we adopt today. The result would unfairly favor certain groups by reducing or eliminating their contribution obligations, while increasing the contribution obligations on providers that are not exempted from contributing. Therefore, we conclude that grant of an exemption from the contribution obligations is only warranted for those who are truly unable to bear the burden of contributing to the universal service fund—low-income consumers. As discussed below, we exempt providers from contribution assessments on their qualifying Lifeline program customers and prohibit contributors from assessing any universal service pass-through charges on their Lifeline customers. As explained below, an exception for low-income consumers is consistent with the Commission's policies underlying the low-income universal service program and targets universal service benefits to those consumers most in need of those benefits.²¹⁴

90. We conclude that telephone numbers assigned to Lifeline customers should be excluded from the universal service contribution base and providers of Lifeline service may not pass-through contribution assessments to Lifeline customers.²¹⁵ The Lifeline program provides an opportunity for the Commission to ensure that low-income families are not denied access to telephone service. We find that an exception for Lifeline customers satisfies the high threshold necessary to justify an exception to the new numbers-based contribution methodology we adopt today. Lifeline customers are, by definition, among the poorest individuals in the country. As such, they are in the greatest need of relief from regulatory assessments. Prohibiting recovery of universal service contributions from Lifeline customers helps to increase subscribership by reducing qualifying low-income consumers' monthly basic local service charges.²¹⁶ The record, moreover, overwhelmingly supports the creation of an exception for Lifeline customers. Consumer groups, large telecommunications customers, LECs, and wireless providers all support creating an exemption for Lifeline customers, and no commenter opposes an exemption for Lifeline customers.²¹⁷ We therefore adopt an exemption to our numbers-based contribution methodology for Lifeline customers.

²¹⁴ *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 621.

²¹⁵ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4 (proposing that numbers assigned to Lifeline customers be excluded from the monthly number count for contribution purposes).

²¹⁶ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24982, para. 62.

²¹⁷ See, e.g., CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5; Consumers Union *et al. High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 58; Ad Hoc Nov. 19, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4; AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 5.

91. Although commenters have sought contribution exceptions for other groups of consumers or service providers, we decline to adopt any further exceptions. Some parties argue that consumers who make few or no calls, i.e., low-volume users, should be exempt from the numbers-based contribution assessment mechanism.²¹⁸ As discussed above, all users of the network, even those who make few or no calls, receive a benefit by being able to receive calls, and therefore it is appropriate for these consumers to contribute to universal service.²¹⁹ Also as discussed above, to the extent low-volume consumers may see an increase in the amount of their universal service contribution pass-through fee,²²⁰ any such increase should be slight.²²¹

92. We also decline to exempt telematics providers,²²² stand-alone voice mail providers,²²³ one-way service providers,²²⁴ and two-way paging services²²⁵ from contributing based on numbers. We disagree with commenters arguing for special treatment for these services.²²⁶ Granting exceptions for

²¹⁸ See, e.g., Consumers Union *et al. Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 12; NASUCA *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 14; Keep USF Fair Mar. 27, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 1.

²¹⁹ See *supra* para. 60; see also Sprint *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7.

²²⁰ But see IDT Aug. 2, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6–7 (arguing that low-volume consumers who make no long distance calls pay about \$1.40 in universal service contribution assessments).

²²¹ See *supra* para. 59.

²²² Telematics is a service that is provided through a transceiver, which is usually built into a vehicle but can also be a handheld device, that provides public safety information to public safety answering points (PSAPs) using global positioning satellite data to provide location information regarding accidents, airbag deployments, and other emergencies in real time. See, e.g., Letter from David L Sieradzki, Counsel for OnStar, to Marlene H. Dortch, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Mar. 2, 2006); *Revision of the Commission's Rules To Ensure Compatibility with Enhanced 911 Emergency Systems*, CC Docket No. 94-102, Order, 18 FCC Rcd 21531, 21531–33, paras. 2, 8 (2003).

²²³ See Letter from Jennifer D. Brandon, Executive Director, Community Voice Mail National, to Tom Navin, Wireline Competition Bureau, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed May 30, 2006) (Community Voice Mail May 30, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter) (arguing for an exemption for these services).

²²⁴ One-way services include, but are not limited to, one-way paging, electronic facsimile (e-fax), and voice mail services. See j2 Global 2003 Comments at 9 (describing its offering as a free unified messaging service that uses telephone numbers to allow subscribers to receive faxes and voice mail into their personal e-mail accounts).

²²⁵ See, e.g., Letter from Matthew Brill, Counsel for USA Mobility, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (opposing the assessment of a numbers-based fee on paging carriers and their customers); Letter from Kenneth Hardman, representing the American Association of Paging Carriers, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at Attach. (filed Oct. 22, 2008).

²²⁶ See Letter from Ari Q. Fitzgerald, Counsel, Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Apr. 12, 2006) (Mercedes-Benz Apr. 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Letter from John E. Logan, ATX Group, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (filed Mar. 16, 2006) (ATX Mar. 16, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from David M. Don, Counsel for j2 Global Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Nov. 18, 2005) (j2 Global Nov. 18, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from William B. Wilhelm, Jr., Counsel for Bonfire Holdings, to Tom Navin, Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau, CC Docket No. 96-45 (filed Feb. 13, 2006) (Bonfire Feb. 13, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); j2 Global *Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 2; Letter from Kenneth E. Hardman, Counsel for American Association of Paging Carriers, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Oct. 6, 2005) (AAPC Oct. 6, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Frederick M. Joyce, Counsel for USA

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these services would provide them with an advantage over other services that are required to contribute based on telephone numbers. These services are receiving the benefit of accessing the public network and therefore assessing universal service contributions on these entities is appropriate.²²⁷ These service providers have not shown that grant of a contribution exception is warranted.²²⁸ Accordingly, providers of these services will be assessed the full per-number charge.

93. We also decline to adopt an exception from the numbers-based contribution mechanism for additional handsets provided through a wireless family plan. We do not agree with commenters who argue that telephone numbers assigned to the additional handsets in family wireless plans should be assessed at a reduced rate, either permanently or for a transitional period.²²⁹ These commenters assert that assessing contributions at the full per-number rate would cause family plan customers to experience “rate shock.”²³⁰ Although family plan customers may see an increase in universal service contribution pass-through charges on their monthly bills, we are not persuaded that the fear of “rate shock” justifies special treatment. We find that each number associated with a family plan obtains the full benefits of accessing the public network, and thus it is fair to assess each number with a separate contribution obligation. We also note that wireless service is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the industry and the record does not include persuasive data showing that a move to a numbers-based contribution methodology would have a significant, detrimental impact on wireless subscribership.²³¹ We agree with Qwest that an exception for

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_____ Mobility, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1–3 (filed Mar. 22, 2006) (USA Mobility Mar. 22, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²²⁷ We similarly decline to adopt an exemption from the numbers-based contribution assessment method for services provided by alarm companies. *See* Letter from Donald J. Evans, Counsel for Corr Wireless Communications, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket No. 06-122, WT Docket No. 05-194, at 2 (filed Oct. 23, 2008). These services are receiving the benefit of having access to the PSTN and should therefore contribute to universal service.

²²⁸ Telematics providers argue against imposition of a \$1.00 per number per month contribution assessment on telematics numbers due to the service’s critical role in advancing public safety, and because the \$1.00 assessment would be prohibitively expensive. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Gary Wallace, Vice President Corporate Relations, ATX Group, Inc., to Kevin Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4; Letter from Matthew Brill, Counsel for Toyota Motor Sales USA, Inc., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008). We find, however, that treating these services differently than other residential services would not be equitable, given their use of the PSTN and the ability of telematics providers to recover the assessment from their end users. Given the public safety benefit to consumers, we find unpersuasive the telematics’ providers assertions that consumers will discontinue use of the service based on an assessment of only \$1.00 per number. Furthermore, we disagree with commenters who argue that telematics service should be treated as a business service, and conclude that telematics service is a residential service that should be assessed under the \$1.00 per number per month residential contribution methodology. *See* OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; Letter from Tamara Preiss, Legal and External Affairs, Verizon Wireless, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed Oct. 29, 2008).

²²⁹ *See e.g.,* AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4; CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5–6; Leap Wireless 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

²³⁰ *E.g.,* AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 4; CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 5–6; Leap Wireless 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2–3. *But see* AAPC Oct. 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

²³¹ There are, as of December 2007, 249,235,715 mobile wireless subscribers, a more than 9% increase from the previous year. *See* FCC, LOCAL TELEPHONE COMPETITION: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2007, tbl. 14 at 18 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-285509A1.pdf. Moreover, where a wireless

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additional family plan handsets would not be competitively neutral and would advantage approximately 70 million wireless family plan consumers over other service consumers.²³² Multiple wireline lines in a household are not given a discounted contribution assessment rate. We therefore decline to adopt a reduced assessment for wireless family plan numbers.

94. Some parties seek an exception to the contribution methodology we adopt today to exclude Internet-based telecommunications relay services (TRS), including video relay services (VRS) and IP Relay services.²³³ We decline to adopt an exception for such providers at this time. The Commission has an open proceeding on a number of issues related to these providers, including whether certain costs to these providers related to the acquisition of ten-digit numbers by their customers should be reimbursed by the TRS fund.²³⁴ We defer to that proceeding consideration of whether to adopt an exception to the contribution methodology we adopt today for numbers assigned to Internet-based TRS users.²³⁵

6. Reporting Requirements and Recordkeeping

95. Under the existing revenue-based contribution methodology, contributors report their historical gross-billed, projected gross-billed, and projected collected end-user interstate and international revenues quarterly on the FCC Form 499-Q and their gross-billed and actual collected end-user interstate and international revenues annually on the FCC Form 499-A.²³⁶ Contributors are billed for their universal service contribution obligations on a monthly basis based on their quarterly projected collected revenue.²³⁷ Actual revenues reported on the FCC Form 499-A are used to perform true-ups to the

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provider is eligible to receive universal service support, it receives the same level of support for each handset. *See* WTA/OPASTCO/ITTA Oct. 10, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

²³² Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 7; Qwest May 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 9; *see also* CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1.

²³³ *See* Letter from Deb MacLean, Communication Access Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, *et al.* to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1–2 (filed Sept. 29, 2008) (CSDVRS Sept. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²³⁴ *See Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket No. 03-123, WC Docket No. 05-196, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 11591, 11646, para. 149 (2008) (“We . . . seek comment on whether, and to what extent, the costs of acquiring numbers, including porting fees, should be passed on to the Internet-based TRS users, and not paid for by the [TRS] Fund. . . . We also seek comment on whether there are other specific costs that result from the requirements adopted in the *Order* that, mirroring voice telephone consumers, should be passed on to consumers, including, for example, E911 charges.”).

²³⁵ To the extent that Internet-based TRS users utilize a proxy number or identifier other than an assigned ten-digit number during/pending the transition to ten-digit numbering for Internet-based TRS services, we make clear that those numbers or identifiers are NOT subject to universal service contribution at this time. This treatment is necessary to ensure the smooth transition to ten-digit numbering for these services, and to prevent duplicative charges for end users of these services.

²³⁶ *See, e.g., Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24969, para. 29. Filers are required to file revisions to FCC Form 499-Q within 45 calendar days of the original filing date. *See* FCC, INSTRUCTIONS TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET, FCC Form 499-Q, at 10 (Feb. 2008) (FCC Form 499-Q Instructions), available at <http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form499-Q/499q.pdf>. Filers are required to file revisions to FCC Form 499-A by March 31 of the year after the original filing date. *See* FCC Form 499-A Instructions at 11–12.

²³⁷ *See Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24972, para. 35.

quarterly projected revenue data.²³⁸

96. We will develop a new and unified reporting system to accommodate our new contribution methodology.²³⁹ Contributors will report their Assessable Number and Assessable Connections counts on a monthly basis. Contributors must report as an Assessable Number any such number that is in use by an end user during any point in the relevant month. The Commission will develop an additional version of the FCC Form 499 for use in reporting Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections.

97. Under the new contribution system we adopt today, contributors will report historical Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections monthly. Contributors will then be invoiced and required to contribute the following month. By reporting actual, historical numbers and connections, our contribution methodology remains simple and straightforward. As explained above, a key reason to move to the modified contribution approach adopted herein is its simplicity. Indeed, several commenters propose monthly reporting of historical number counts.²⁴⁰ We find that reporting Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections on a projected collected basis would unnecessarily complicate the contribution system. Although we are mindful of the issues inherent in historical reporting,²⁴¹ we find that a one month lag between the reported Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections and the contribution based on those data is minimal and will not unfairly disadvantage any provider, even those with a declining base.

98. We allow contributors to self-certify which telephone numbers are, consistent with this order, considered Assessable Numbers. Contributors will be subject to audit, however, and their method for distinguishing Assessable Numbers other numbers must be reasonable and supportable.

99. Each contributor must maintain the necessary internal records to justify, in response to an audit or otherwise, its reported Assessable Number and Assessable Connections counts and the data reported on the Commission's contribution forms.²⁴² Contributors are responsible for accurately including all Assessable Numbers in their Assessable Number counts and all Assessable Connections in their Assessable Connections component of the methodology. Failure to file the required form by the applicable deadline, or failure to file accurate information on the form, could subject a contributor to enforcement action.²⁴³ In addition, as with the current FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q, we will require that an officer of the filer certify to the truthfulness and accuracy of the forms submitted to the administrator.

100. To ensure that filers report correct information, we continue to require all reporting

²³⁸ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24972, para. 36.

²³⁹ We decline to adopt the suggestion by AT&T and Verizon to transition the Telecommunications Relay Services Fund, local number portability cost recovery, and numbering administration to a numbers/connections-based assessment methodology. See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6. Although these programs rely on the revenue information reported in the current FCC Form 499-A, they do not rely on many of the revenue distinctions, such as interstate and intrastate, that necessitate the change from a revenue-based assessment for the universal service fund.

²⁴⁰ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 2-3; CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5; USF by the Numbers Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

²⁴¹ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24969-70, paras. 29-32.

²⁴² *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, para. 27.

²⁴³ Pursuant to section 1.80 of the Commission's rules, failure to file required forms or information carries a base forfeiture amount of \$3,000 per instance and is subject to adjustment criteria. See 47 C.F.R. § 1.80.

entities to maintain records and documentation to justify the information reported in these forms, and to provide such records and documentation to the Commission and to USAC upon request.²⁴⁴ All universal service fund contributors are required to retain their records for five years.²⁴⁵ Specifically, contributors to the universal service fund must retain all documents and records that they may require to demonstrate to auditors that their contributions were made in compliance with the program rules, assuming that the audits are conducted within five years of such contribution. Contributors further must make available all documents and records that pertain to them, including those of contractors and consultants working on their behalf, to the Office of Inspector General, to USAC, and to their respective auditors. These documents and records should include without limitation the following: financial statements and supporting documentation; accounting records; historical customer records; general ledgers; and any other relevant documentation.²⁴⁶

101. Finally, we direct the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau), and delegate to the Bureau the authority, to develop or modify the necessary forms to ensure proper contribution reporting occurs, consistent with this order.

7. Transition to New Methodology

102. The new reporting procedures discussed above will require reporting entities to adjust their record-keeping and reporting systems in order to provide reports to USAC regarding the number of Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections. Accordingly, we implement a 12-month transition period for the new contribution mechanisms.²⁴⁷ This transition period will give contributors ample time to adjust their record-keeping and reporting systems so that they may comply with modified reporting procedures. As explained below, a 12-month transition period will also allow reporting entities to submit several reports for informational purposes before being assessed on the basis of projected Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections.²⁴⁸ We find, therefore, that a 12-month transition period balances administrative burdens on contributors with the need to implement the new contribution methodologies in a balanced and equitable manner.

103. During 2009, filers will continue reporting their interstate telecommunications revenue on a quarterly basis and USAC will continue assessing contributions to the federal universal service mechanisms based on those quarterly reports. This one-year period and, in particular, the first six months of that period, should be used by contributors to adjust their internal and reporting systems to prepare for

²⁴⁴ *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16372, para. 27; *see also* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.706(e), 54.711(a).

²⁴⁵ *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16372, para. 27; 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(e).

²⁴⁶ *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, paras. 27–28. We note that contributors who also report NRUF data to the NANPA are currently required to maintain internal records of their numbering resources for audit purposes. *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7601, para. 62.

²⁴⁷ *See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 Ex Parte Letter*, Attach. at 3 (proposing a 12-month transition to the new mechanism taking effect).

²⁴⁸ *See CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments* at 7; *see also Verizon and AT&T Sept. 11, 2008 Ex Parte Letter*, Attach. at 2 (advocating a 12-month implementation period followed by a 6-month transition period). Some parties advocated for a transition period as short as possible. *See, e.g., Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, Attach. at 2 (filed Sept. 19 2008) (CenturyTel Sept. 19, 2008 Ex Parte Letter); Sprint Nextel June 14, 2006 Ex Parte Letter.* Others advocated for a longer transition period. *See, e.g., Qwest Mar. 21, 2006 Ex Parte Letter, Attach. at 3 (advocating 18 months); XO Communications Oct. 3, 2008 Ex Parte Letter, Attach. at 11 (advocating at least 18 months).*

the reporting of Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections.

104. Beginning in July 2009, contributors will continue to report and contribute based on their quarterly reported interstate and international revenues for the last two quarters of the year, but they will also begin filing with USAC monthly reports of their Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections. USAC will thus collect data under the old revenue-based methodology, while collecting and reviewing data under the new Assessable Number and Assessable Connections methodologies for the last six months of 2009. We find that this six-month period of double-reporting is necessary to help reporting entities, Commission staff, and USAC identify implementation issues that may arise under this new methodology prior to it taking effect.²⁴⁹ Although only the December 2009 Assessable Numbers and Assessable Connections will be used to compute contributors' January 2010 assessments, we find it is reasonable to require contributors to begin filing under the new methodologies prior to these periods to ensure that there is adequate time for all affected parties to address any implementation issues that may arise. Moreover, we conclude that the short overlap of reporting under both the old and new methodologies will not be unduly burdensome for contributors given the limited duration of the dual reporting.

IV. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A. Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

105. Pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA),²⁵⁰ the Commission has prepared a Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (FRFA) for the report and order concerning the possible significant economic impact on small entities by the policies and actions considered in the report and order. The text of the FRFA is included in Appendix [___].

B. Paperwork Reduction Act

106. This document contains proposed new or modified information collection requirements. The Commission, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork burdens, invites the general public and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to comment on the information collection requirements contained in this document, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13. In addition, pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107-198,²⁵¹ we seek specific comment on how we might "further reduce the information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees."

C. Accessible Formats

107. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice) or 202-418-0432 (TTY). Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations for filing comments (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by e-mail: FCC504@fcc.gov; phone: 202-418-0530 or TTY: 202-418-0432.

D. Congressional Review Act

²⁴⁹ See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3 (recommending a six-month transition period for filers and USAC to test and calibrate the new system prior to its taking effect).

²⁵⁰ See 5 U.S.C. § 603. The RFA, *see* U.S.C. §601 *et seq.*, has been amended by the Contract with America Advancement Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-121, 110 Stat. 847 (1996) (CWAAA). Title II of the CWAAA is the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 (Small Business Act).

²⁵¹ See 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(4).

108. The Commission will include a copy of this report and order in a report to be sent to Congress and the Government Accountability Office pursuant to the Congressional Review Act. See 5 U.S.C. § 801(a)(1)(A).

V. ORDERING CLAUSES

109. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that, pursuant to sections 1–4, 201–209, 214, 218-220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, and 503 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and sections 601 and 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151–154, 157 nt, 201–209, 214, 218-220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, 503, 601 and 706, and sections 1.1, 1.411–1.429, and 1.1200–1.1216 of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.1, 1.411–1.429, 1.1200–1.1216, the REPORT AND ORDER IS ADOPTED.

110. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Parts [] of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. § [] are AMENDED as set forth in Appendix A hereto.

111. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this report and order shall become effective 30 days after publication of the text of a summary thereof in the Federal Register, pursuant to 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.4, 1.13, except for the information collections, which require approval by OMB under the PRA and which shall become effective after the Commission publishes a notice in the Federal Register announcing such approval and the relevant effective date(s).

112. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Commission’s Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, SHALL SEND a copy of this report and order, including the Final Regulatory Flexibility Analyses, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary

APPENDIX C

Alternative Proposal

In the Matter of)	
)	
High-Cost Universal Service Support	)	WC Docket No. 05-337
)	
Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service	)	CC Docket No. 96-45
)	
Lifeline and Link Up	)	WC Docket No. 03-109
)	
Universal Service Contribution Methodology	)	WC Docket No. 06-122
)	
Implementation of the Local Competition	)	CC Docket No. 96-98
Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996)	
)	
Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation	)	CC Docket No. 01-92
Regime)	
)	
Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic	)	CC Docket No. 99-68
)	
IP-Enabled Services	)	WC Docket No. 04-36
)	
Numbering Resource Optimization	)	CC Docket No. 99-200

**ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER
AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING**

Adopted: "Insert Adopted Date"

Released: "Insert Release Date"

Comment Date: [XX days after date of publication in the Federal Register]

Reply Comment Date: [XX days after date of publication in the Federal Register]

By the Commission:

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. In enacting the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act),¹ Congress sought to introduce competition into local telephone service, which traditionally was provided through regulated monopolies. Recognizing that in introducing such competition, it was threatening the implicit subsidy system that had traditionally supported universal service, it directed the Commission to reform its universal service program to make support explicit and sustainable in the face of developing competition.

2. For the most part, Congress's vision has been realized. Competition in local telephone markets has thrived. At the same time, the communications landscape has undergone many fundamental changes that were scarcely anticipated when the 1996 Act was adopted. The Internet was only briefly mentioned in the 1996 Act,² but now has come into widespread use, with broadband Internet access service increasingly viewed as a necessity. Consistent with this trend, carriers are converting from circuit-switched networks to Internet Protocol (IP)-based networks. These changes have benefited consumers and should be encouraged. Competition has resulted in dramatically lower prices for telephone service, and the introduction of innovative broadband products and services has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, work, and obtain our education, news, and entertainment. At the same time, however, these developments have challenged the outdated regulatory assumptions underlying our universal service and intercarrier compensation regimes, forcing us to reassess our existing approaches. We have seen unprecedented growth in the universal service fund, driven in significant part by increased

¹ Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (1996) (1996 Act).

² See 47 U.S.C. § 230; 47 U.S.C. § 157 nt.

support for competitive eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs). The growth of competition also has eroded the universal service contribution base as the prices for interstate and international services have dropped. Finally, we have seen numerous competitors exploit arbitrage opportunities created by a patchwork of above-cost intercarrier compensation rates. Although the Commission has attempted to address many of these issues on a case-by-case basis, it has become increasingly clear that piecemeal efforts to respond to these developments are inadequate—only comprehensive reform can address the fundamental challenges that they present.³

3. Today we adopt a comprehensive approach to addressing these difficult, but critical issues. First, we spur widespread deployment of broadband by ensuring that carriers receiving universal service high-cost support offer broadband throughout their service areas. Second, we help Lifeline/Link Up customers participate in this new broadband world by creating a pilot program to provide discounted access to broadband services. Third, we broaden and stabilize our universal service contribution base through equitable and non-discriminatory contributions. Fourth, having placed our universal service fund on solid footing, we now take the long-overdue step of moving toward uniform intercarrier compensation rates that provide efficient incentives for the investment in and use of broadband networks. Finally, our approach minimizes disruptions to carriers and safeguards universal service for consumers by adopting sensible transition plans and ensuring that universal service is used to support service in high-cost areas, not carriers' dividends.

II. REFORM OF HIGH-COST UNIVERSAL SERVICE SUPPORT

4. Today we take a monumental step toward our goal of ensuring that broadband is available to all Americans. We do this by requiring that all recipients of high-cost support offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within their supported areas as a condition of receiving future support. Taking this action will promote the deployment of broadband Internet access service to all areas of the nation, including high-cost, rural, and insular areas where customers may not currently have access to such services. In particular, as a condition of receiving continued high-cost support, we will require all incumbent local exchange carriers (LECs) to commit to offer broadband Internet access service within five years to all customers in study areas where the incumbent LECs receive high-cost support. Incumbent LECs that do not make this commitment will gradually lose their high-cost support, as this support will be awarded via reverse auction to an ETC who will meet carrier of last resort obligations and will commit to offering broadband Internet access to all customers in the entire study area within ten years. We also adopt a five year transition plan for existing high-cost support received by competitive ETCs. With these reforms, we take great strides toward ensuring that all Americans, regardless of where they live, will have broadband Internet access service available to them, without increasing the size of the high-cost fund.

A. Background

³ We thus conclude that there is a compelling need to proceed with comprehensive reform at this time, as we describe below. *See, e.g., infra* Parts II.A, III.A, IV.A, and V.B. Given that we have notice and an extensive record, going back in some cases seven years, we are unpersuaded by commenters proposing that we delay reform to seek further comment, or that we issue a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on questions beyond those raised in Part VI. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Ray Baum, Chairman, NARUC Communications Committee, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, et al., FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 80-286, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 04-32, 06-122, WT Docket No. 05-194 at 2 (filed Oct. 21, 2008) (NARUC Oct. 21, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Jeffery S. Lanning, Embarq, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, et al., FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (Embarq Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Eric N. Einhorn, Windstream, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 07-135, 08-152 at 1 (filed October 27, 2008) (Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

5. The 1996 Act amended the Communications Act of 1934 (the Act) with respect to the provision of universal service.⁴ Congress sought to preserve and advance universal service, while at the same time opening all telecommunications markets to competition.⁵ Section 254(b) of the Act directs the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) and the Commission to base policies for the preservation and advancement of universal service on several general principles, plus other principles that the Commission may establish.⁶ Among other things, section 254(b) directs that there should be specific, predictable, and sufficient federal and state universal service support mechanisms; quality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates; and access to advanced telecommunications and information services should be provided in all regions of the nation.⁷

6. The Commission implemented the universal service provisions of the 1996 Act in the 1997 *Universal Service First Report and Order*.⁸ In considering methods to determine universal service support in rural, insular, and high-cost areas, the Commission examined the use of competitive bidding, and identified several advantages of competitive bidding as a method for allocating high-cost universal service support.⁹ First, the Commission found that “a compelling reason to use competitive bidding is its potential as a market-based approach to determining universal service support, if any, for any given area.”¹⁰ Second, “by encouraging more efficient carriers to submit bids reflecting their lower costs, another advantage of a properly structured competitive bidding system would be its ability to reduce the amount of support needed for universal service.”¹¹ Despite these advantages, the Commission determined that the record at the time was insufficient to support adoption of a competitive bidding mechanism.¹² Moreover, the Commission found it unlikely that competitive bidding mechanisms would be useful at that time because there likely would be no competition in a significant number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas in the near future.¹³ The Commission, therefore, declined to adopt a competitive bidding mechanism at that time, but found that competitive bidding warranted further consideration as a potential mechanism for determining levels of high-cost support in the future.¹⁴

⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254 (added by the 1996 Act).

⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254.

⁶ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b).

⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1), (2), (5).

⁸ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, 8780–88, paras. 1–20 (1997) (*Universal Service First Report and Order*) (subsequent history omitted).

⁹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320.

¹⁰ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320 (agreeing with the Joint Board). The Commission also agreed with the Joint Board that “competitive bidding is consistent with section 254, and comports with the intent of the 1996 Act to rely on market forces and to minimize regulation.” *Id.* at 8951, para. 325.

¹¹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320 (“In that regard, the bidding process should also capture the efficiency gains from new technologies or improved productivity, converting them into cost savings for universal service.”).

¹² See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8949–50, paras. 322–23. Only GTE had proposed a detailed competitive bidding plan, which it characterized as an outline rather than a final proposal. See GTE’s Comments in Response to Questions, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. 1 (filed Aug. 2, 1996).

¹³ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8950, para. 324.

¹⁴ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8948, para. 320.

7. Pursuant to section 254(e) of the Act, an entity must be designated as an eligible telecommunications carrier (ETC) to receive high-cost universal service support.¹⁵ ETCs may be incumbent LECs, or non-incumbent LECs, which are referred to as “competitive ETCs.”¹⁶ Under the existing high-cost support distribution mechanism, incumbent LEC ETCs receive high-cost support for their intrastate services based on their costs.¹⁷ Competitive ETCs, on the other hand, receive support for each of their lines based on the per-line support the incumbent LEC receives in the service area.¹⁸ This support to competitive ETCs is known as “identical support.” The Commission’s universal service high-cost support rules do not distinguish between primary and secondary lines; therefore, high-cost support may go to a single end user for multiple connections.¹⁹ Further, the Commission’s rules may result in multiple competitors in the same high-cost area receiving identical per-line support.

8. High-cost support for competitive ETCs has grown rapidly over the last several years, which has placed extraordinary pressure on the federal universal service fund.²⁰ In 2001, high-cost universal service support totaled approximately \$2.6 billion.²¹ By 2007, the amount of high-cost support had grown to approximately \$4.3 billion per year.²² In recent years, this growth has been due mostly to increased support provided to competitive ETCs, which pursuant to the identical support rule receive high-cost support based on the incumbent LEC’s per-line support. Competitive ETC support, in the six years from 2001 through 2007, has grown from under \$17 million to \$1.18 billion—an annual growth rate

¹⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(e). The statutory requirements for ETC designation are set out in section 214(e) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (Communications Act or Act). 47 U.S.C. § 214(e).

¹⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (“A ‘competitive eligible telecommunications carrier’ is a carrier that meets the definition of ‘eligible telecommunications carrier’ below and does not meet the definition of an ‘incumbent local exchange carrier’ in § 51.5 of this chapter.”).

¹⁷ Non-rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support for their intrastate supported services based on the forward-looking economic cost of providing the services. 47 C.F.R. § 54.309. Rural incumbent LEC ETCs receive support based on their loop costs, as compared to a national average. 47 C.F.R. Part 36, sbpt. F; 47 C.F.R. § 54.305. Incumbent LEC ETCs that serve study areas with 50,000 or fewer lines receive support based on their local switching costs. 47 C.F.R. § 54.301. Additionally, incumbent LEC ETCs that are subject to price cap or rate-of-return regulation receive interstate access support based on their revenue requirements. 47 C.F.R. Part 54, sbpts. J, K.

¹⁸ 47 C.F.R. § 54.307(a).

¹⁹ See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8828–30, paras. 94–96.

²⁰ Support for the fund derives from assessments paid by providers of interstate telecommunications services and certain other providers of interstate telecommunications. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706. Fund contributors are permitted to, and almost always do, pass those assessments through to their end-user customers. See 47 C.F.R. § 54.712. Fund assessments paid by contributors are determined by applying the quarterly contribution factor to the contributors’ contribution base revenues. In the second quarter of 2007, the contribution factor reached 11.7%, which is the highest level since its inception. See *Proposed Second Quarter 2007 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 5074, 5077 (OMD 2007). The contribution factor has since declined to 11.4% in the fourth quarter of 2008. *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD 2008).

²¹ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 3.2 (2007) (2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-279226A1.pdf.

²² UNIVERSAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPANY, 2007 ANNUAL REPORT 43 (2007) (USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT), available at <http://www.usac.org/res/documents/about/pdf/usac-annual-report-2007.pdf>.

of over 100 percent.²³ This “funded competition” has grown significantly in a large number of rural, insular, or high-cost areas; in some study areas, more than 20 competitive ETCs currently receive support.²⁴

9. To address the growth in competitive ETC support, the Joint Board recommended an interim cap on the amount of high-cost support available to competitive ETCs, pending comprehensive high-cost universal service reform. The Commission adopted this recommendation in 2008.²⁵

10. For the past several years, the Joint Board and the Commission have been exploring ways to reform the Commission’s high-cost program. In the most recent high-cost support comprehensive reform efforts, the Joint Board issued a recommended decision on November 20, 2007.²⁶ The Joint Board recommended that the Commission address reforms to the high-cost program and make “fundamental revisions in the structure of existing Universal Service mechanisms.”²⁷ Specifically, the Joint Board recommended that the Commission should: (1) deliver high-cost support through a provider of last resort fund, a mobility fund, and a broadband fund²⁸; (2) cap the high-cost fund at \$4.5 billion, the approximate level of 2007 high-cost support²⁹; (3) reduce the existing funding mechanisms during a transition period³⁰; (4) add broadband and mobility to the list of services eligible for support under section 254 of the Act³¹; (5) eliminate the identical support rule³²; and (6) “explore the most appropriate auction mechanisms to determine high-cost universal service support.”³³

11. On January 29, 2008, the Commission released three notices of proposed rulemaking

²³ 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 3.2; USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 45.

²⁴ See USAC Quarterly Administrative Filings for 2008, Fourth Quarter (4Q) Appendices, HC03—Rural Study Areas with Competition—4Q2008, available at <http://www.usac.org/about/governance/fcc-filings/2008/Q4/HC03%20-%20Rural%20Study%20Areas%20with%20Competition%20-%204Q2008.xls> (showing 24 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom North (study area code 351167), and 22 competitive ETCs in the study area of incumbent LEC Iowa Telecom Systems (study area code 351170)).

²⁵ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 8998, 8999–9001, paras. 4–7 (JB 2007) (*Interim Cap Recommended Decision*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 8834 (2008) (*Interim Cap Order*). As recommended by the Joint Board, the Commission capped competitive ETC support for each state. *Interim Cap Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 9002, para. 9; *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8846, paras. 26–28. The Commission set the cap at the level of support competitive ETCs were eligible to receive during March 2008. *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8850, para. 38.

²⁶ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (JB 2007) (*Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*).

²⁷ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 1.

²⁸ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20480–81, para. 11.

²⁹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26.

³⁰ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 27.

³¹ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20481–82, paras. 12–18.

³² *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20486, para. 35.

³³ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, paras. 1–6.

addressing proposals for comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service support.³⁴ In the *Identical Support NPRM*, the Commission sought comment on the Commission's rules governing the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to competitive ETCs.³⁵ It tentatively concluded that the Commission should eliminate the identical support rule.³⁶ The Commission also tentatively concluded that support to a competitive ETC should be based on the competitive ETC's own costs of providing the supported services, and it sought comment on how the support should be calculated, the reporting obligations to be applied, and whether the Commission should cap such support at the level of the incumbent LEC's support.³⁷ In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, the Commission tentatively concluded that reverse auctions offer several potential advantages over current high-cost mechanisms and sought comment on whether they should be used as the disbursement mechanism to determine the amount of high-cost universal service support for ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas, and it sought comment on how to implement reverse auctions for this purpose.³⁸ The Commission also sought comment on a number of specific issues regarding auctions and auction design.³⁹ The Commission also released the *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, seeking comment on the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* and incorporating by reference the *Identical Support NPRM* and the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*.⁴⁰ The discussion that follows represents our response to the Joint Board's *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, pursuant to section 254(a)(2).⁴¹

B. Discussion

12. Today we comprehensively reform the high-cost universal service support mechanism, and take steps to ensure that broadband Internet access service is deployed quickly to all areas of the country, including rural and insular areas. The steps we take today will provide certainty to providers as to the levels of support available to them in providing supported services and broadband Internet access service to all customers within the supported areas. This will assist providers in creating business plans to deploy services in currently unserved areas and will ensure efficiency in the deployment of services to these areas. Specifically, we are defining the level of high-cost support available to providers that commit to offer broadband to all customers within a service area. For incumbent LECs, other than rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, support in incumbent LEC service areas will be set at the total amount of high-

³⁴ *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1467 (2008) (*Identical Support NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1495 (2008) (*Reverse Auctions NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 1531 (2008) (*Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*) (collectively the *High-Cost Reform NPRMs*).

³⁵ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1468, para. 1.

³⁶ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1468, para. 1.

³⁷ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1473–78, paras. 12–25.

³⁸ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1495, para. 1.

³⁹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500–12, paras. 10–50.

⁴⁰ *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1531, para. 1.

⁴¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(a)(2). Pursuant to that section, the Commission shall complete any proceeding to implement a Joint Board recommendation within one year after receiving it. The Commission has acted on the *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision* prior to the November 20, 2008 one-year statutory deadline.

cost support disbursed to the incumbent LEC ETC in December 2008 on an annualized basis. For rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, all high-cost universal service mechanisms will continue to operate as they do today through 2010, and then will be frozen at that level. Incumbent LEC ETCs will continue to receive this level of support if they commit to offer broadband Internet access services to all customers within the service area within five years. If an incumbent LEC does not make this broadband commitment for a particular service area, the support will be transitioned to the winning bidder of a reverse auction that will commit to deploy broadband throughout the service area within ten years, and to take on carrier of last resort obligations. For competitive ETCs, we adopt a five-year transition, during which their support will be reduced 20 percent each year. While ensuring that broadband Internet access service is made available to customers in rural and high-cost areas, with the exception of high-cost support for rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, we also cap the overall size of the high-cost mechanism to protect customers in all areas of the nation from increasing universal service contribution assessments.

13. The requirements that we adopt for disbursement of high-cost universal service support do not apply to providers operating in Alaska, Hawaii, or any U.S. Territories and possessions.⁴² We find that these areas have very different attributes and related cost issues than do the continental states.⁴³ For this reason, we are exempting providers in Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. Territories or possessions from the high-cost support requirements and rules adopted herein, and we will address them in a subsequent proceeding.⁴⁴

1. Controlling the Growth of the High-Cost Fund

14. Consistent with the recommendation of the Joint Board, we cap the total amount of high-cost universal service support, with the exception of high-cost support for rural rate-of-return incumbent

⁴² Providers operating in U.S. Territories and possessions, such as Puerto Rico and Guam, are not subject to the high-cost support requirements adopted in this order. See Letter from Earl Comstock, Comstock Consulting LLC, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-377 at 1 (dated Oct. 15, 2008) (asking the Commission to recognize the higher costs and lower income levels in Puerto Rico in any reform efforts it may take); Letter from Eric N. Votaw, Vice President-Marketing & Regulatory, GTA Telecom, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (asking the Commission to recognize that Guam’s costs are higher than the continental United States and that Guam should be treated separately, along with Alaska and Hawaii, for reform purposes).

⁴³ E.g., *Verizon Commc’ns, Inc., Transferor, and América Móvil, S.A. de C.V., Transferee*, WT Docket No. 06-113, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Declaratory Ruling, 22 FCC Rcd 6195, 6211, para. 36 (2007) (*Verizon/América Móvil Transfer Order*) (describing “difficult to serve terrain and dramatic urban/rural differences” in Puerto Rico); *Integration of Rates and Services for Provision of Communications by Authorized Common Carriers between the Contiguous States and Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands*, CC Docket No. 83-1376, Supplemental Order Inviting Comments, 4 FCC Rcd 395, 396, paras. 7–8 (1989) (*Rates and Services Integration Order*) (describing the unique market conditions and structure in Alaska); Letter from Brita D. Strandberg, Counsel for General Communication, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 2 (Oct. 3, 2008) (discussing Alaska’s particular service needs and network architecture).

⁴⁴ Cf. *The Establishment of Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service at the 17.3-17.7 GHz Frequency Band and at the 17.7-17.8 GHz Frequency Band Internationally, and at the 24.75-25.25 GHz Frequency Band for Fixed Satellite Services Providing Feeder Links to the Broadcasting-Satellite Service and for the Satellite Services Operating Bi-directionally in the 17.3-17.8 GHz Frequency Band*, IB Docket No. 06-123, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 8842, 8860, para. 47 (2007) (*Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service Order*) (“The Commission is committed to establishing policies and rules that will promote service to all regions in the United States, particularly to traditionally underserved areas, such as Alaska and Hawaii, and other remote areas.”).

LECs.⁴⁵ As the Joint Board recognized, high-cost support currently accounts for more than half of total federal universal service support.⁴⁶ Since 1997, when the Commission implemented the universal service requirements of section 254 of the Act, high-cost support has increased by 240 percent.⁴⁷ Although, earlier this year, we took an initial step to address high-cost fund growth by capping support to competitive ETCs, that cap was an interim, emergency measure, pending a closer examination of the steps necessary to achieve comprehensive reform.⁴⁸ Many commenters have urged the Commission to cap the overall amount of high-cost support, rather than limiting the cap only to competitive ETCs.⁴⁹ Although other commenters oppose the adoption of a cap on the total amount of high-cost support or on the amount of support available to incumbent LEC ETCs,⁵⁰ we find that, to manage the high-cost support mechanism effectively, we must control its growth, and that capping support in the manner discussed below will provide specific, predictable, and sufficient support to preserve and advance universal service.⁵¹

⁴⁵ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, 20481, 20484, paras. 2, 11, 26.

⁴⁶ *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20484, para. 26. In 2007, total federal universal service disbursements amounted to approximately \$6.95 billion. Of that amount, approximately \$4.29 billion, 62%, was disbursed as high-cost support. USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 51.

⁴⁷ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at 3-14, tbl. 3.1 (high-cost support in 1997 was approximately \$1.26 billion, compared with approximately \$4.29 billion in 2007). Even taking into account the fact that additional interstate support mechanisms, Interstate Access Support (IAS) and Interstate Common Line Support (ICLS), were created in 2000 and 2001, respectively, high-cost support has still increased by more than 45%, from approximately \$2.94 billion in 2002 to its current level of approximately \$4.29 billion. *Id.*

⁴⁸ See *Interim Cap Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 8834, para. 1.

⁴⁹ See CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 18 (existing high-cost support mechanisms should be frozen at the study area level or on a statewide basis to provide funding certainty and encourage investment); Chinook *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments, Attach. at 5-6 (any cap on universal service support should apply to all ETCs, including incumbent LECs); Connecticut Dep't of Pub. Util. Control *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5 (supporting a cap on high-cost support set at the 2007 level); Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2 (supporting the recommendation to cap the overall size of the high-cost fund); Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (an overall cap should be applied to control the size of the high-cost mechanism); NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19 (the Joint Board's proposal to cap the overall size of the high-cost mechanism is "a welcome dose of fiscal responsibility"); National Consumer Law Center *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 2-3 (supporting the Joint Board's proposal to cap the overall high-cost fund); Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2-3, 6-9 (Commission should cap the overall high-cost fund).

⁵⁰ See Frontier *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 6-7; JSI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 6; Montana Telecommunications Ass'n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21-22; NECA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 17-20; TCA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10-11; TDS *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8-9; Missouri Small Telephone Company Group (MSTC) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5-7; Utah Rural Telecom Ass'n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5.

⁵¹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5); see CenturyTel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 18; Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3, 11; Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 8-9; National Consumer Law Center *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 2; NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4-6; New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 52-54; Oregon PUC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2-3; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 2; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7; New Jersey Division of Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 64-65; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 8-9; State Commissioners *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 2; Texas Office of Public Utility Counsel *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Reply at 2; Virgin Mobile *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 3-4. The

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15. We find it necessary to cap the high-cost mechanism as a first step toward fulfilling our statutory obligation to create specific, predictable and sufficient universal service support mechanisms.⁵² As the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit held in *Alenco*: “[t]he agency’s broad discretion to provide sufficient universal service funding includes the decision to impose cost controls to avoid excessive expenditures that will detract from universal service.”⁵³ The *Alenco* court also found that “excessive funding may itself violate the sufficiency requirements,”⁵⁴ and the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit has stated that “excessive subsidization arguably may affect the affordability of telecommunications services, thus violating the principle in [section] 254(b)(1).”⁵⁵ Given the excessive growth in high-cost support, we find it necessary to cap this mechanism to ensure that unsubsidized users who contribute to the fund are not harmed by excessive subsidization.

16. Therefore, we take several steps to limit the growth of high-cost support. First, excluding support to rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, we cap the overall high-cost fund at the total amount of high-cost support disbursed by the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) for December 2008 on an annualized basis, net of any prior or past period adjustments. Although we agree with the Joint Board’s recommendation to cap the high-cost mechanism, rather than set such a cap at the 2007 level of high-cost support as the Joint Board recommended, we find it is more appropriate to set the cap at the level of support disbursed by USAC in December 2008 on an annualized basis. Furthermore, for incumbent LECs other than rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, we freeze each incumbent LEC ETC’s individual, annual high-cost support at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, that the ETC received in December 2008 annualized, net of any prior or past period adjustments, on a study area or service area basis.⁵⁶ For rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, all high-cost universal service support mechanisms utilized by rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs continue to operate as they do today through 2010. This includes high-cost loop support (HCLS), local switching support (LSS), interstate common line support (ICLS), safety net additive support, and safety valve support. Support from these mechanisms will be frozen by study area at 2010 levels.⁵⁷

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Commission has already implemented caps on the schools and libraries and rural health care universal service mechanisms. *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9054, 9140, paras. 529, 704 (establishing a \$2.25 billion annual cap for the schools and libraries mechanism and a \$400 million annual cap for the rural health care mechanism); *see also* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.507(a), 54.623(a).

⁵² 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5); *see also Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9054, 9140, paras. 529, 704.

⁵³ *Alenco Commc’ns, Inc. v. FCC*, 201 F.3d 608, 620–21 (5th Cir. 2000) (*Alenco*).

⁵⁴ *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620.

⁵⁵ *Qwest Commc’ns Int’l Inc. v. FCC*, 398 F.3d 1222, 1234 (10th Cir. 2005).

⁵⁶ Pursuant to section 214(e)(5) of the Act, the term “service area” is used to refer to the geographic area established by a state commission or this Commission for the purpose of determining universal service obligations and support mechanisms. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(5). For a rural telephone company, section 214(e)(5) states that “service area” shall mean the rural company’s “study area” unless and until the Commission and the states establish a different definition of service area for such company. *Id.* In this order, we use the terms “service area” and “study area” interchangeably. Nothing in this order is meant to change any redefinitions of service area previously established by the Commission and/or the state commissions.

⁵⁷ Letter from John N. Rose, President, OPASTCO, and Kelly Worthington, Executive Vice President, WTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket No. 05-337, Attach. at 2 (filed Oct. 29, 2008) (Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

17. As discussed below, for competitive ETCs, we provide a five year transition, during which their support is reduced in equal steps.⁵⁸ More specifically, for each competitive ETC, a base-line level of support will be determined based on the total support received by that competitive ETC for the twelve months prior to the effective date of the order. For the twelve months following the effective date of the order, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 80 percent of its baseline support amount. In year two, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 60 percent of its baseline support amount. In year three, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 40 percent of its baseline support amount. In year four, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 20 percent of its baseline support amount. Finally, in year five, existing high-cost support for competitive ETCs will be eliminated.

18. Consistent with section 254(b)(5) of the Act, we find that capping high-cost support in this manner will enable ETCs to predict the specific level of support that they will receive should they choose to participate in the program.⁵⁹ To the extent that an incumbent LEC ETC determines that it cannot offer broadband Internet access service throughout its service area at the specified level of support, as discussed below, that particular study area will be deemed an “Unserved Study Area,” and we will conduct a reverse auction to determine the entity capable of meeting our service requirements and the amount of support to provide for that area. In fact, through the reverse auction process, it will be the bidders, not the Commission, that determine how much support they would need to offer service. Finally, as discussed below, if the reverse auction process does not yield a winning bidder, the Commission will reexamine whether it needs to take further action with regard to this situation, should it arise.

2. Conditioning Support on Offering Broadband Internet Access Service

19. The broadband era is here. Those of us who have broadband Internet access service use it to communicate, to work, to get vital information, to be educated, and to be entertained. Broadband Internet access service—a novelty at the time of the passage of the 1996 Act—is now mainstream. Yet some Americans still lack access to this vital service, and as Commissioner Copps has said, “does America at the beginning of the 21st century become technologically stagnant or the leader of the Digital Age? For me, the answer to that question depends in some significant measure upon whether we succeed in bringing high-speed, high-value broadband and an open Internet to all Americans . . . rural as well as urban folks . . .”⁶⁰

20. Today, we modify our high-cost support system fundamentally to spur deployment and ensure that all Americans have access to broadband. Specifically, for incumbent LECs, we make offering broadband Internet access service a condition of being eligible to receive high-cost support. As we explain below, we will require all incumbent LECs to certify whether or not they will commit to offering broadband Internet access throughout their supported study areas in five years.⁶¹ Those who make that

⁵⁸ Letter from Paul W. Garnett, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, 06-122 at 1 (filed Oct. 22, 2008) (CTIA Oct. 22, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5).

⁶⁰ Remarks of Commissioner Michael J. Copps, Pike & Fischer’s Broadband Policy Summit IV, Washington, DC (June 12, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-282890A1.pdf.

⁶¹ See *supra* note 56 (explaining use of the terms “study area” and “service area” in this order). We understand the concern of commenters who point out the need for more granular information on broadband availability. See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20481, para. 13; see also Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 13–16; GCI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 34–36; NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 20; New Jersey Rate Counsel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21–22; New York State PSC *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 1, 5–6; TCA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs*

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commitment will continue to receive their current levels of support. Auction winners, as well, must commit to offering broadband Internet access service throughout their supported areas as a condition of receiving even initial support. We also explain the obligations related to this condition, including carrier-of-last-resort-type obligations.

21. We believe that imposing this condition on the receipt of high-cost support for incumbent LECs and auction winners is fully consistent with and indeed promotes Congress's overall objectives as stated in section 254 of the Communications Act and section 706 of the 1996 Act.⁶² Section 254(b)(2) of the Act instructs the Commission to base policies for the advancement of universal service on the principle that "[a]ccess to *advanced telecommunications and information services* should be provided in all regions of the Nation."⁶³ Similarly, section 254(b)(3) states that "[c]onsumers . . . in rural, insular, and high-cost areas, should have access to . . . *advanced telecommunications and information services*, that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates charged for similar services in urban areas."⁶⁴ Indeed, Congress even established the definition of universal service as "an *evolving* level of telecommunications services . . . taking into account advances in telecommunications and information technologies and services."⁶⁵ We believe that imposing a broadband condition on receipt of high-cost support by incumbent LECs and auction winners advances the general purposes of section 254 of the Act as just described and also advances Congress's objective stated in section 706 of the 1996 Act to "encourage the deployment on a reasonable and timely basis of advanced

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Comments at 11–12; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 36; Embarq *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 8–10. The Commission has recently undertaken a major effort to gather more specific and granular data about broadband subscribership and availability. See *Development of Nationwide Broadband Data to Evaluate Reasonable and Timely Deployment of Advanced Services to All Americans, Improvement of Wireless Broadband Subscribership Data, and Development of Data on Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Subscribership*, WC Docket No. 07-38, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 9691, 9708–09, paras. 34–35 (2008) (*Broadband Data Gathering Order*) (seeking comment on, among other things, adopting a national broadband mapping program). We believe our refined broadband data gathering program will help all of us better assess where our broadband availability needs are greatest. For purposes of implementing the broadband deployment program of this order, we ask incumbent LECs to identify where they will and will not commit to broadband availability, thus identifying where we need to proceed to a reverse auction.

⁶² 47 U.S.C. §§ 157 nt, 254. Some commenters suggest that adding broadband Internet access service to the list of "supported services" would be inconsistent with section 254(c)(1) of the Act because broadband Internet access service is an information service, not a telecommunications service. See SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30–31; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 31–32; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 42–43; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 16–17. Using the universal service program to ensure universal broadband availability, however, is fully consistent with the statute as explained above. In addition, section 254(c)(2) provides that "[t]he Joint Board may, from time to time, recommend to the Commission modifications in the definition of the services that are supported by Federal universal service support mechanisms." 47 U.S.C. § 254(c)(2). The Joint Board did just that in the *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, in which it recommended that we add broadband Internet access service to the list of services eligible for support under section 254. See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20491, para. 56. In this order, we achieve the Joint Board's goal by conditioning receipt of federal high-cost support on an ETC's commitment to offer broadband Internet access service throughout its service area, but we do not add broadband Internet access service to the list of universal service supported services.

⁶³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(2) (emphasis added).

⁶⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3) (emphasis added).

⁶⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(c)(1) (emphasis added).

telecommunications capability to all Americans.”⁶⁶ We also see no reason why conditioning the receipt of high-cost support on offering broadband Internet access service is not permissible under the Commission’s authority to promulgate general rules related to universal service.⁶⁷

22. *Broadband Internet Access As a Condition to Receiving High-Cost Support.* Consistent with the objectives of sections 254 and 706 as just described, all incumbent LECs and auction winners must offer broadband Internet access service to all customers in their supported service areas as a condition of receiving universal service high-cost support. Since the Commission adopted universal service rules in response to the 1996 Act, broadband Internet access service has evolved into a critical service for American consumers. The importance of this evolution is reflected in Congress’s recent finding that “[t]he deployment and adoption of broadband technology has resulted in enhanced economic development and public safety for communities across the Nation, improved health care and education opportunities, and a better quality of life for all Americans, [and] [c]ontinued progress in the deployment and adoption of broadband technology is vital to ensuring that our Nation remains competitive and continues to create business and job growth.”⁶⁸ The majority of consumers who use broadband Internet access service today rely on it for telework, access to banking services, interaction with government, entertainment, shopping, access to news and other information, and so many other uses.⁶⁹ Broadband Internet access plays a special role in rural areas, reducing the burdens of distance.⁷⁰ For example, high-speed connections to the Internet allow children in rural areas to have access to the same information as school children in urban areas. Telemedicine networks made possible by broadband Internet access service also save lives and improve the standard of healthcare in sparsely populated, rural areas that may lack access to the breadth of medical expertise and advanced medical technologies available in other

⁶⁶ 47 U.S.C. §§ 157 nt, 254.

⁶⁷ The Commission has previously considered imposing conditions on the receipt of high-cost support. See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8831, para. 98. And of course, today’s recipients of high-cost support must comply with many obligations that are not explicitly spelled out in the statute. For example, to be designated as an ETC, an applicant must demonstrate that it has back-up power. See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 20 FCC Rcd 6371, 6382, para. 25 (2005) (*ETC Designation Order*).

⁶⁸ Broadband Data Improvement Act, Pub. L. No. 100-385, 122 Stat. 4096, § 102(1)–(2) (2008).

⁶⁹ A recent survey finds that, compared to Internet users with dial-up service at home, those with broadband service at home are far more likely to engage in 14 different types of Internet-related activities on a typical day. These activities include using an online search engine, checking for weather reports, getting news, visiting a state or local government Web site, obtaining job information, watching a video, and downloading a podcast. The daily use of a search engine, for example, is reported by 57% of the broadband users as compared to only 26% of the dial-up users. See JOHN B. HARRIGAN, PEW INTERNET & AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT, HOME BROADBAND ADOPTION 2008 at 19 (2008) (2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY), available at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Broadband_2008.pdf.

⁷⁰ For example, the California Broadband Task Force Report finds broadband service critical to expanding job opportunities for rural residents. It observes, for example, that broadband has facilitated the use of “homeshoring,” or the use of home-based workers for providing customer service, instead of requiring employees to adhere to a strict work schedule at a centralized location. This report also finds that broadband offers farmers better access to market information and allows them to expand their potential customer base. See FINAL REPORT OF THE CALIFORNIA BROADBAND TASK FORCE at 13 (Jan. 2008) (CALIFORNIA 2008 BROADBAND REPORT), available at <http://www.calink.ca.gov/taskforcereport/>.

areas.⁷¹ Broadband service also enables the sharing of critical, time-sensitive information with first responders, government officials, and health care providers, thereby improving the government's ability to provide a comprehensive and cohesive response to a public health crisis in coordination.⁷²

23. Despite the advances in broadband technology and the deployment of infrastructure to accommodate higher bandwidth speeds, ubiquitous broadband availability does not exist throughout the nation—especially for those consumers in rural areas.⁷³ In March 2008, the Commission's most recent data revealed that more than half of the households in the United States now subscribe to a high-speed service provider and at least one high-speed service provider is providing service in excess of 200 kbps in at least one direction in 99.9 percent of zip codes in the country.⁷⁴ The broadband subscription rate is much lower in rural areas, however. A 2008 survey finds that the percentage of rural households subscribing to broadband service is only 38 percent—well below the 57 percent and 60 percent subscription rates found in urban and suburban areas, respectively.⁷⁵ This survey concludes that the lack of broadband availability very likely accounts for some of this disparity.⁷⁶ Moreover, this conclusion is consistent with the results of residential surveys in several states.⁷⁷ We find that making the offering of

⁷¹ See *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60, Order, 21 FCC Rcd 11111, 11112, para. 5 (2006); see also SUSANNAH FOX, PEW INTERNET & AMERICAN LIFE PROJECT, *THE ENGAGED E-PATIENT POPULATION* at 1 (2008) (finding that home broadband users are twice as likely as home dial-up users to do health research on a typical day), available at http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Health_Aug08.pdf.

⁷² A recent report to Congress concludes that “[m]odern broadband communications networks and applications present an enormous opportunity to radically improve the manner in which emergency information is shared by health officials. Broadband services enable bandwidth intensive information such as video, pictures, and graphics to be transmitted faster and in a more reliable and secure manner.” JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS CAPABILITIES OF EMERGENCY MEDICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH CARE FACILITIES, REPORT TO CONGRESS 2 (Feb. 4, 2008), available at http://energycommerce.house.gov/Press_110/JAC.Report_FINAL%20Jan.3.2008.pdf.

⁷³ See, e.g., Cellular South *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10; see also generally 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 11–12.

⁷⁴ See FCC, *HIGH-SPEED SERVICES FOR INTERNET ACCESS: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2006*, tbl. 15 (2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-280906A1.pdf.

⁷⁵ See 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 3–4. The survey was conducted by phone from April 8, 2008 to May 11, 2008 among 2,251 American adults, 1,153 of whom were broadband users. *Id.*

⁷⁶ Pew acknowledges that the participants in its 2008 survey may report incorrectly as to whether broadband service is available where they live. 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 11. Pew nonetheless concludes that “the fact that rural residents are more likely to report that broadband isn’t available where they live indicates that infrastructure availability comes into play in broadband adoption. Some 28% of rural adult Americans without home high-speed say broadband isn’t available where they live, in contrast to 22% of non-rural Americans without broadband who say this. Moreover, 24% of dial-up users in rural areas say having the service available where they live would prompt a switch to broadband; this compares to the 14% figure for all respondents.” *Id.* at 11–12.

⁷⁷ In Ohio, a March 2008 survey of 1,200 residents found broadband service available in 96% of urban homes but in only 79% of rural homes. See CONNECT OHIO TECHNOLOGY ASSESSMENT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY at 2 (June 27, 2008), available at http://connectoh.org/documents/Res_OHExecutiveSummary06252008_FINAL.pdf. In California, a state-commissioned task force recently found that approximately 500,000 California households, or almost 1.4 million California residents, are unable to subscribe to broadband service with a speed of at least 500 kbps. The task force identified 1,975 communities without broadband service and concluded that many California communities do not have access to the higher broadband speeds. See CALIFORNIA 2008 BROADBAND REPORT at 33. In Tennessee, a July 2007 survey of 1,787 residents having dial-up service at home found that 36% of them did not subscribe to broadband service because it was unavailable to their homes. See CONNECTED TENNESSEE, TENNESSEE

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broadband Internet access service a condition of receiving universal service high-cost support can bring this critical service to the remainder of Americans who await its deployment.⁷⁸ In addition, doing so will further the objective of section 254(b)(3) that consumers in rural, insular, and high-cost areas have access to advanced telecommunications and information services that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates charged for similar services in urban areas.⁷⁹

a. Definition of Broadband Internet Access Service

24. For purposes of satisfying the condition to receive high-cost support, we adopt a definition of broadband Internet access service that focuses on the end user's experience, without regard to the types of facilities, protocols, or other technologies used to deliver that experience. Broadband Internet access service is therefore defined as an "always on" service that combines computer processing, information provision, and computer interactivity with data transport, enabling end users to access the Internet and use a variety of applications, at speeds discussed elsewhere in this order.⁸⁰ We refer specifically to broadband Internet access service—an information service—and not to broadband transmission alone because our goal is to ensure that all Americans have access to the Internet.⁸¹

b. Broadband Internet Access Service Obligations

25. Section 254(b)(1) instructs the Commission to base policies for the advancement of universal service on the principle that quality services should be offered at just, reasonable, and affordable rates.⁸² Below we provide requirements for offering broadband Internet access service as a condition of receiving universal service high-cost support. In sum, all incumbent LECs and auction winners must offer broadband Internet access service, along with all supported services, to all customers throughout their service areas by the end of a five- or ten-year build-out period consistent with the requirements of this order.

26. Except as described just below, an incumbent LEC or auction winner may offer broadband Internet access service using any technology, or combination of technologies, that meets the (continued from previous page) _____

RESIDENTIAL CONSUMERS at 22 (2007), available at http://www.connectedn.org/_documents/CTResidentialSurvey100107.FINAL.pdf.

⁷⁸ We disagree with commenters who suggest that it is premature or ill-advised to require all ETCs to offer broadband because, as discussed below, we do so in a manner that does not increase the size of the high-cost fund. *See, e.g.,* SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30; Sprint Nextel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 16–17; USTelecom *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 33–34; Western Telecomms. Alliance (WTA) *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 73; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 41. Similarly, we disagree with commenters who argue that government action at the current time would be wasteful as the market is already taking steps to reach currently underserved areas. *See, e.g.,* NCTA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19–20; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 30; SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 42. We cannot wait indefinitely for the benefits of broadband to reach all Americans.

⁷⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3).

⁸⁰ *See infra* paras. 28, 45; *see also* *Appropriate Framework for Broadband Access to the Internet over Wireline Facilities*, CC Docket No. 02-33, Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 14853, 14860–61, para. 9 (2005) (*Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*), *aff'd sub nom. Time Warner Telecom, Inc. v. FCC*, 507 F.3d 205 (3d Cir. 2007).

⁸¹ As explained below, nothing in this order changes the choice that providers have today to offer broadband transmission on a common carrier basis. *See infra* para. 26.

⁸² 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1).

requirements for speed set forth in this order. An incumbent LEC or auction winner may also combine services provided over its own facilities with those provided over another provider's facilities pursuant to agreement. Indeed, there may be service areas where it is more economic to offer broadband Internet access service via one technology than another and we explicitly provide for even a single provider to take advantage of the inherent benefits of different technologies for different areas.⁸³ Furthermore, an incumbent LEC or auction winner can combine a common carrier offering of broadband transmission⁸⁴ with the information processing capabilities described above,⁸⁵ so long as what the end user receives is in fact broadband Internet access service.

27. In general, an incumbent LEC or auction winner cannot use satellite broadband technology to meet its obligations under this order absent a waiver from the Commission. We are concerned that broadband Internet access service provided via satellite differs from broadband Internet access provided over other technologies in two important ways. First, satellite-provided broadband Internet access service is subject to latency due to the amount of time it takes a signal to travel between the satellite and the user.⁸⁶ Latency ranges from a quarter of a second to almost a second, making the use of applications that require a very fast response difficult or impossible, and substantially degrading the quality of other applications like voice over Internet protocol.⁸⁷ Second, satellite-provided broadband Internet access service is subject to degradation due to weather events ("rain fade") to a greater degree than other wireless technologies.⁸⁸ For these reasons, we find that satellite-provided broadband Internet

⁸³ Thus, we are not favoring wireline technology over another. *But see* Virgin Mobile *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 5–6.

⁸⁴ *See Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 14900–01, paras. 89–90 (giving providers of wireline broadband Internet access the choice to offer broadband transmission on a common carrier basis or a non-common carrier basis).

⁸⁵ *See supra* para. 24.

⁸⁶ *See, e.g.*, COMPUTER SCIENCE AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS BOARD, NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, BROADBAND: BRINGING HOME THE BITS 145 (2002) (BRINGING HOME THE BITS); BroadbandInfo.com, Inside the World of Satellite Broadband, BroadbandInfo.com, <http://www.broadbandinfo.com/satellite/intro-to-satellite.html> (last visited Nov. 3, 2008) (stating that because the satellites providing broadband signals orbit the earth approximately 22,300 miles above the surface, there is a lag time between the sending and receiving of the satellite broadband signal).

⁸⁷ *See* BRINGING HOME THE BITS 145 (explaining that for Internet telephony, the delay can cause a real degradation in usability); Jon Norwood, Overview of Satellite Internet—Comparing the Main Features of Broadband Satellite (Oct. 17, 2006), available at <http://www.velocityguide.com/satellite/satellite-internet-comparison.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (stating that signal delay to a satellite ranges from around 500 to 900 milliseconds, and that this latency can render any software that requires real-time user input problematic at best); BroadbandInfo.com, Inside the World of Satellite Broadband, available at <http://www.broadbandinfo.com/satellite/intro-to-satellite.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (stating that for certain broadband Internet real-time applications, such as e-gaming, the latency is enough to cause severe interference with the application).

⁸⁸ *See, e.g.*, *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps To Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 98-146, Second Report, 15 FCC Rcd 20913, 20938, para. 59 (2000) (explaining that areas subject to extreme rain or snow may have difficulty receiving satellite signals in those conditions, and describing it as a limitation to satellite Internet last-mile facilities); *see also* Howstuffworks.com, How Does Satellite Internet Operate?, <http://computer.howstuffworks.com/question606.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (explaining that, as for satellite TV, heavy rains can affect reception of Internet signals); Skycasters, Broadband Satellite Internet: 99.44% System Reliability, <http://www.skycasters.com/satellite-internet-service-specs/system-reliability.html> (last visited Oct. 31, 2008) (explaining that rain fade is a short duration period during

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access service cannot be the primary means by which we serve rural America. We recognize, however, that for certain customers, satellite-provided broadband may be the only economic means of reaching them. Therefore, all incumbent LECs and auction winners may apply to the Commission for a waiver to be able to meet their commitments under this order by offering broadband Internet access service via satellite to certain customers, based on a specific, detailed showing that there is no other economic option for serving those customers.⁸⁹ If the Commission grants such a waiver with regard to particular customers, that waiver may be transferred if a different ETC becomes subject to the obligation to offer broadband to those customers. In addition, we adopt the OPASTCO/WTA proposal that we create a “limited automatic exception for high-cost loops” for rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs. More specifically, OPASTCO/WTA propose: “The broadband build-out requirement has a limited automatic exception for very high-cost loops and allows rural RoR ILECs to serve those customers by satellite without filing a waiver request. A very high-cost loop is defined as a loop in which the additional cost to provide broadband is in excess of 150 percent of the carrier’s study area average loop cost. The automatic exception cannot apply to more than two percent of a carrier’s total loops within a study area.”⁹⁰

3. Incumbent LECs’ Commitment to Offer Broadband

28. As discussed above, as a condition of receiving federal high-cost universal service support, all incumbent LECs and auction winners must offer broadband Internet access service.⁹¹ Therefore, incumbent LECs receiving high-cost support must certify to the Commission, for each study area⁹² for which they receive high-cost support, whether or not they will offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within that study area, consistent with the requirements of this order, within five years of the due date of their commitment.⁹³ This certification must include a commitment to offer broadband Internet access service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.⁹⁴

29. Incumbent LECs that file a certification for a particular study area indicating that they will offer broadband Internet access service under the terms specified in this order will continue to receive their current levels of high-cost support for that study area, which will be deemed a “Committed Study Area.” We specify the precise benchmarks that the incumbent LEC must meet over the five-year build-out period, and the consequences for failure to do so, below.⁹⁵

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which the loss of satellite service occurs when intense storm cells are located directly between the satellite and the satellite dish).

⁸⁹ If an incumbent LEC or auction winner is permitted to use satellite service, the ETC may not charge a higher price to customers served by satellite than it charges to customers served by another broadband technology.

⁹⁰ Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2.

⁹¹ *See supra* paras. 19–27.

⁹² *See supra* note 56 (explaining the use of the terms “study area” and “service area” in this order).

⁹³ The Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) will release a public notice at a future date specifying the manner and due date of the certification. Other reporting, monitoring, and milestone requirements are set forth below. *See infra* paras. 57–63.

⁹⁴ This tier of broadband is similar to the tier described as “Basic Broadband Tier 1” in our *Broadband Data Gathering Order*. *See Broadband Data Gathering Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 9700–01, para. 20 & n.66.

⁹⁵ *See infra* paras. 57–63.

30. As discussed above, except for rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, we freeze each incumbent LEC ETC's individual high-cost support at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, the ETC received in December 2008 annualized, net of any prior or past period adjustments, on a study area or service area basis.⁹⁶ For rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, all high-cost universal service mechanisms will continue to operate as they do today through 2010, and then will be frozen at that level. Incumbent LEC ETCs committing to offer broadband Internet access service within a study area consistent with the requirements of this order will continue to receive the frozen high-cost support amount for that study area.⁹⁷

31. Study areas for which incumbent LECs either certify that they will not offer broadband in five years as described herein, or for which the incumbent LECs fail to file any certification at all, will be deemed "Unserved Study Areas." For these areas, the Commission will conduct a reverse auction as described below, awarding high-cost support to a bidder that will commit to take on carrier of last resort obligations and to offer broadband Internet access service throughout the study area.

4. Reverse Auctions for Study Areas Unserved by Broadband

32. The Joint Board recommended that the Commission's universal service goals include universal availability of broadband Internet service at affordable and comparable rates for all rural and non-rural areas.⁹⁸ While we are not adopting the Joint Board's recommendation to create a separate broadband fund, we agree with the Joint Board's goal that broadband Internet access service should be universally and affordably available. We are therefore allowing incumbent LECs receiving high-cost support to continue to receive such support if they commit to offer broadband services throughout their supported service areas by the end of a five-year build-out period. We anticipate, however, that in some study areas, the incumbent LEC may decline to make that commitment. For these Unserved Study Areas, we will conduct a reverse auction for the right to receive high-cost support.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See *supra* para. 16.

⁹⁷ Some incumbent LECs assert that they will not be able to commit to provide broadband Internet access service to all customers within their study areas at the frozen level of support. See, e.g., Letter from Eric N. Einhorn, V.P. Federal Government Affairs, Windstream, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122, 08-152, 07-135, at 3 (filed Oct. 27, 2008); Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337, at 2 (filed Oct. 20, 2008); Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President Legal & Industry, NTCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 04-36, at 1-2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008). First, to the extent incumbent LECs cannot build out their networks to provide broadband to all customers in their study areas, they may seek a waiver to provide service via satellite technology, as discussed above. Second, universal service support is not meant to subsidize high-cost carriers, but rather it is meant to support customers in high-cost areas. See *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620 ("The Act only promises universal service, and that is a goal that requires sufficient funding of customers, not providers. So long as there is sufficient and competitively-neutral funding to enable all customers to receive basic telecommunications services, the FCC has satisfied the Act and is not further required to ensure sufficient funding of every local telephone provider as well."). Therefore, if an incumbent LEC cannot provide broadband service at the frozen support levels, support will go to a reverse auction winning bidder who can provide such service at or below that level on a more efficient basis. Third, as discussed below, to the extent that a reverse auction does not produce a winning bidder, the Commission will reexamine support to that study area. Finally, for rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs, all high-cost universal service mechanisms will continue to operate as they do today through 2010, and then will be frozen at that level.

⁹⁸ See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20491-92, paras. 56-62.

⁹⁹ Many commenters, in particular those representing rural telephone companies, opposed the use of reverse auctions to award high-cost support to carriers of last resort in rural areas. See, e.g., *OPASTCO Reverse Auctions*

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33. We sought comment in our *Reverse Auctions NPRM* on the merits of using reverse auctions, a form of competitive bidding, to decide how much high-cost support to provide to ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas.¹⁰⁰ In a reverse auction, support generally would be determined by the lowest bid to serve the auctioned area.¹⁰¹ We conclude that using a reverse auction method for identifying both the recipient of high-cost support for an Unserved Study Area, as well as the amount of support, is appropriate because the winning bid should approach the minimum level of subsidy required to achieve our universal service goals.¹⁰² In contrast, a support mechanism based on cost or on a cost model provides no incentive for an ETC to provide supported services at the minimum possible cost.¹⁰³ In addition, a reverse auction provides a fair and efficient means of eliminating or reducing the subsidization of multiple ETCs in a given region.¹⁰⁴ For these reasons, we find that a reverse auction offers advantages over the current high-cost support distribution mechanisms and we adopt a reverse auction plan, as discussed below.¹⁰⁵

34. To implement the reverse auctions, there are several issues that must be addressed. We describe in this part: (1) the geographic area to be auctioned; (2) the reserve price for the reverse auction; (3) what a winning bidder will receive; (4) how the winning bidder will be selected; and (5) the qualifications a bidder must demonstrate before it may participate in a reverse auction.

a. Geographic Area

35. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we sought comment on whether we should use the study area¹⁰⁶ as the geographic area for reverse auctions.¹⁰⁷ We observed that high-cost support today is (continued from previous page) _____
Comments at 16–21; NTCA *Reverse Auctions* Comments at 30–46. Under the measures we adopt today, reverse auctions will be conducted only in study areas for which the incumbent LEC receiving high-cost support has not committed to offer broadband Internet access service.

¹⁰⁰ See *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 10.

¹⁰¹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11.

¹⁰² *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11; see Connecticut Dep't of Pub. Util. Control *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (supporting reverse auctions as a means of controlling and reducing the size of the universal service fund, while putting the burden on providers to estimate bid amounts); Comcast *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 7 (noting that the use of reverse auctions could reduce the size of the high-cost fund significantly).

¹⁰³ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11; see Letter from Grover Norquist, Americans for Tax Reform, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 1 (filed Apr. 14, 2008) (arguing that reverse auctions will create incentives to invest in rural communities and will not finance and subsidize wasteful carriers).

¹⁰⁴ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500, para. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Although several rural LEC commenters oppose the use of reverse auctions to distribute high-cost support, as discussed above, incumbent LECs will not be required to participate in a reverse auction to receive support, so long as they commit to deploy broadband throughout their study areas. See, e.g., ATA *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 13–15 (opposing the use of reverse auctions); Alexicon *Reverse Auctions NPRM* Comments at 2–3 (opposing reverse auctions for rural LECs).

¹⁰⁶ A study area is a geographic segment of an incumbent LEC's telephone operations. Generally, a study area corresponds to an incumbent LEC's entire service territory within a state. *Direct Communications Cedar Valley, LLC and Qwest Corporation Joint Petition for Waiver of the Definition of "Study Area" of the Appendix-Glossary of Part 36 of the Commission's Rules, Petition for Waiver of Section 69.2(hh) and 69.605(c) of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 19180, 19181, para. 2 (WCB 2005). Section 54.207 of the Commission's rules provides that a rural telephone company's service area will be its study area "unless and until

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generally based on the wireline incumbent LEC's study area.¹⁰⁸ We tentatively concluded that the wireline incumbent LEC's study area would be the appropriate geographic area on which to base reverse auctions.¹⁰⁹ We adopt our tentative conclusion that the study area is the best geographic area to use for several reasons. First, if we allowed bidders to bid to provide service in smaller geographic areas, we would encourage bidders to bid on areas that are easier or cheaper to serve, leaving our most difficult-to-serve populations still without broadband service.¹¹⁰ Conversely, if we required bidders to bid on even larger geographic areas, we might discourage bidders from entering the auction because of the difficulty in committing to serve an even larger area. Although some commenters oppose using the incumbent LEC's study area,¹¹¹ use of the study area is consistent with the area we ask incumbent LECs to consider in making their commitments. Finally, selecting smaller geographic areas for auction would increase the number of auctions to be held, potentially delaying the conduct of the auction and, therefore, the deployment of broadband to unserved areas.¹¹² For these reasons, we conclude that the study area is the best available geographic area to consider for the auction. We will conduct a reverse auction for each study area for which the incumbent LEC receiving high-cost support has not committed to offer broadband Internet access service pursuant to the requirements explained above (Unserved Study Areas).¹¹³

b. Reserve Price

36. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we noted that we should establish a reserve price—a maximum level of high-cost support that participants in the auction would be allowed to place as a bid.¹¹⁴ We observed that a reserve price that is set too low is likely to discourage bidders from participating, while one that is set too high raises the possibility of providing too much support.¹¹⁵ We conclude that the reserve price should be the amount of high-cost support that the incumbent LEC would have been

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the Commission and the states, after taking into account recommendations of a Federal-State Joint Board instituted under section 410(c) of this Act, establish a different definition of service area for such company.” 47 C.F.R. § 54.207(b); 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(5). As discussed above, we use the terms “study area” and “service area” interchangeably in this order. *See supra* note 56.

¹⁰⁷ *See Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1503, para. 20.

¹⁰⁸ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1503, para. 20

¹⁰⁹ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1504, para. 21.

¹¹⁰ Thus, we disagree with commenters' arguments that we should hold auctions for small geographic areas, such as counties, census block groups, or zip codes. *See, e.g., Comcast High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 9; *NCTA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 16; *SouthernLINC High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 24–25; *TracFone High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 6.

¹¹¹ *See, e.g., Comcast High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 8–9; *NCTA High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 16; *SouthernLINC High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 25; *TracFone High-Cost Reform NPRMs Comments* at 5.

¹¹² *See Ohio PUC Reverse Auctions NPRM Comments* at 6–7 (generally agreeing that the incumbent LEC's study area is the appropriate geographic area on which to base reverse auctions because further disaggregation could add cost and delays, and increase the opportunity for creamskimming).

¹¹³ *See supra* paras. 19–31.

¹¹⁴ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1509, para. 36.

¹¹⁵ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1509, para. 36.

entitled to receive had it committed to offer broadband Internet access service within the study area.¹¹⁶

37. We set the reserve price in each study area at the incumbent LEC's current level of high-cost support for several reasons. First, we are adopting caps on the overall high-cost fund. Setting a reserve price will help ensure that overall high-cost funding remains within the caps, because the high-cost funding for each Unserved Study Area will merely be transferred to another ETC, not increased. In addition, setting a reserve price at this level will ensure that, even in reverse auctions for particular Unserved Study Areas that do not garner many bids, those bids will be made by providers who are confident that they can assume all the obligations of the carrier of last resort,¹¹⁷ as well as the new broadband service obligations, and provide service more efficiently than the incumbent LEC.¹¹⁸ Indeed, we expect that bidders frequently will offer to provide service using newer and more efficient technologies than the incumbent LEC uses today. For these reasons, we set the reserve price at the level described above.

c. Auctioned Support

38. For Unserved Study Areas, we will auction the award of high-cost support to provide all supported services to the entire Unserved Study Area, on a carrier of last resort basis, consistent with the requirements of this order. The maximum annual award amount will be equal to the amount of the winning bid (Award Amount), paid out as described in more detail below as certain geographic areas are built out.¹¹⁹

39. The Award Amount is conditioned on the winning bidder providing all supported services as a carrier of last resort, as the incumbent LEC does today under state law, and meeting the ETC requirements set forth in the *ETC Designation Order*.¹²⁰ Competitive ETCs are currently required to

¹¹⁶ See SouthernLINC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 22 n.63 (“The Commission would start bidding at current support levels.”). As discussed above, each incumbent LEC ETC's individual high-cost support is frozen at the amount of support, on a lump sum basis, the ETC received in December 2008 annualized, net of any prior or past period adjustments, on a study area basis. See *supra* paras. 16, 30.

¹¹⁷ Carrier of last resort obligations for incumbent LECs are a matter of state law. Under section 214(e)(6), when the state lacks jurisdiction, the Commission shall make the public interest determination on whether to designate a carrier an ETC. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6). The ETC requirements include a requirement to provide supported services throughout the service area. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1).

¹¹⁸ Some commenters oppose setting the reserve price at current incumbent LEC levels, or setting any reserve price. See OPASTCO *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 19–20; MSTC Group *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 17–18; North Dakota PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5. We find that setting the reserve price at the incumbent LEC support level will provide certainty to bidders and enable bidders with more efficient technologies to provide broadband in areas where incumbent LECs do not commit to do so. Furthermore, as discussed below, if a reverse auction provides no winner, the Commission will examine the need for further action. See *infra* para. 47.

¹¹⁹ A competitive ETC that currently serves all or a portion of an Unserved Study Area will not receive high-cost support for the same service area as both a winning bidder and based upon a showing of its own costs. If a competitive ETC that already receives high-cost support within this study area wins the auction, it will lose its existing high-cost support for particular geographic areas as it begins to receive its Award Amount for those areas.

¹²⁰ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 6371. Section 214(e)(6) of the Act gives the Commission authority to designate carriers as ETCs when those carriers are not subject to the jurisdiction of a state commission. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6). The requirements in the *ETC Designation Order* currently apply only to Commission-designated ETCs, although the Commission, in that order, encouraged state commissions to adopt similar requirements. *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6372, 6379, paras. 1, 19.

provide supported services throughout their service area, even though they may not be, under state law, the carrier of last resort.¹²¹ In the *ETC Designation Order*, the Commission adopted additional requirements for ETC designation proceedings in which the Commission acts pursuant to section 214(e)(6).¹²² The Commission requires that applicants seeking ETC designation from this Commission demonstrate the following: (1) a commitment and ability to provide services, including providing service to all customers within its proposed service area; (2) that it will remain functional in emergency situations; (3) that it will satisfy consumer protection and service quality standards; (4) that it offers local usage comparable to that offered by the incumbent LEC; and (5) an understanding that it may be required to provide equal access if all other ETCs in the designated service area relinquish their designations pursuant to section 214(e)(4).¹²³ We find that the universal service obligations in the *ETC Designation Order* will apply to all competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions; in addition, the auction winner must accept all of the carrier of last resort obligations of the incumbent LEC for that study area, whether such obligations are imposed on the LEC pursuant to state or federal law.

40. In addition to the *ETC Designation Order* requirements, we add two additional requirements to competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions. First, they must, as a condition of receiving the Award Amount, offer broadband Internet access service to all customers within the Unserved Study Area. Second, competitive ETCs winning reverse auctions must offer supported services at a retail price comparable to the retail price charged by the incumbent LEC in that same study area for the same or equivalent service.¹²⁴ In this manner, we ensure that competitive ETCs receiving high-cost support will continue to make supported services at least as affordable and available as they are today.

41. We recognize that a transition mechanism is needed to shift high-cost support from the incumbent LEC currently receiving it to another ETC that wins an Award Amount. A flash cut would be harmful in at least two ways. First, the incumbent LEC would immediately lose support upon which it may rely to maintain supported services as a carrier of last resort to consumers today. It is possible that removing support from the incumbent LEC would, in some cases, jeopardize its provision of services to some users. In addition, granting a full Award Amount immediately to a winning ETC would provide little incentive for the competitive ETC to build out new facilities to difficult-to-serve areas until the last possible moment, as in many cases those areas will be the most expensive to serve. As a result, we conclude that, prior to the initiation of an auction, the incumbent LEC for the Unserved Study Area will be required to identify the distribution of support by geographic area for purposes of the auction and the transfer of support to the winning bidder. As the winning ETC builds out to those geographic areas and certifies that it complies with all its obligations under this order for that area, it will receive high-cost support for that portion of the Unserved Study Area, and the incumbent LEC will no longer receive such support for that area.¹²⁵ As the winning bidder takes on carrier of last resort obligations and obtains high-

¹²¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1).

¹²² *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6380, para. 20.

¹²³ *ETC Designation Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 6380, para. 20; 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4).

¹²⁴ In adopting this requirement, we are not setting any specific rates, nor does this requirement conflict with the states' jurisdiction over intrastate rates. Instead, we are conditioning the receipt of federal universal service support on an ETC's provision, on a voluntary basis, of rates comparable to the incumbent LEC's for equivalent services.

¹²⁵ The amount of support to be awarded to the winning bidder could be less than the amount of support received by the incumbent LEC for that same area. The transfer of support will be based on the amount of support, relative to support for the entire study area, received by the incumbent LEC for the area to be transferred; that same relative percentage will be used to calculate the amount of award support the auction winner should receive for the same

(continued....)

cost support for an area, the incumbent LEC will no longer receive high-cost support for that area and will be relieved of its carrier of last resort obligations at both the state and federal levels. We require winning auction bidders to comply fully with all the requirements of this order by the end of a ten-year build-out period.

42. Finally, we address the question of transferability of the Award Amount. We conclude that auction winners may transfer their right to the Award Amount. This transfer could take one of several forms—an auction winner could be purchased by another entity, the winner could sell assets used to provide the supported services, or the auction winner could transfer just the right to the Award Amount itself. The transferee will, in all events, step into the shoes of the auction winner and will be responsible for meeting all obligations as if it had been the original auction winner. Any such transfer, however, must be authorized by the Commission before it is consummated.

d. Selecting a Winning Bid

43. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we sought comment on whether the reverse auction should award high-cost support to a single winner or to multiple winners.¹²⁶ We observed that if only one winner receives support, this could provide a fair and efficient means of eliminating the subsidization of multiple ETCs in a region, particularly in areas in which costs are prohibitive.¹²⁷ We tentatively concluded that universal service support auctions should award high-cost support to a single winner.¹²⁸ We now conclude that the single winner format will provide the most effective mechanism for determining the support amount sufficient to meet the universal service goals in any given area.¹²⁹ We therefore adopt our tentative conclusion to select one winner in each reverse auction.

44. As we have explained above, in requiring the offering of broadband Internet access service as a condition of receiving high-cost support, one of our main goals is to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable, quality broadband services.¹³⁰ Achieving this goal will require careful selection of the winning bidder for a particular Unserved Study Area. As explained in more detail below, the winning bidder will be the one who commits to offer the highest speed of broadband service—throughout the entire Unserved Study Area—at a bid amount that is equal to or less than the reserve price (the incumbent LEC's current high-cost support amount). In so doing, we work towards making quality, technologically advanced broadband services available to all Americans, including those in difficult- or expensive-to-serve areas, rather than settling for lesser broadband service for those Americans who live in high-cost areas. We acknowledge that, in many cases, the winning bid will not be the cheapest one. But we believe that encouraging bidders to offer better broadband services at or below a set reserve price will (continued from previous page) _____
area. In no event will an incumbent LEC who is not an auction winner continue to receive support for an area once an auction winner begins to receive support for that same area.

¹²⁶ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 13.

¹²⁷ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 14.

¹²⁸ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1501, para. 14.

¹²⁹ See, e.g., Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4–5; New York PSC *Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 2–3; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 21–22, App. at 12. We disagree with commenters who support multiple winner auctions. See, e.g., Alltel *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 40–41; Atlantic Tele-Network *Identical Support and Reverse Auctions NPRMs* Comments at 13. We find that supporting a single auction winner is a more efficient means of ensuring the provision of broadband Internet access in areas where the incumbent LEC has determined that the costs of serving all customers in the area is prohibitive.

¹³⁰ See *supra* paras. 19–23.

help us achieve our broadband goals, while keeping an appropriate limit on the amount of high-cost support disbursed to achieve that goal.

45. For purposes of our reverse auction, we establish three tiers of broadband service. We will use the term “Basic Broadband Tier 1” to refer to service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps but less than 1.5 mbps, and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps. We will use the term “Broadband Tier 2” to refer to service with download speeds equal to or greater than 1.5 mbps and less than 3 mbps, and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps. We will use the term “Broadband Tier 3” to refer to service with download speeds equal to or greater than 3 mbps, and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.¹³¹

46. We will evaluate bids as follows: for any Unserved Study Area, a bidder will submit a bid to commit to offering a service falling within Basic Broadband Tier 1, Broadband Tier 2, or Broadband Tier 3 to all customers in the Unserved Study Area. To qualify for an award, the bid must be equal to or less than the reserve price—that is, equal to or less than the amount of high-cost support received by the incumbent LEC for that Unserved Study Area.¹³² The bidder need not specify a specific speed to which it will commit in any of the three tiers, but it must disclose in which tier its proposed service will fall. The bid amount will be an amount of high-cost support to provide all supported services in the Unserved Study Area as carrier of last resort, subject to all the requirements of this order, including the condition to offer broadband throughout the Unserved Study Area. The winning bid will be selected through a two-step process. First, we will identify the highest speed tier for which there is a valid bid. If there is only one bid for that tier, then that is the winning bid. If there are multiple bids within that tier, then the winning bid will be the lowest price bid within that tier.¹³³

47. If a particular reverse auction produces no winner, the study area will be identified as a truly high-cost study area. The fact that there is no winning bidder may indicate that the reserve price was set at too low an amount of support. The Commission will reexamine any such study area to determine whether the frozen high-cost support amount is sufficient, and, if it is not, the Commission will determine what further actions should be taken to ensure that the study area is served by a provider that will meet the broadband commitment and carrier of last resort requirements. For example, the Commission may consider disaggregating the study area on a wire center basis for reverse auction purposes, or increasing the amount of high-cost support set as the reserve price for the study area.¹³⁴ To ensure continued service to customers during the limited period of time in which the Commission examines these issues, the existing incumbent LEC will continue to have all carrier of last resort and ETC obligations, and will continue to receive high-cost support frozen at its current level pending transfer of such support to the winning bidder of the reverse auction.

e. Bidder Qualifications

48. We adopt a number of conditions that bidders must meet before they can participate in

¹³¹ These terms are similar, but not identical, to terms used in our latest *Broadband Data Gathering Order*. See *Broadband Data Gathering Order*, 23 FCC Rcd at 9700–01, para. 20 & n.66.

¹³² See *supra* paras. 16, 36.

¹³³ For example, assume the Commission conducted a reverse auction for an Unserved Study Area with a reserve price of \$5 and received four bids: \$1 to offer Basic Broadband Tier 1, \$2 to offer Broadband Tier 2, \$3 to offer Broadband Tier 3, and \$4 to offer Broadband Tier 3. In that scenario, the winning bid amount would be \$3 to offer Broadband Tier 3.

¹³⁴ See Free Press Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 12 (arguing that, if a study area receives no winning bidder in a reverse auction, then the study area should be disaggregated).

any auction. We adopt these requirements to help ensure that any bidder who wins an auction will be capable of meeting the commitments that flow from being a winning bidder.

49. First, we require that a bidder be an ETC, certified by the Commission or by a state. In the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, we tentatively concluded that an auction bidder must be an ETC covering the relevant geographic area prior to participating in the auction.¹³⁵ We hereby adopt that tentative conclusion. Winning bidders must be designated as ETCs before receiving high-cost support pursuant to sections 214 and 254 of the Act; therefore, requiring bidders to receive this designation prior to participating in an auction entails only a small additional burden. This burden is offset by the potential delay in deploying broadband Internet access service that would result while a non-ETC winning bidder seeks and obtains ETC designation.¹³⁶ We note that ETCs are not required to provide all supported services with their own facilities.¹³⁷ ETCs may enter into contracts with other entities to provide some supported services in part or all of the study area.

50. As a general matter, in our spectrum auctions we require an upfront payment to deter frivolous or insincere bidding.¹³⁸ In the reverse auctions we adopt today, we are not requiring an upfront payment. Instead, we are requiring participants to demonstrate to the Commission a capability to meet the milestone requirements. This showing will include, for example, evidence of financial resources with which to undertake the construction or upgrading of facilities necessary to offer broadband Internet access service. In addition, in areas where the bidder does not currently offer telecommunications services, we will require the bidder to submit a plan demonstrating the timetable for building the necessary facilities and obtaining any required permits.

5. Competitive Eligible Telecommunications Carriers

51. In the *Identical Support NPRM*, the Commission tentatively concluded that it should eliminate the current identical support rule for competitive ETCs, because the rule bears no relationship to the amount of money competitive ETCs have invested in rural and other high-cost areas of the country.¹³⁹ In that notice, the Commission tentatively concluded that a competitive ETC should receive high-cost

¹³⁵ *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1500–01, para. 12; *see also, e.g.*, Florida PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 5; Indiana Util. Reg. Comm’n *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 12; MSTC Group *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 12; Verizon/Verizon Wireless *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments, App. at 8.

¹³⁶ For this reason, we disagree with commenters who argue that we should not require bidders to be ETCs. *See* GCI *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 89; Consumers Union (CU) et al. *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 17.

¹³⁷ Pursuant to section 214(e)(1)(A) of the Act, a common carrier designated as an ETC must offer the services supported by the federal universal service mechanisms throughout the designated service area either by using its own facilities or by using a combination of its own facilities and resale of another carrier’s services (including the services offered by another ETC). 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1)(A).

¹³⁸ *See, e.g.*, *Auction of LPTV and TV Translator Digital Companion Channels Scheduled for November 5, 2008*, AU Docket No. 08-22, Public Notice, DA 08-1944, para. 53 (WTB 2008).

¹³⁹ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5; *see, e.g.*, Embarq *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10 (“It is logically inconsistent to compensate a carrier for serving ‘high-cost’ areas when there is no evidence—in the form of cost studies, filings, or model results—that the areas being supported are indeed ‘high-cost’ for that carrier.”); Frontier *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 4 (asserting that identical support is merely a subsidy to competitive ETCs, “and there is no basis to tell whether consumers are getting any [u]niversal [s]ervice benefits whatsoever” from subsidizing competitive ETCs in this manner).

support based on its own costs, which better reflect real investment in rural and other high-cost areas of the country, and which create greater incentives for investment in those areas.¹⁴⁰ Because a competitive ETC's per-line support is based solely on the per-line support received by the incumbent LEC, rather than its own network investments in an area, the competitive ETC has little incentive to invest in, or expand, its own facilities in areas with low population densities, thereby contravening the Act's universal service goal of improving the access to telecommunications services in rural, insular and high-cost areas.¹⁴¹ Instead, competitive ETCs have a greater incentive to expand the number of subscribers, particularly those located in the lower-cost parts of high-cost areas, rather than to expand the geographic scope of their networks. As discussed above, the Joint Board recommended elimination of the identical support rule; we agree with the Joint Board and adopt this recommendation and our tentative conclusion.¹⁴²

52. For competitive ETCs, we provide a five-year transition, during which their existing support is reduced in equal steps.¹⁴³ More specifically, for each competitive ETC, a base-line level of support will be determined based on the total support received by that competitive ETC for the twelve months prior to the effective date of the order. For the twelve months following the effective date of the order, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 80 percent of its baseline support amount. In year two, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 60 percent of its baseline support amount. In year three, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 40 percent of its baseline support amount. In year four, each competitive ETC will receive support equal to 20 percent of its baseline support amount. Finally, in year five, existing high-cost support for competitive ETCs will be eliminated. In the Further Notice we seek comment on an appropriate universal service mechanism (or mechanisms) focused on the deployment and maintenance of advanced mobile wireless services in high-cost and rural areas.

6. Build-Out Milestones and Monitoring, Compliance, and Enforcement

53. We find that a rigorous monitoring, compliance and enforcement program is necessary to ensure that all incumbent LECs and auction winners receiving high-cost support adhere to their obligation to offer broadband Internet access service throughout their supported service areas by the end of their respective build-out periods. We therefore establish build-out requirements to monitor providers' progress toward their build-out commitment. Specifically, and as described in detail below, we require each provider receiving high-cost support to meet specific milestones with regard to broadband deployment in the years preceding completion.

54. *Applicability of Requirements.* As an initial matter, we find that the monitoring, compliance and enforcement requirements we adopt today will apply equally to all recipients of high-cost support that commit to offer broadband Internet access service as a condition of receiving support.

¹⁴⁰ *Identical Support NPRM*, 23 FCC Rcd at 1470, para. 5.

¹⁴¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3); Alabama PSC *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 3 (“The identical support rule provides little incentive for ETCs to invest in building their own facilities in rural areas with low population densities because their support currently is based solely on the per-line support received by the incumbent, instead of investment in the network.”).

¹⁴² *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 5 (recommending elimination of the identical support rule, which “bears little or no relationship to the amount of money competitive ETCs have invested in rural and other high-cost areas of the country”).

¹⁴³ CTIA Oct. 22, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1. The calculation of support provisions in this Part apply to competitive ETCs that do not receive high-cost support as the result of winning a reverse auction. Support for winning auction bidders, including competitive ETCs, will be based on the bid amount, as discussed above. See *supra* paras 43–47.

Consumers should expect to receive the benefits of today's order, irrespective of whether an incumbent LEC or winning auction bidder receives high-cost support in their area. We find that the milestone obligations we impose today will not unduly burden any company; rather, they represent efforts we believe carriers would undertake in the normal course of constructing a broadband network. We therefore apply the monitoring, compliance, and enforcement requirements below to all incumbent LECs and auction winners that receive high-cost support.

55. *Milestones for Committed Incumbent LECs.* To ensure that incumbent LECs that commit to offering broadband make steady progress towards offering broadband Internet access service throughout their entire service areas as required in this order, we adopt milestones based on customer locations where the incumbent LEC is not yet offering broadband Internet access service (Unserved Customers).¹⁴⁴ Specifically, we require incumbent LECs to be capable of providing broadband Internet access service to an additional 20 percent of their Unserved Customers by the end of each year of the five-year build-out period. This requirement means that, of the total number of Unserved Customers in the service area, these carriers must offer broadband to 20 percent by the end of year one, 40 percent by the end of year two, 60 percent by the end of year three, 80 percent by the end of year four, and 100 percent by the end of year five. This five-year period starts from the due date of the incumbent LEC commitment.

56. *Milestones for Auction Winners.* To ensure that auction winners make good progress toward meeting their obligation to become fully compliant with the requirements of this order, we require every auction winner to be capable of serving 10 percent of the potential customers in the service area by the end of year two, 25 percent by the end of year three, 50 percent by the end of year four, 65 percent by the end of year five, 75 percent by the end of year six, 85 percent by the end of year seven, 90 percent by the end of year eight, 95 percent by the end of year nine, 100 percent by the end of year ten. The absence of a milestone at the end of year one is intended to allow new service providers sufficient time to plan their network and to start deploying and marketing it within some parts of the service area. Similarly, the ascending milestones in the remaining years are intended to permit the auction winner a reasonable time in which to build its network and services while ensuring that it does not delay in reaching customers who need this vital service. The ten-year build-out period starts on the date on which that carrier wins the auction.

57. *Consequences of Not Meeting Milestones.* For all incumbent LECs and auction winners receiving high-cost support, failure to achieve any milestone will result in loss of eligibility for support (and, where this Commission has jurisdiction over the designation of ETC status, loss of ETC status) for that service area. If the incumbent LEC or auction winner loses its eligibility for support, the study area will be subject to re-auction. If at the end of the build-out period, the incumbent LEC or auction winner is not fully compliant with all its obligations under this order, including its obligation to offer broadband Internet service throughout the service area, it will forfeit its eligibility for support and, if its ETC designation was made by this Commission, lose its ETC status.

58. *Milestone Audits.* All milestone data will be subject to audit by the Commission's Office of Inspector General and, if necessary, investigated by the Office of Inspector General, to determine compliance with the build-out requirements, the Act, and Commission rules and orders.¹⁴⁵ Service

¹⁴⁴ Customer locations include both residential and business locations within the ETC's service area.

¹⁴⁵ See *Comprehensive Review of the Universal Service Fund Management, Administration, and Oversight, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Lifeline and Link-Up, Changes to the Board of Directors for the National Exchange Carrier Association, Inc.*, WC Docket No. 03-109, Report and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 16372, 16383-84, para. 24

(continued....)

providers will be required to comply fully with the Office of Inspector General's audit requirements, including, but not limited to, providing full access to all accounting systems, records, reports, and source documents of the service providers and their employees, contractors, and other agents, in addition to all other internal and external audit reports that are involved, in whole or in part, in the administration of this program.¹⁴⁶ Such audits or investigations may provide information showing that a service provider failed to comply with the Act or the Commission's rules, and thus may reveal instances in which universal service support was improperly distributed or used.

59. We emphasize that we retain the discretion to evaluate the uses of monies disbursed through the high-cost program and to determine on a case-by-case basis whether waste, fraud, or abuse of program funds occurred and whether recovery is warranted. We remain committed to ensuring the integrity of the universal service program and will aggressively pursue instances of waste, fraud, and abuse under the Commission's procedures and in cooperation with law enforcement agencies. In doing so, we intend to use any and all enforcement measures, including criminal and civil statutory remedies, available under law.¹⁴⁷

III. BROADBAND FOR LIFELINE/LINK UP CUSTOMERS

60. In this Part, pursuant to section 254(b) of the Act, we establish a Broadband Lifeline/Link Up Pilot Program (Pilot Program) to examine how the Lifeline and Link Up universal service support mechanism can be used to enhance access to broadband Internet access services for low-income Americans.¹⁴⁸ Specifically, we conclude that we will make available \$300 million each year for the next three years to enable ETCs to support broadband Internet access service and the necessary access devices. In particular, if an ETC provides Lifeline service to an eligible customer, the Pilot Program will support 50 percent of the cost of broadband Internet access installation, including a broadband Internet access device, up to a total amount of \$100. In addition, if an ETC provides Lifeline service to an eligible household, the Pilot Program will double, up to an additional \$10, the household's current monthly subsidy to offset the cost of broadband Internet access service.

A. Background

61. Since 1985, the Commission, pursuant to its general authority under sections 1, 4(i), 201, and 205 of the Act and in cooperation with state regulators and local telephone companies, has administered two programs designed to increase subscribership by reducing charges to low-income

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(*Comprehensive Review Report and Order*) (requiring "recipients of universal service support for high-cost providers to retain all records that they may require to demonstrate to auditors that the support they received was consistent with the Act and the Commission's rules, assuming that the audits are conducted within five years of disbursement of such support."). The term "service provider" includes any participating subcontractors.

¹⁴⁶ This includes presenting personnel to testify, under oath, at a deposition if requested by of the Office of Inspector General.

¹⁴⁷ See, e.g., 41 U.S.C. §§ 51–58 (Anti-Kickback Act of 1986); 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (False Claims Act).

¹⁴⁸ The Commission has established a similar universal service pilot program under the Rural Health Care support mechanism. See *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60, Order, 21 FCC Rcd 11111(2006) (*2006 Rural Health Care Pilot Program Order*) (establishing a Rural Health Care pilot program to examine how the Rural Health Care funding mechanism can be used to enhance public and non-profit health care providers' access to advanced telecommunications and information services); *Rural Health Care Support Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 02-60, Order, 22 FCC Rcd 20,360 (2007) (selecting Rural Health Care pilot program participants eligible to receive up to 85% of the costs associated with the construction of state or regional broadband health care networks and with the advanced telecommunications and information services provided over those networks).

consumers.¹⁴⁹ The Commission's Lifeline program reduces qualifying consumers' monthly charges, and Link Up provides federal support to reduce eligible consumers' initial connection charges by up to one half.¹⁵⁰

62. Under the Commission's current rules, states and territories have the authority to establish their own Lifeline/Link Up programs that provide additional support to low-income consumers that incorporate the unique characteristics of each state or territory.¹⁵¹ For example, in establishing eligibility criteria, states have the flexibility to consider federal and state-specific public assistance programs with high rates of participation among low-income consumers in the state. State certification procedures and outreach efforts can also take into account existing state laws and budgetary limits. Some states and territories, however, have elected to use the federal criteria as their default standard. These "federal default states" include not only states and territories with their own Lifeline/Link Up programs that have adopted the federal default criteria, but also states and territories that have not adopted their own Lifeline/Link Up program. In April 2004, the Commission released an order expanding the federal default eligibility criteria to include an income-based criterion and additional means-tested programs.¹⁵²

63. *Eligibility for Lifeline and Link Up.* In states that provide state Lifeline and Link Up support, Lifeline and Link Up are available to all subscribers who meet state eligibility requirements. Although states have some latitude in selecting means tests, state commissions must establish narrowly targeted qualification criteria that are based solely on income or factors directly related to income for low-income residents to be eligible for Lifeline and Link Up. In addition, states with eligible residents of tribal lands must ensure that their qualification criteria are reasonably designed to apply to residents of tribal lands, if applicable.¹⁵³ To receive Lifeline and Link Up in a state that does not mandate state Lifeline support, consumers must certify that their household income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, or that they participate in one of the following seven federal programs: Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Public Housing Assistance (Section 8), the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), the National School Lunch Program's free lunch program, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).¹⁵⁴ Subscribers

¹⁴⁹ 47 U.S.C. §§ 151, 154(i), 201, 205.

¹⁵⁰ Lifeline currently provides low-income consumers with discounts of up to \$10.00 off of the monthly cost of telephone service for a single telephone line in their principal residence, though this amount adjusts, in part, to reflect the carrier's tariffed federal subscriber line charge. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.403. Link Up provides low-income consumers with discounts of up to \$30.00 off of the initial costs of installing telephone service. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.411(a). Under the Commission's rules, there are four tiers of federal Lifeline support. All eligible subscribers receive Tier 1 support which provides a discount equal to the ETC's subscriber line charge. Tier 2 support provides an additional \$1.75 per month in federal support, available if all relevant state regulatory authorities approve such a reduction. (All fifty states have approved this reduction.) Tier 3 of federal support provides one half of the subscriber's state Lifeline support, up to a maximum of \$1.75. Only subscribers residing in a state that has established its own Lifeline/Link Up program may receive Tier 3 support, assuming that the ETC has all necessary approvals to pass on the full amount of this total support in discounts to subscribers. Tier 4 support provides eligible subscribers living on tribal lands up to an additional \$25 per month towards reducing basic local service rates, but this discount cannot bring the subscriber's cost for basic local service to less than \$1. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.403.

¹⁵¹ *See* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.409(a), 54.415(a).

¹⁵² *See Lifeline and Link Up*, WC Docket No. 03-109, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 19 FCC Rcd 8302 (2004).

¹⁵³ 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(a).

¹⁵⁴ 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(b).

living on tribal lands qualify to receive federal Lifeline support if: (1) they qualify under state criteria in a state that provides Lifeline support; (2) they certify that their household income is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines; (3) they certify that they receive benefits from one of the seven federal programs listed above; or (4) they certify that they participate in one of the following additional federal assistance programs: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance (GA), Tribally administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF), or Head Start (meeting the income-qualifying standard).¹⁵⁵

64. *TracFone and Computer and Communications Industry Association Petitions.* On October 9, 2008, TracFone Wireless, Inc. (TracFone) submitted a petition requesting that the Commission establish a trial basis program to support broadband Internet access service and the devices that support this service.¹⁵⁶ Citing data demonstrating that a significant amount of low-income families are unable to afford broadband Internet access, TracFone proposes that the Commission, on a temporary basis, provide affordable access to low-income consumers by supporting broadband Internet access service and the devices used to access these services.¹⁵⁷ TracFone proposes limiting the program to 500,000 to 100,000 low-income households in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee, and the District of Columbia.¹⁵⁸ Doing so, according to TracFone, will enable to the Commission to examine how to better make available broadband Internet access service to low-income consumers throughout the Nation.¹⁵⁹

65. On October 7, 2008, the Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA) filed a petition requesting the Commission revise the definition of universal service supported services to allow low-income consumers receive support for broadband Internet access services.¹⁶⁰ CCIA states that, despite a critical need for broadband Internet access service, low-income consumers still have a considerably low broadband Internet access deployment rate. Accordingly, CCIA argues the definition of supported services for purposes of universal service should be revised to provide support for broadband Internet access service to low-income consumers.¹⁶¹

66. In recent proceedings, other parties have also urged the Commission to provide low-income consumers with support for broadband services. For example, Windstream argues that the Commission should direct broadband support to low-income consumers where such support is most needed.¹⁶² AARP also concludes that the Commission should provide Lifeline/Link Up support for broadband services and urges the Commission to conduct a proceeding to examine the matter.¹⁶³ AARP

¹⁵⁵ 47 C.F.R. § 54.409(a)–(d).

¹⁵⁶ See *Lifeline and Link Up, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 03-109, CC Docket No. 96-45, Petition to Establish A Trial Broadband Lifeline/Link Up Program (filed Oct. 9, 2008) (*TracFone Petition*).

¹⁵⁷ See *TracFone Petition* at 3–4.

¹⁵⁸ See *TracFone Petition* at 3.

¹⁵⁹ See *TracFone Petition* at 5.

¹⁶⁰ See Petition for Rulemaking to Enable Low-Income Consumers to Access Broadband Through the Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up Programs, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (*CCIA Petition*).

¹⁶¹ See *CCIA Petition* at 7.

¹⁶² See Letter from Eric Einhorn, Vice President Governmental Affairs, Windstream Communications Inc., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 99-68, 08-122, 05-337, 08-152 (Sept. 24, 2008) (Windstream Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

¹⁶³ AARP *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 55.

proposes that in addition to examining supporting broadband services, the Commission should also examine how to increase low-income consumers' access to devices that support broadband services and education on how to use such devices.¹⁶⁴ Many consumer groups and service providers have also commented in support of TracFone and CCIA's proposals to support the provision to low-income consumers of broadband Internet access service and the devices used to access these services.¹⁶⁵

B. Discussion

67. Consistent with the Commission's authority under sections 1, 4(i), 201, 205, and 254 of the Act, we establish a Lifeline and Link Up pilot program to support the provision of broadband Internet access service and the devices used to access this service to low-income consumers.¹⁶⁶ In doing so, we explain the justification for establishing this program and provide criteria and obligations applicants must satisfy for selection to participate in this program. Further, we establish requirements for oversight and administration of the Pilot Program.

68. *Broadband Internet Access Service and Devices Eligible for Low Income Support.* In the *Universal Service First Report and Order*, consistent with its statutory obligations, the Commission maintained the authority to adopt changes to the Lifeline program to make it more consistent with Congress's mandates in the 1996 Act if such changes would serve the public interest.¹⁶⁷ We believe that a Lifeline and Link Up pilot program comports with the goals of universal service, and advances the public

¹⁶⁴ AARP *Joint Board Comprehensive Reform NPRM* Comments at 55.

¹⁶⁵ See, e.g., Letter from Dale R. Schmick, CEO, YourTel America, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 03-109, 05-337, at 2 (filed Oct. 21, 2008) (YourTel Oct. 21, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Thomas J. Sugrue, Vice President Government Affairs, T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109, WT Docket Nos. 04-356, 07-195 at 3 (filed Oct. 17, 2008) (urging the Commission to adopt quickly TracFone's and CCIA's proposals); Letter from Karyne Jones, President & CEO, National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 at 1 (filed Oct. 29, 2008) (NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Donnie Ruby, Staff Associate, Telecommunications Research and Action Center, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); Letter from Bill Newton, Executive Director, Florida Consumer Action Network, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 27, 2008); Letter from Robert D. Atkinson, Chair Public Policy Committee, Alliance for Public Technology, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (APT Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from John Breyault, Vice President of Public Policy Telecommunications and Fraud, National Consumers League, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 23, 2008) (NCL Oct. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Mark Richert, Director, Public Policy, American Foundation for the Blind, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 03-109 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (AFB Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

¹⁶⁶ To the extent that our adoption of the Pilot Program adds broadband to the list of universal service supported services, we clarify that this inclusion is limited only to the Pilot Program—broadband is not a supported service for other low-income or high-cost support purposes. Pursuant to section 254(c)(1) of the Act, the Joint Board has recommended adding broadband as a supported service, and we do so for the limited purpose of the Pilot Program. See *Comprehensive Reform Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd at 20478, para. 4 ("The Joint Board now recommends that the nation's communications goals include achieving . . . universal availability of broadband Internet services"). Furthermore, the Commission's authority to provide universal service support to low-income consumers pre-dates the adoption in 1996 of section 254 of the Act, and arises out of sections 1, 4(i), 201, and 205 of the Act. 47 U.S.C. §§ 151, 154, 201, 205; *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8956–57, paras. 338–40. Pursuant to our authority to regulate low-income support under these sections, as well as under section 254, we provide universal service support for broadband Internet access services through the Pilot Program.

¹⁶⁷ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8956, para. 339.

interest by providing new technologies and services to low-income consumers. Section 254(b)(2) of the Act instructs the Commission to base policies for the advancement of universal service on the principle that “[a]ccess to *advanced telecommunications and information services* should be provided in all regions of the Nation.”¹⁶⁸ Similarly, section 254(b)(3) states that “low-income consumers . . . should have access to . . . *advanced telecommunications and information services*, that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas and that are available at rates charged for similar services in urban areas.”¹⁶⁹

69. Since the Commission first adopted its universal service rules in response to the 1996 Act, broadband Internet access service has evolved into a critical service for American consumers.¹⁷⁰ The majority of consumers who use broadband Internet access service today rely on it for telework, access to banking services, interaction with government, entertainment, shopping, access to news and other information, and many other uses. Access to broadband Internet access service is especially important to low-income consumers for purposes of education, public health and public safety.¹⁷¹ High-speed connections to the Internet allow children in low-income families access to distance learning and research.¹⁷² Telemedicine networks made possible by broadband Internet access service also save lives and improve the standard of healthcare to low-income families living in areas that may lack access to the breadth of medical expertise and advanced medical technologies available in other areas.¹⁷³ Broadband Internet access service also enables the sharing of critical, time-sensitive information with first responders, government officials, and health care providers, thereby improving the government’s ability to provide a comprehensive and cohesive response to a public health crisis.

70. Despite the advances in broadband technology, broadband availability still lags for low-income consumers.¹⁷⁴ The Commission’s most recent data reveal that where the median income is under \$21,000, approximately 99.5 percent of households have high-speed service available with speeds in excess of 200 kbps in at least one direction.¹⁷⁵ Yet, according to the Pew Internet & American Life

¹⁶⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(2) (emphasis added).

¹⁶⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(3) (emphasis added).

¹⁷⁰ See APT Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1; NCL Oct. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1.

¹⁷¹ According to the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, older low-income Americans have difficulty affording broadband services and many do not have Internet access. NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (citing Older Americans, Broadband and the Future of the Net, SeniorNet, 2008). Commenters also assert that broadband connections are particularly necessary for consumers who are blind, visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing. See APT Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (citing ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC TECHNOLOGY, ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL BROADBAND: POLICIES FOR STIMULATING DEPLOYMENT AND DEMAND 27 (2007)); AFB Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

¹⁷² See *Inquiry Concerning the Deployment of Advanced Telecommunications Capability to All Americans in a Reasonable and Timely Fashion, and Possible Steps to Accelerate Such Deployment Pursuant to Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, GN Docket No. 07-45, Notice of Inquiry, 22 FCC Rcd 7816, 7817, para. 3 (2007) (706 Fifth NOI).

¹⁷³ See 2006 Rural Health Care Pilot Program Order, 21 FCC Rcd at 11112, para. 5; 706 Fifth NOI, 22 FCC Rcd at 7817, para. 4.

¹⁷⁴ See Cellular South *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Comments at 10.

¹⁷⁵ See FCC, HIGH-SPEED SERVICES FOR INTERNET ACCESS: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2006, tbl. 19 (2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-277784A1.pdf.

Project, only 25 percent of households with annual incomes below \$20,000 have broadband service.¹⁷⁶ In contrast, among those living in households with annual incomes in excess of \$100,000, broadband adoption is approximately 85 percent.¹⁷⁷

71. According to the Commission's data, there are approximately 6.9 million consumers participating in the Lifeline universal service program.¹⁷⁸ Providing an additional \$300 million in annual support through the low-income universal service support mechanisms over a three-year period should increase the broadband subscribership for low-income customers to over fifty percent.¹⁷⁹

72. We therefore find that this Pilot Program furthers the universal service objectives of section 254 of the Act and serves the public interest by making this critical service available to the low-income Americans who cannot otherwise afford it. In addition, the Pilot Program will provide the Commission with a more complete and practical understanding of how to ensure the best use of Lifeline and Link Up universal service support to deploy advanced services to low-income consumers.¹⁸⁰

1. Available Funding

73. We establish a maximum annual funding level for this broadband Lifeline and Link Up Pilot Program at \$300 million for each of the next three years. In its petition, TracFone proposes that a pilot program should fund up to either \$180 million or \$360 million per year for Lifeline broadband Internet access service support, and up to \$125 million or \$250 million for the Link Up portion of the program, for a total of either \$305 million or \$610 million, depending on whether the program would support 500,000 participants or one million participants.¹⁸¹

74. While we recognize the importance of making sufficient funds available for this Pilot Program to enable us to determine whether and, if so, how to make broadband Internet access service funding a permanent part of the Lifeline and Link Up programs, we find that the levels of funding proposed by TracFone are not sufficiently tied to a specific improvement in the adoption of broadband by Lifeline subscribers, as discussed above. In 2007, the overall size of the universal service fund's

¹⁷⁶ See 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY ii.

¹⁷⁷ See 2008 PEW BROADBAND ADOPTION STUDY at 2.

¹⁷⁸ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT.

¹⁷⁹ Desktop computers can be purchased for as low as \$200. See Walmart Consumer Products, <http://www.walmart.com/catalog/catalog.gsp?cat=3951&fromPageCatId=14503> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008). For \$267, a consumer can purchase a new ASUS Eee PC 2G Surf laptop. See Amazon ASUS Eee PC 2G Surf Product Page, <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00114T9WY/ref=noref?ie=UTF8&s=pc> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008). Personal computers and wireless devices will continue to become available at even lower rates. Throughout the world, there are \$100 laptops and wireless devices. See Michael Trucano, InfoDev.org, Quick guide: Low-cost computing devices and initiatives for developing world (Apr. 2008), <http://www.infodev.org/en/Publication.107.html> (last visited Oct. 25, 2008). For example, Candlebox, being developed for use in India by Qualcomm, is a low-cost, low-power device that uses mobile technology to provide wireless Internet access and supports e-mail, social networking, e-commerce and distance learning applications. RICHARD P. ADLER & MAHESH UPPAL, ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA, M-POWERING INDIA: MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH at 21 (2008), available at <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/atf/cf/%7Bdeb6f227-659b-4ec8-8f84-8df23ca704f5%7D/2008INDIA.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ See NCBA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2 (suggesting that the Pilot Program should be modeled after the existing Lifeline program and can be studied and evaluated to develop future broadband Lifeline/Link Up support programs).

¹⁸¹ See *TracFone Petition* at 5.

disbursement mechanisms was approximately \$7.0 billion.¹⁸² Of that amount, approximately \$823 million went to fund the universal service low-income program.¹⁸³ TracFone's proposal represents a potential 74 percent increase over existing low-income program disbursements, and would be limited to targeting low-income consumers in only three states and the District of Columbia.¹⁸⁴ We are concerned that such a large funding commitment for a limited geographic area would not provide the Commission with sufficient information to assess the benefits of expanding the low-income support mechanisms upon the conclusion of the Pilot Program. When extrapolated to all states and territories, the low-income pilot program proposed by TracFone could potentially double the size of the \$7 billion universal service fund.¹⁸⁵ We find it more appropriate to fund a pilot program that better correlates with providing broadband Internet access service to all eligible low-income support recipients as this provides better information regarding the permanent adoption of such support.

75. Instead, we set the size of the Lifeline and Link Up Pilot Program at up to \$300 million per year over the next three years. We find that this amount provides benefits to low-income consumers while not overly increasing the amount of low-income support disbursed from the universal service fund. Specifically, this level of funding should enable the program to increase the broadband subscribership for these customers to over fifty percent.¹⁸⁶

2. Eligible Services and Equipment

76. For the broadband Lifeline/Link Up Pilot Program we adopt today, we limit support to one subsidy per household. For purposes of this order, we define "household" as one adult and his/her dependants, living together in the same residence.¹⁸⁷ Participating households who remain eligible for the program will be entitled to remain in the program beyond the first year, subject to the requirement that participating ETCs verify their customers' continued eligibility under the applicable income-based or program-based criteria, as they are required to do for their current voice Lifeline customers. We do not require state or carrier matching requirements. The Pilot Program is exempt from fees and taxes to the same degree as the current Lifeline programs.

77. Under the Link Up portion of the Pilot Program we adopt today, we seek to overcome barriers that low-income households might face in subscribing to broadband services, such as lacking the equipment necessary to connect to broadband services. Therefore, if an ETC currently provides or seeks to provide Lifeline voice service to an eligible customer, the Pilot Program will support 50 percent of the cost of broadband Internet access service installation, including a broadband Internet access device, up to a total amount of \$100. The device can be a laptop computer, a desktop computer, or a handheld device, so long as the equipment has the capability to access the Internet at the speeds established per this order,

¹⁸² See USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 51. USAC's administrative expenses for 2007 were \$104,073,000. *Id.* at 3.

¹⁸³ USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 3.

¹⁸⁴ See *TracFone Petition* at 3.

¹⁸⁵ Assuming \$250 is provided to each consumer, the total cost of the TracFone proposal could reach almost \$7 billion.

¹⁸⁶ See *supra* para. 71.

¹⁸⁷ *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, Schools and Libraries Universal Service Support Mechanism, Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Lifeline and Link-up*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 02-6 and WC Docket Nos. 02-60, 03-109, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 16883, 16890, para. 12 (2005) (*Hurricane Katrina Order*). Also, service agreements of longer than the lesser of one year or the remaining Pilot Program funding period are prohibited.

and the equipment carries at least a warranty.¹⁸⁸ The device subsidy is a one-time subsidy and is limited to one unit per qualified household.¹⁸⁹ The subsidy amount will be paid by USAC to the participating ETC that provides the device and the service to the customer, utilizing the same process that USAC uses for the current Link Up program.¹⁹⁰

78. Once low-income households have the ability to connect to the Internet, we seek to ensure that they can afford to subscribe to broadband Internet access service. Under the Lifeline portion of the program, if an ETC currently provides or seeks to provide Lifeline voice service to an eligible household, and that ETC provides broadband Internet access service, the Pilot Program will double the current monthly subsidy for the Lifeline subscriber up to \$10 per month to offset the cost of broadband Internet access service.¹⁹¹ As defined in this order, broadband Internet access service is an “always on” service that combines computer processing, information provision, and computer interactivity with data transport, enabling end users to access the Internet and use a variety of applications, at speeds discussed below.¹⁹² This monthly support provided to participating customers under the Pilot Program is separate from and in addition to their monthly Lifeline support for voice telephone service.¹⁹³

79. All ETCs participating in the existing low-income programs are eligible to participate, provided that they notify the Commission and USAC of their election to participate at least a month in advance and certify that they will comply with all program requirements, including those set forth herein. Such certification must identify the service area in which the ETC plans to offer such Lifeline/Link Up broadband services, the costs of such service and broadband device, and all costs, both recurring and nonrecurring, to the customer participating in the program. The ETC must offer the services supported in the Pilot Program throughout the entire service area. The Wireline Competition Bureau will release a public notice establishing a deadline by which ETCs must notify the Commission of their intention to participate.

80. The program we adopt today is technologically and competitively neutral; however, we establish minimum speeds at which participating ETCs must be able to provide broadband service. ETCs participating in the Pilot Program must offer broadband Internet access service with download speeds equal to or greater than 768 kbps and upload speeds greater than 200 kbps.¹⁹⁴

3. Selection Criteria

¹⁸⁸ Where such device costs \$100 or less, the Pilot Program will support 90% of the cost of the broadband Internet access device.

¹⁸⁹ 47 C.F.R. § 54.411(b).

¹⁹⁰ See USAC, Low Income: Overview of the Process, <http://www.universalservice.org/li/about/overview-process.aspx> (last visited Oct. 11, 2008).

¹⁹¹ Because \$10 is the maximum federal support under Tier 1 to Tier 3 of the existing Lifeline program, we find this to be the appropriate support amount for purposes of the Pilot Program. See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 2.3. Ten dollars is also above the average Lifeline support amount of \$8.46, which includes both tribal and non-tribal recipients. See *id.*, tbl. 2.12.

¹⁹² See *infra* para. 84.

¹⁹³ Pilot Program participants may not receive support for the same services from both the Pilot Program and the existing universal service programs—which consist of the rural health care, E-rate, high-cost, and low-income programs.

¹⁹⁴ See *supra* para. 28.

81. TracFone suggests that all ETCs notifying the Commission of their intent to participate in the Pilot Program should be allowed to provide the broadband Internet access service and devices under the Pilot Program.¹⁹⁵ TracFone also argues that the Commission should limit the Pilot Program to 500,000 to 100,000 low-income households in Florida, Virginia, Tennessee and the District of Columbia.¹⁹⁶ We agree with TracFone that all ETCs should be allowed to provide services under the Pilot Program, but we disagree that the consumers who are eligible to participate should be limited to three states and the District of Columbia.¹⁹⁷ Instead, it is consistent with the public interest to allow all ETCs and consumers that meet the criteria discussed in this order to participate in the Pilot Program, limited only by the availability of funds. Support will be disbursed on a “first come, first served basis” where priority is established according to ETCs’ submission of reimbursement requests to USAC and compliance with program eligibility.

82. *Consumer Qualifications.* To receive reimbursement under the Pilot Program, an ETC must provide support to a consumer eligible for support under the current Lifeline and Link Up programs. Specifically, the consumer must meet the eligibility criteria specified in section 54.409 of the Commission’s rules.¹⁹⁸ We agree with TracFone that only one connection and device per household should be funded. Accordingly, we limit Pilot Program support to one new connection and device per household. Lifeline consumers who currently have a broadband connection and related Internet device are excluded from participation in this Pilot Program. In addition to their obligations under section 54.409 of our rules, consumers must demonstrate that they do not currently have a broadband Internet access service subscription or broadband Internet access device.¹⁹⁹

83. *ETC Obligation to Offer Pilot Program Services.* Prior to participation, ETCs must notify the Commission and USAC of their intention to participate. A participating ETC must offer the services and supported devices to all qualifying low-income consumers throughout its service areas. It must also follow the carrier obligations identified in section 54.405, as applicable, of the Commission’s rules.²⁰⁰ Consumers and ETCs must follow the framework and requirements of the existing Lifeline and Link Up program.²⁰¹

4. Implementation and Reporting Requirements

84. To be eligible for support, ETCs must submit a reimbursement request to USAC 30 days from the date a customer subscribes to service or purchases a device. We require participating each ETC to file with USAC on a monthly basis the number of Pilot Program consumers it is serving, the types and prices of devices offered, the type of technology used (including make and model of equipment used) and the speeds at which it is providing service to each of those consumers. ETCs in their monthly submission must also report the number of subscribers served for the past month and projections for the number of

¹⁹⁵ *TracFone Petition* at 4.

¹⁹⁶ *TracFone Petition* at 3.

¹⁹⁷ See, e.g., YourTel Oct. 21, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2 (urging the Commission to allow low-income consumers living in Missouri to be eligible for Pilot Program support).

¹⁹⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.409.

¹⁹⁹ As discussed above, for purposes of this Pilot Program we define “household” as one adult and his/her dependants living together in the same residence. See *supra* para 76; *Hurricane Katrina Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 16890, para. 12.

²⁰⁰ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.405.

²⁰¹ 47 C.F.R. § 54.400–417.

subscribers for the next 2 months. Such monthly reporting is required to allow USAC to monitor availability of funds under the Pilot Program and notify participating ETCs when funds may no longer be available for additional customers. In determining and/or projecting funds availability, USAC should consider the recurring costs of existing customers; we decline to specifically allocate the available funding between Lifeline and Link Up, relying instead on the certification and reporting requirements herein to enable USAC to properly administer the Pilot Program.

85. Similar to current recordkeeping requirements, we also require ETCs to maintain records to document compliance with all Commission requirements governing this Pilot Program for the three full preceding calendar years and provide that documentation to the Commission or USAC upon request.²⁰² Additionally, ETCs must maintain documentation for as long as the consumer is receiving broadband Lifeline service from that ETC pursuant to the Pilot Program, and for three additional years after the consumer stops receiving service pursuant to the Pilot Program.

86. ETCs may receive reimbursement for the revenue they forego in reducing the price of any qualified consumers' broadband Internet access service and related device. As a condition of participation, it is the ETC's responsibility to make available a wide array of cost efficient broadband Internet access devices capable of providing the speeds described above to qualified consumers under this program. ETCs must also comply with the self-certification procedures, and submit certifications with their monthly submissions, consistent with sections 54.410 and 54.416 of the Commission's rules.²⁰³ Any services or equipment supported under this order are non-transferable and the devices must be returned to the ETC if they are not used in compliance with the terms of this order or other applicable laws or regulations. We delegate to the Wireline Competition Bureau the authority to disqualify an ETC or consumer from the Pilot Program and seek recovery of support not used in a manner consistent with this order.

5. Program Oversight

87. We are committed to guarding against waste, fraud, and abuse, and ensuring that funds disbursed through the Pilot Program are used for appropriate purposes. In particular, each Pilot Program participant shall be subject to audit by the Office of Inspector General and, if necessary, investigated by the Office of Inspector General, to determine compliance with the Pilot Program, Commission rules and orders, as well as section 254 of the Act.²⁰⁴ The Pilot Program participant will be required to comply fully with the Office of Inspector General's audit requirements including, but not limited to, providing full access to all accounting systems, records, reports, and source documents of itself and its employees, contractors, and other agents in addition to all other internal and external audit reports that are involved, in whole or in part, in the administration of this Pilot Program.²⁰⁵ Such audits or investigations may provide information showing that a Pilot Program participant or vendor failed to comply with the Act or the Commission rules, and thus may reveal instances in which Pilot Program awards were improperly distributed or used. To the extent the Commission finds that funds were distributed and/or used improperly, the Commission will require USAC to recover such funds through its normal processes, including adjustment of support amounts in other universal service programs from which Pilot Program

²⁰² See 47 C.F.R. § 54.417(a).

²⁰³ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.410, 54.416.

²⁰⁴ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.619; *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, para. 26.

²⁰⁵ This includes presenting personnel to testify, under oath, at a deposition if requested by the Office of Inspector General.

participants receive support.²⁰⁶ If any participant fails to comply with Commission rules or orders, or fails to timely submit filings required by such rules or orders, the Commission also has the authority to assess forfeitures for violations of such Commission rules and orders. In addition, any participant or service provider that willfully makes a false statement can be punished by fine or forfeiture under sections 502 and 503 of the Act,²⁰⁷ or by fine or imprisonment under Title 18 of the United States Code (U.S.C.) including, but not limited to, criminal prosecution pursuant to section 1001 of Title 18 of the U.S.C.²⁰⁸ We emphasize that we retain the discretion to evaluate the uses of monies disbursed through the Pilot Program and to determine on a case-by-case basis whether waste, fraud, or abuse of program funds occurred and whether recovery is warranted. We remain committed to ensuring the integrity of the universal service program and will aggressively pursue instances of waste, fraud, and abuse under the Commission's procedures and in cooperation with law enforcement agencies. In doing so, we intend to use any and all enforcement measures, including criminal and civil statutory remedies, available under law.²⁰⁹ The Commission will also monitor the use of awarded monies and develop rules and processes as necessary to ensure that funds are used in a manner consistent with the goals of this Pilot Program. Finally, we remind participants that nothing in this order relieves them of their obligations to comply with other applicable federal laws and regulations.

IV. REFORM OF UNIVERSAL SERVICE CONTRIBUTIONS

88. In this Part, we adopt a telephone numbers-based methodology under which contributors will pay a constant, flat-rate assessment based on the number of telephone numbers they have assigned to residential end users. We set this per-number assessment at the fixed rate of \$1.00 per residential number per month. We conclude that providers of business services should contribute to the universal service fund on a connection basis, and we seek comment on implementation of that methodology. In the interim, providers of business services will continue to contribute based on interstate and international revenues for these services. The separate contribution methodologies for residential and business services will be implemented beginning on January 1, 2010.

A. Background

89. In implementing the universal service requirements of the 1996 Act, the Commission established a method for collecting funds to be disbursed through the various universal service support mechanisms. Specifically, the Commission determined that contributions to the universal service fund would be assessed on telecommunications providers based on their interstate and international end-user telecommunications revenues.²¹⁰ The Commission concluded that basing providers' universal service

²⁰⁶ We intend that funds disbursed in violation of a Commission rule that implements section 254 or a substantive program goal will be recovered. Sanctions, including enforcement action, are appropriate in cases of waste, fraud, and abuse, but not in cases of clerical or ministerial errors. *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16388–89, para. 30.

²⁰⁷ 47 U.S.C. §§ 502, 503(b).

²⁰⁸ 18 U.S.C. § 1001. Further, the Commission has found that “debarment of applicants, service providers, consultants, or others who have defrauded the USF is necessary to protect the integrity of the universal service programs.” *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC at 16390, para. 32. Therefore, the Commission intends to suspend and debar parties from the Pilot Program who are convicted of or held civilly liable for the commission or attempted commission of fraud and similar offenses arising out of their participation in the Pilot Program or other universal service programs. *See id.* paras. 31–32.

²⁰⁹ *See, e.g.*, 41 U.S.C. §§ 51–58 (Anti-Kickback Act of 1986); 31 U.S.C. § 3729 (False Claims Act).

²¹⁰ *See Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206–07, paras. 843–44; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Access Charge Reform*, Sixteenth Order on Reconsideration and Eighth Report and

(continued....)

contributions on their revenues would be competitively neutral, easy to administer, and explicit.²¹¹

90. When the Commission adopted the revenue-based contribution system, assessable interstate revenues were growing. The total assessable revenue base has declined in recent years, however, from about \$79.0 billion in 2000 to about \$74.5 billion in 2006,²¹² while universal service disbursements grew over that same time period from approximately \$4.5 billion in 2000 to over \$6.6 billion in 2006.²¹³ Declines in assessable contribution revenues combined with growth in universal service disbursements have increased the contribution factor applied to determine universal service contribution amounts.²¹⁴ This upward pressure jeopardizes the stability and sustainability of the support mechanisms, demonstrating the need for long-term fundamental reform of the contribution methodology.²¹⁵

91. In addition, interstate end-user telecommunications service revenues are becoming increasingly difficult to identify as customers migrate to bundled packages of interstate and intrastate telecommunications and non-telecommunications products and services.²¹⁶ The integration of local and long-distance wireline services into packages that allow customers to purchase buckets of long distance minutes and local service for a single price blurs the distinction between revenue derived from intrastate telecommunications service and interstate telecommunications service. Similarly, the availability of

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Order in CC Docket No. 96-45 and Sixth Report and Order in CC Docket No. 96-262, 15 FCC Rcd 1679, 1685, para. 15 (1999) (*Fifth Circuit Remand Order*) (establishing a single contribution for all universal service support mechanisms based on interstate and international revenues).

²¹¹ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206–08, 9211, paras. 843, 845–48, 854.

²¹² Compare JIM LANDE & KENNETH LYNCH, FCC, 2000 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY REVENUES, tbl. 4 (2002), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/IAD/telrev00.pdf with JIM LANDE & KENNETH LYNCH, FCC, 2006 TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY REVENUES, tbl. 4 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284929A1.pdf. But see Letter from David C. Bergmann, Chair, NASUCA Telecommunications Committee, to Chairman Kevin Martin et al., FCC, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 06-122, 05-337, 05-195, 04-36, 03-109, 02-60, CC Docket Nos. 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 99-68, 96-262, 96-45, 80-286, at 7 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (arguing that the growth in the contribution factor is “almost entirely” due to the growth in universal service disbursement requirements).

²¹³ See FCC, UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT, tbl. 1.2a (2001) (2001 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Common_Carrier/Reports/FCC-State_Link/Monitor/mrs01-0.pdf; 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 1.11; see also USAC 2007 ANNUAL REPORT at 3, 51 (detailing universal service disbursements for 2007 at approximately \$6.9 billion).

²¹⁴ The contribution factor grew from 5.9% in the first quarter of 2000 to 11.3% for the fourth quarter of 2008. See *Proposed First Quarter 2000 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, 15 FCC Rcd 3660 (WCB 1999); *Proposed Fourth Quarter 2008 Universal Service Contribution Factor*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Public Notice, DA 08-2091 (OMD Sept. 12, 2008) (*Fourth Quarter 2008 Contribution Factor Public Notice*).

²¹⁵ See 47 U.S.C. §§ 254(b), (d).

²¹⁶ Although the Commission has established safe harbors for the reporting of interstate telecommunications revenues derived from interstate telecommunications services bundled with customer premises equipment (CPE) or information services, it has not established guidelines for reporting interstate telecommunications service revenues for flat-rated bundles of wireline interstate and intrastate services. See *Policy and Rules Concerning the Interstate, Interexchange Marketplace; Implementation of Section 254(g) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended; 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review—Review of Customer Premises Equipment and Enhanced Local Exchange Markets*, CC Docket Nos. 96-61, 98-183, Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 7418, 7446–48, paras. 47–54 (2001) (*CPE Bundling Order*).

mobile wireless calling plans that allow customers to purchase buckets of minutes on a nationwide network without incurring roaming or long-distance charges also makes it difficult for providers and the Commission to identify the amount of revenue derived from interstate telecommunications service.²¹⁷ Further, migration to interconnected VoIP services complicates the distinctions that serve as the basis for current contribution obligations.²¹⁸

92. In 2001 and 2002, the Commission sought comment on modifications to the existing revenue-based contribution methodology, and on replacing that methodology with one that assesses contributions on the basis of a flat-fee charge, such as a per-line charge.²¹⁹ The Commission also sought comment on other universal service contribution methodologies, including moving to a numbers-based methodology.²²⁰ Finally, in May 2008, the Commission encouraged commenters to refresh the record in several pending intercarrier compensation and universal service reform proceedings, including the contribution methodology proceeding.²²¹

B. Discussion

93. The system of contributions to the universal service fund is broken. The Commission has repeatedly patched the current system to accommodate decreasing interstate revenues, a trend toward “all-you-can-eat” services that make distinguishing interstate from other revenues difficult if not impossible and changes in technology. While the service developments that precipitated these changes have enormous consumer benefits, they have also severely strained the contributions system.²²² We therefore

²¹⁷ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Memorandum Opinion and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 13 FCC Rcd 21252, 21258–59, paras. 13–15 (1998) (*First Wireless Safe Harbor Order*); see also *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 17 FCC Rcd 24952, 24965–67, paras. 21–25 (2002) (*Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*).

²¹⁸ See *Universal Service Contribution Methodology*, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 04-36, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 21 FCC Rcd 7518 (2006) (*2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*); *aff'd in part, vacated in part sub nom. Vonage Holdings Corp. v. FCC*, 489 F.3d 1232 (D.C. Cir. 2007).

²¹⁹ See *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 16 FCC Rcd 9892 (2001) (*2001 Contribution NPRM*); see also *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Report and Order, 17 FCC Rcd 3752, 3765, para. 31, 3766–89, paras. 34–83 (2002) (*Contribution First FNPRM*).

²²⁰ *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24983–97, paras. 66–100 (seeking comment on capacity-based proposals that had been developed in the record and on telephone-number proposals advocated by certain parties); *Commission Seeks Comment on Staff Study Regarding Alternative Contribution Methodologies*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, Public Notice, 18 FCC Rcd 3006 (2003) (*Contribution Staff Study*) (seeking comment on a Commission staff study that estimated potential contribution assessment levels under the then-newly modified revenue-based method and the three connection-based proposals in the further notice portion of the *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*).

²²¹ *Interim Cap Clears Path for Comprehensive Reform: Commission Poised to Move Forward on Difficult Decisions Necessary to Promote and Advance Affordable Telecommunications for All Americans*, News Release (May 2, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-281939A1.pdf.

²²² We agree with commenters who argue that the contribution methodology requires a comprehensive overhaul. See, e.g., Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. 1 at 1 (filed Sept. 11, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Roger C. Sherman, Director, Government Affairs—Wireless

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adopt today a system of contributions that will assess a \$1.00 contribution per residential telephone number per month, and we will move to a connections-based system for business services. In this part, we explain our legal authority to move to these new methodologies, why we have decided to move to these methodologies, and how the residential numbers-based system will work.

1. Legal Authority

94. The Commission has ample authority to require contributions from the variety of providers discussed below. The Commission's authority derives from several sections of the Act: section 254(d), Title I, and section 251(e). These sections of the statute provide us authority to require contributions from the kinds of service providers we address below in our discussions of the new numbers-based approach for residential services and the connections-based approach for business services.

95. Section 254 is the cornerstone of the Commission's universal service program. Section 254(d) first provides that "[e]very telecommunications carrier that provides interstate telecommunications services shall contribute, on an equitable and nondiscriminatory basis, to the specific, predictable, and sufficient mechanisms established by the Commission to preserve and advance universal service."²²³ Under this "mandatory contribution" provision, every provider of telecommunications services²²⁴ must contribute, although the Commission has authority to exempt a carrier or class of carriers if their contributions would be *de minimis*.²²⁵

96. Section 254(d) also provides that the Commission may require "[a]ny other provider of interstate telecommunications . . . to contribute to the preservation and advancement of universal service if the public interest so requires."²²⁶ The Commission has relied on this "permissive authority" to require various providers of telecommunications,²²⁷ but not necessarily telecommunications services,²²⁸ to contribute. For example, the Commission has required entities that provide interstate telecommunications to others on a private contractual basis to contribute to the universal service fund,²²⁹ as well as payphone

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Regulatory, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1 (filed June 14, 2006) (Sprint Nextel June 14, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (Verizon Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 1 (filed Oct. 20, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

²²³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²²⁴ Section 254(d) refers to "telecommunications carriers," which are defined as "any provider of telecommunications services." 47 U.S.C. § 153(44).

²²⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²²⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²²⁷ "Telecommunications" is defined as "the transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user's choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received." 47 U.S.C. § 153(43).

²²⁸ "Telecommunications service" is defined as "the offering of telecommunications for a fee directly to the public, or to such classes of users as to be effectively available directly to the public, regardless of the facilities used." 47 U.S.C. § 153(46).

²²⁹ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a); *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9183-84, paras. 794-95. We note that private service providers that provide interstate connections solely to meet their internal needs (i.e., self-providers) will not be required to contribute under the new methodology. This is consistent with our current

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aggregators.²³⁰ Most recently, we required interconnected VoIP providers to contribute even though the Commission has not determined that they are telecommunications carriers. Specifically, in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, we used our permissive authority under section 254(d) to require interconnected VoIP providers to contribute, and we noted that they “provide” telecommunications to their end users.²³¹ We also noted that in some cases, the interconnected VoIP provider may be “providing” telecommunications even if it arranges for the end user to have PSTN access through a third party.²³²

97. The Commission also has authority under Title I to require other service providers to contribute. In general, the Commission can rely on its ancillary jurisdiction under Title I when the Commission has subject matter jurisdiction over the service to be regulated, and the assertion of jurisdiction is “reasonably ancillary to the effective performance of [its] various responsibilities.”²³³ The Commission relied on this authority before section 254 was added by the 1996 Act to establish a high-cost support fund,²³⁴ which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit found to be a permissive exercise of Title I authority.²³⁵ And more recently in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, the Commission relied on its ancillary jurisdiction under Title I as an additional source of authority to require contributions from interconnected VoIP providers.²³⁶ In that order, the Commission noted that the Act grants subject matter jurisdiction over interconnected VoIP because it involves “transmission” of voice by wire or radio,²³⁷ and that imposing contribution obligations on interconnected VoIP providers was “reasonably ancillary” to the effective performance of the Commission’s responsibilities to establish “specific, predictable, and sufficient mechanisms . . . to preserve and advance universal service.”²³⁸ In particular, the Commission noted that interconnected VoIP providers “benefit from their interconnection

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policy. In the *Universal Service First Report and Order*, the Commission reasoned that, for self-providers of interstate telecommunications, the telecommunications is incidental to their primary non-telecommunications business. See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9185, para. 799.

²³⁰ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a); *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9184–85, paras. 796–98. But see Letter from Robert F. Aldrich, Counsel for the American Public Communications Council (APCC), to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. (filed Oct. 23, 2008).

²³¹ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7538–40, paras. 39–41; 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(a).

²³² *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7539, para. 41 (“To provide this capability [telecommunications], interconnected VoIP providers may rely on their own facilities or provide access to the PSTN through others.”).

²³³ See *United States v. Southwestern Cable Co.*, 392 U.S. 157, 177–78 (1968); *United States v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 406 U.S. 649, 667–68 (1972); *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp.*, 440 U.S. 689, 700 (1979); see also *American Library Ass’n v. FCC*, 406 F.3d 689 (D.C. Cir. 2005).

²³⁴ See *Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission's Rules and Establishment of a Joint Board*, CC Docket No. 80-286, Decision and Order, 96 F.C.C.2d 781, (1984), *aff’d sub nom. Rural Tel. Coalition v. FCC*, 838 F.2d 1307 (D.C. Cir. 1988).

²³⁵ *Rural Tel. Coalition*, 838 F.2d at 1315.

²³⁶ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7541–43, paras. 46–49.

²³⁷ See *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 47 & n.160 (citing *IP-Enabled Services, First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, 20 FCC Rcd 10245 (2005) (*VoIP 911 Order*), *aff’d sub nom. Nuvio Corp. v. FCC*, 473 F.3d 302 (D.C. Cir. 2006); 47 U.S.C. § 152(a)).

²³⁸ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 48 (quoting 47 U.S.C. § 254(d)).

to the PSTN.”²³⁹

98. In addition, Congress provided the Commission with “plenary authority” over numbering in section 251(e). Specifically, the Commission has “exclusive jurisdiction over those portions of the North American Numbering Plan that pertain to the United States.”²⁴⁰ The Commission relied on its authority under section 251(e) to support its action to require interconnected VoIP providers to provide E911 services.²⁴¹ The Commission noted that it exercised its authority under section 251(e) because, among other reasons, “interconnected VoIP providers use NANP numbers to provide their services.”²⁴²

99. These sections of the Act provide the Commission ample authority to require contributions from all providers subject to the new numbers-based and connections-based approaches described in more detail below. These methodologies may require some providers to contribute directly to universal service when in the past they may have been contributing only indirectly or not at all. For example, under the numbers-based approach, any provider who assigns an “Assessable Number” to a residential user must contribute \$1.00 per number per month.²⁴³ Providers such as VoIP providers who are not “interconnected VoIP” providers, electronic facsimile service providers, Internet-based TRS providers, one-way and two-way paging service providers, and telematics providers may assign Assessable Numbers to residential users and maintain the retail relationship with the end users.²⁴⁴ Not all of these providers are “telecommunications carriers” subject to the mandatory contribution obligation of section 254(d). Nonetheless, we have authority to require them to contribute. First, all of these providers provide—directly or indirectly—some amount of interconnection to the public switched telephone network (PSTN), the network that universal service supports. Interconnection to the PSTN benefits the consumers of each of these types of services, facilitating communication (even if just one-way communication) between the end user and PSTN users. As we noted in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, interconnected VoIP providers often provide access to the PSTN via third parties²⁴⁵ and this is sufficient to permit the Commission to rely on its authority to require contributions from “other provider[s] of interstate telecommunications.”²⁴⁶ And as we explain below, it is in the public interest (as required by section 254(d)) that these providers contribute. Furthermore, the prerequisites for the use of our Title I ancillary jurisdiction are unquestionably met here. All the services that rely on assignment of an Assessable Number to a residential end user come within the Commission’s broad subject matter jurisdiction because they involve in some manner “interstate . . . communication by wire or radio.”²⁴⁷ And similar to our explanation in the *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, requiring contributions from providers who take advantage of PSTN connectivity whether directly or indirectly

²³⁹ *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7542, para. 48.

²⁴⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(e)(1).

²⁴¹ *See VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 10265, para. 33.

²⁴² *See VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 10265, para. 33.

²⁴³ The term Assessable Number is defined below. *See infra* paras. 115–129.

²⁴⁴ This list is meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. Other providers may also have to contribute to the universal service fund based on the criteria described in this order.

²⁴⁵ *See 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7539, para. 41.

²⁴⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

²⁴⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 152(a); *see also VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 10261–62, para. 28 (providing detailed explanation of why interconnected VoIP falls within the Commission’s subject matter jurisdiction).

makes sense because their end users benefit from the ubiquity of that network and from being somehow interconnected with it.²⁴⁸ Finally, our plenary authority over numbering supports our actions here with regard to a numbers-based methodology for residential services. The purpose of a uniform system of numbering is to facilitate communication on interconnected networks based on a standardized system of identifiers—telephone numbers.²⁴⁹ Those customers who are assigned telephone numbers, whether for plain old telephone service (POTS) or for any other service, are using the numbers to take advantage of some feature of the PSTN, whether it is the capability to be called, to have their locations automatically relayed to emergency call handlers, to be faxed from anywhere, or for some other reason. Because customers are receiving this benefit, it is appropriate that their service providers (and ultimately, likely, the customers themselves) contribute to the ubiquity and support of the network from which they are benefiting.

100. We reject suggestions that we do not have authority to require contributions based on numbers or connections because we lack authority over intrastate services.²⁵⁰ The same number or connection typically is used for both interstate and intrastate services. The Commission and courts have rejected the assertion that simply because a single facility has the capacity to provide both interstate and intrastate services, the Commission lacks authority to regulate any aspect of the facility.²⁵¹ In fact, the subscriber line charge (SLC) that the Commission established is intended to capture the *interstate* cost of the *local* loop.²⁵² The contribution methodologies we adopt are thus limited to assessments on services that can provide interstate service. We will only require providers to contribute to universal service based on the Assessable Numbers or connections that are capable of originating or terminating interstate or international communications.²⁵³

2. The New Numbers-Based Assessment Methodology for Residential Services

101. As discussed above, we adopt a new contribution methodology for residential services based on assessing telephone numbers, rather than interstate and international services revenue. We find

²⁴⁸ Compare 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order, 21 FCC Rcd at 7540, para. 43.

²⁴⁹ *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 96-98, Second Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 19392, 19404, 19407, paras. 19, 25 (1996) (noting that numbering administration ensures the creation of a nationwide, uniform system of numbering essential to the efficient delivery of interstate and international telecommunications services and the development of a competitive telecommunications services market) (subsequent history omitted); see also *Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, CC Docket No. 95-283, Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 2588, 2591, para. 4 (1995) (“Adequate telephone numbers, available through a uniform numbering plan, are essential to provide consumers efficient access to new telecommunications services and technologies and to support continued growth of an economy increasingly dependent upon those services and technologies.”); *Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, CC Docket No. 92-237, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 11 FCC Rcd 2068, para. 2 (1994).

²⁵⁰ See, e.g., American Association of Paging Carriers (AAPC) *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7; Alaska Communication Systems (ACS) *Contribution First FNPRM* Reply at 6–7; Allied Personal Communications Industry Association of California (Allied) *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 6–7; National ALEC Association/Prepaid Communications Association (NALA/PCA) *Contribution First FNPRM* Reply at 3.

²⁵¹ See, e.g., *NARUC v. FCC*, 737 F.2d 1095, 1113 (D.C. Cir. 1984) (“The same loop that connects a telephone subscriber to the local exchange necessarily connects that subscriber into the interstate network as well.”).

²⁵² *NARUC v. FCC*, 737 F.2d at 1113–14.

²⁵³ Services that provide only intrastate communications and do not traverse a public interstate network will not be required to contribute under the new assessment methodology.

that this change will benefit contributors and end users by simplifying the contribution process and providing predictability as to the amount of universal service contributions and pass-through charges for residential services. For residential services, we set the contribution amount at a flat \$1.00 per month charge for each number associated with residential services.

a. Benefits of a Numbers-Based Contribution Methodology

102. We find that adoption of a telephone number-based methodology for residential services will help preserve and advance universal service by ensuring a specific, predictable, and sufficient funding source, consistent with the universal service principles of section 254(b) of the Act.²⁵⁴ Changes in technology and services have made the revenue-based contribution mechanism difficult to administer. As commenters have noted, the distinction between intrastate and interstate revenues is blurring as providers move from their traditional roles as pure LECs or interexchange carriers (IXCs) to businesses that offer consumers the choice of purchasing their telecommunications needs from a single source.²⁵⁵ Additionally, these providers are offering consumers greater flexibility, such as bundling of local and long distance service at a flat rate.²⁵⁶ Moreover, technologies such as wireless and interconnected VoIP have emerged that provide voice and data services that know no jurisdictional boundaries.²⁵⁷ Consumers benefit from the opportunity to obtain bundled services, and the universal service contribution mechanism should reflect and complement those marketplace and technological developments as much as possible. Our decision to use numbers as the basis for assessing contributions for residential services will enhance the specificity and predictability of entities' contributions.

103. Our adoption of a numbers-based contribution methodology will benefit both residential consumers and contributors by simplifying the basis for assessments and stabilizing assessments at a set amount of \$1.00 per month per residential telephone number.²⁵⁸ Contributors are allowed, and in most cases do, recover their universal service contribution costs from fees assessed on their end-user customers.²⁵⁹ Under the revenue-based contribution mechanism, a provider's contribution costs fluctuated from quarter to quarter, causing consumers' universal service fees to fluctuate as well. These fluctuations did not allow customers to anticipate changes to their fees. A set \$1.00-per-number contribution assessment is simple and predictable for both contributors and for consumers. To the extent a contributor elects to recover its contribution costs through end-user fees, its residential customers will pay the same \$1.00 fee per number each month, making the assessment simple and predictable.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(5).

²⁵⁵ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1.

²⁵⁶ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1; see also Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 5 (filed Nov. 19, 2007) (Ad Hoc Nov. 19, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter) (discussing the convergence of different applications for business and residential customers onto a single integrated network with bundled pricing).

²⁵⁷ See *Vonage Holdings Corporation Petition for Declaratory Ruling Concerning an Order of the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission*, 19 FCC Rcd 22404, 22412-14, paras. 16-18 (2004) (*Vonage Order*), *aff'd sub nom. Minnesota Pub. Utils. Comm'n v. FCC*, 483 F.3d 570 (8th Cir. 2007).

²⁵⁸ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2.

²⁵⁹ Contributors are prohibited from passing through to subscribers more than their contribution cost. 47 C.F.R. § 54.712.

²⁶⁰ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2; see also Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 6; NCTA 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5; Small

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104. A numbers-based contribution methodology also benefits residential end users because it is technologically and competitively neutral. A consumer will pay the same universal service charge regardless of whether the consumer receives residential service from a cable provider, an interconnected VoIP provider, a wireless provider, or a wireline provider. This will enable residential consumers to choose the providers and provider types they want without regard to any artificial distortions that would otherwise be caused by differing contribution charges.²⁶¹ In a marketplace characterized by increased competition within and between different technology platforms, residential consumers will receive the same universal service charge regardless of the type of service the customer chooses.

105. Similarly, by subjecting contributors to the same regulatory framework for assessments on residential services regardless of technology, the numbers-based methodology will eliminate incentives under the current revenue-based system for providers to migrate to services and technologies that are either exempt from contribution obligations or are subject to safe harbors.²⁶² The elimination of such incentives will result in a more competitively and technologically neutral marketplace and a more predictable source of funding for the universal service mechanisms.

106. The adoption of a fixed \$1.00 per residential number per month contribution assessment is specific and predictable and will simplify the administration of universal service contributions.²⁶³ Interstate end-user telecommunications revenues have become increasingly difficult to identify, particularly for residential services, due to increased bundling of local and long distance service and the growth of consumer interconnected VoIP offerings.²⁶⁴ In contrast, telephone numbers provide an easily identifiable basis for contribution.²⁶⁵ The amount of North American Numbering Plan (NANP) telephone numbers in use has shown steady, stable growth, providing a fairly constant basis for estimating universal

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Business Administration Office of Advocacy (SBA) *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 8; Vonage *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 7–8; Letter from Gregory V. Haledjian, Regulatory and Governmental Relations, Counsel to IDT Corporation and USF By the Numbers Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, Attach. at 3–4 (filed Jan. 30, 2007).

²⁶¹ See, e.g., NCTA *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5; Vonage *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 6; Letter from Grace E. Koh, Policy Counsel, Cox Enterprises, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 05-337, 01-92, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 96-262 at 2 (filed July 15, 2008).

²⁶² See AT&T *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 4.

²⁶³ In addition to being easily administrable, the record supports adoption of \$1.00 per month as the residential per-number assessment amount. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, Attach. at 3 (filed Oct. 25, 2005); See Letter from Mary L. Henze, AT&T Services, and Kathleen Grillo, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 3 (filed Sept. 23, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (estimating a \$1.01 per-number per-month assessment under a numbers-based contribution methodology); see also Letter from Paul Garnett, Assistant Vice President, CTIA–The Wireless Association, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter), Attach. at 5 (supporting the AT&T and Verizon proposal); Letter from David B. Cohen, Vice President, Policy, USTelecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Sept. 25, 2008).

²⁶⁴ See 2007 UNIVERSAL SERVICE MONITORING REPORT at tbl. 1.1.

²⁶⁵ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 1; see also ALEXANDER BELINFANTE, FCC, TELEPHONE SUBSCRIBERSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES, tbl. 1 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284923A1.pdf.

service support amounts.²⁶⁶ The new methodology, based on a flat \$1.00 per residential number per month, will be easier to administer, facilitating greater regulatory compliance. A numbers-based contribution methodology will also be readily applicable to emerging service offerings. The new methodology minimizes the potential for providers to avoid contributions by bundling intrastate revenues with interstate revenues or engaging in other bypass activities.²⁶⁷

107. Further, assessing universal service contributions based on residential telephone numbers will promote number conservation.²⁶⁸ Telephone numbers are a finite, public resource. If contributors are assessed based on the residential telephone numbers assigned to them, they will have an incentive to efficiently manage their numbering resources in a manner that minimizes their costs. We expect that this will result in the need for fewer area code splits or overlays due to number exhaust.²⁶⁹

108. Our adoption of a numbers-based contribution methodology for residential services is consistent with the goal of ensuring just, reasonable, and affordable rates.²⁷⁰ The per-number assessment of \$1.00 per number per month will represent a reduction in pass-through charges for many residential customers.²⁷¹ Although the \$1.00 per number per month assessment may represent an increase in universal service charges for residential customers that make few or no long distance calls, this increase should be slight. Under the current revenue-based contribution mechanism, providers may assess a federal universal service fee on the basis of the customer's SLC. The residential SLC may be as high as \$6.50 per month.²⁷² Based on the most recent contribution factor of 11.4 percent, even a customer who made no long distance calls could thus be assessed \$0.74 per month in universal service charges under the

²⁶⁶ See CRAIG STROUP AND JOHN VU, FCC, NUMBERING RESOURCE UTILIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES, tbl. 12 (2008) (showing number utilization from December 2000 to December 2007), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-284926A1.pdf.

²⁶⁷ See Ad Hoc Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 6-7; Coalition for Sustainable Universal Service (CoSUS) Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 38; Sprint Contribution First FNPRM Comments at 8-9. Because residential services will no longer be assessed based on revenues, contributors may not mark-up or otherwise adjust the \$1.00 per Assessable Number per month residential contribution assessment in response to uncollectible revenues.

²⁶⁸ See, e.g., ITI 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 6; Vonage 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 7.

²⁶⁹ See *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket No. 99-200, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 15 FCC Rcd 7574, 7625, para. 122 (2000) (*NRO I Order*) (determining that implementation of thousands-block number pooling is essential to extending the life of the NANP by making the assignment and use of NXX codes more efficient); see also *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 96-98, 95-116, Fourth Report and Order, 18 FCC Rcd 12472, 12474, para. 5 (2003) (*NRO IV Order*) (explaining further that thousands-block number pooling is a numbering resource optimization measure in which 10,000 numbers in an NXX are divided into ten sequential blocks of 1,000 numbers and allocated to different service providers (or different switches) within a rate center).

²⁷⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(1).

²⁷¹ See Letter from Jean L. Kiddoo and Tamar E. Finn, Counsel to IDT Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 5 (filed Aug. 2, 2007) (IDT Aug. 2, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter) (showing that the average residential household paid about \$1.37 in universal service fees in 2006). IDT claims the data show that the lowest-income consumers paid an average of \$1.09 in universal service fees for wireline telephone bills. *Id.* at 6.

²⁷² 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1), 69.152(d)(1). The SLC is referred to as the End User Common Line Charge in the Commission's rules.

existing revenue-based methodology.²⁷³ Thus, the potential increase for a customer who makes no long distance calls could be as little as \$0.26 per month under the \$1.00 per number methodology. In addition, we have separate protections to ensure that telephone service remains affordable for low-income subscribers.²⁷⁴

109. Some commenters assert that assessing a flat universal service charge is inherently unfair because it does not take into account the fact that some people make many interstate and international calls, while others make few if any such calls in a given month.²⁷⁵ We disagree. We find that imposition of a flat charge is warranted because all contributors and their subscribers receive a benefit from being connected to the public network, enabling them to make and receive interstate calls.²⁷⁶ The *ability* to make or receive interstate calls over a public network is a significant benefit and it is reasonable to assess universal service contributions for residential customers based on access to the network. Customers who do not make any interstate calls still receive the benefit of accessing the network to *receive* interstate calls. The \$1.00 per month per number assessment reflects our finding that it is equitable for providers to contribute a fixed amount based on the ability to access and utilize a ubiquitous public network.

110. Some commenters allege that changing from the current revenue-based methodology to a new mechanism based on telephone numbers would not be equitable because it could reduce contributions from certain industry segments and increase them for others.²⁷⁷ Although the change to a numbers-based contribution methodology for residential services will result in changes in the relative contribution obligations of industry segments, the new contribution methodology is not inequitable or discriminatory. The evolving nature of the telecommunications marketplace and of its participants requires the Commission to periodically review and revise the contribution methodology to ensure that providers continue to be assessed on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis. We find that, given the difficulties in continuing to assess contributions entirely on a revenue-based methodology and the benefit to residential consumers of access to the public network, it is equitable to adopt a numbers-based contribution methodology that assesses a \$1.00 per month per number fee for residential services.

b. Assessable Numbers

111. Below, we describe the telephone numbers for which service providers are obligated to contribute to the universal service fund. We call these “Assessable Numbers.” The Commission has addressed certain reporting based on telephone numbers in other contexts. In the number utilization context, the Commission requires that each telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA), the Pooling Administrator, or another telecommunications carrier report its numbering resources in each of six defined categories of

²⁷³ The revenue from the \$6.50 SLC would be multiplied by the 11.4% contribution factor, resulting in a contribution amount and corresponding assessment of \$0.74. See *Fourth Quarter 2008 Contribution Factor Public Notice* at 1; AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 3.

²⁷⁴ See 47 C.F.R. § 54.400 *et seq.*; *infra* para. 141 (describing contribution exemptions for services to low-income consumers).

²⁷⁵ See, e.g., Letter from Maureen A. Thompson, Executive Director, Keep USF Fair Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 5–7 (filed Mar. 27, 2006) (Keep USF Fair Mar. 27, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9.

²⁷⁶ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 8783, para. 8

²⁷⁷ See, e.g., FW&A *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 13–15; NRTA and OPASTCO *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7–11; SBC *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 18; Verizon *Contribution First FNPRM* Reply at 6; Verizon Wireless *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 5–6.

numbers set forth in section 52.15(f) of our rules.²⁷⁸ In the regulatory fee context, the Commission used the category of “assigned numbers” as the starting point for determining how to assess fees on certain providers, but found it necessary to modify that definition to account for the different regulatory contexts. Specifically, in assessing regulatory fees for commercial mobile radio service (CMRS) providers that report number utilization to NANPA based on the reported assigned number count in their Numbering Resource Utilization and Forecast (NRUF) data, the Commission requires these providers to adjust their assigned number count to account for number porting. The Commission found that adjusting the NRUF data to account for porting was necessary for the data to be sufficiently accurate and reliable for purposes of regulatory fee assessment.²⁷⁹

112. We adopt a new term based on the category of assigned numbers to represent the numbers being assessed for universal service contribution purposes—“Assessable Numbers.” The definition of Assessable Numbers that we adopt focuses on those numbers that are actually in use by end users for services that traverse a public interstate network. Specifically, we define an Assessable Number as a NANP telephone number or functional equivalent identifier²⁸⁰ in a public or private network that is in use by a residential end user and that enables the residential end user to receive communications from or

²⁷⁸ These six categories of numbers are defined as follows:

- (i) Administrative numbers are numbers used by telecommunications carriers to perform internal administrative or operational functions necessary to maintain reasonable quality of service standards.
- (ii) Aging numbers are disconnected numbers that are not available for assignment to another end user or customer for a specified period of time. Numbers previously assigned to residential customers may be aged for no more than 90 days. Numbers previously assigned to business customers may be aged for no more than 365 days.
- (iii) Assigned numbers are numbers working in the Public Switched Telephone Network under an agreement such as a contract or tariff at the request of specific end users or customers for their use, or numbers not yet working but having a customer service order pending. Numbers that are not yet working and have a service order pending for more than five days shall not be classified as assigned numbers.
- (iv) Available numbers are numbers that are available for assignment to subscriber access lines, or their equivalents, within a switching entity or point of interconnection and are not classified as assigned, intermediate, administrative, aging, or reserved.
- (v) Intermediate numbers are numbers that are made available for use by another telecommunications carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer. Numbers ported for the purpose of transferring an established customer’s service to another service provider shall not be classified as intermediate numbers.
- (vi) Reserved numbers are numbers that are held by service providers at the request of specific end users or customers for their future use. Numbers held for specific end users or customers for more than 180 days shall not be classified as reserved numbers.

47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)

²⁷⁹ See *Assessment and Collection of Regulatory Fees for Fiscal Year 2005, Assessment and Collection of Regulatory Fees for Fiscal Year 2004*, MD Dockets No. 05-59, 04-73, Report and Order and Order on Reconsideration, 20 FCC Rcd 12259, 12271, paras. 39–40 (2005).

²⁸⁰ “Functional equivalent identifier” means an identifier used in place of and with the same PSTN access capability as a NANP number; it is not intended to capture identifiers used in conjunction with NANP numbers, such as internal extensions that cannot be directly dialed from the PSTN. Nor is “functional equivalent identifier” intended to capture routing identifiers used for routing of Internet traffic, unless such identifiers are used in place of a NANP number to provide the ability to make or receive calls on the PSTN.

terminate communications to (1) an interstate public telecommunications network or (2) a network that traverses (in any manner) an interstate public telecommunications network.²⁸¹ Assessable Numbers include geographic as well as non-geographic telephone numbers (such as toll-free numbers and 500-NXX numbers) so long as they meet the other criteria described in this part for Assessable Numbers.

113. The provider with the retail relationship to the residential end user is the entity responsible for contributing.²⁸² We impose the contribution obligation on the provider with the retail relationship to the end user for several reasons. First, this provider will have the most accurate and up-to-date information about how many Assessable Numbers it currently has assigned to end users. Second, this provider is also in the best position to distinguish residential users from business users, and thus to determine how many of its telephone numbers in use are Assessable Numbers. Finally, this provider, and its users, are benefiting from a supported PSTN, and thus it is sound policy to require them to contribute to its support.²⁸³ We note that today, providers are permitted to pass through their contribution assessments to end users, and we understand that they typically do so.²⁸⁴ Under the new methodologies, they may continue to do so, subject to the same requirement that they will not pass through more than their contribution amount.²⁸⁵

114. Next, we specify whether certain types of numbers are included in the definition of Assessable Numbers. First, numbers used for intermittent or cyclical purposes are included in the definition of Assessable Numbers. Numbers used for cyclical purposes are numbers designated for use that are typically “working” or in use by the end user for regular intervals of time. These numbers include, for example, an end user’s summer home telephone number that is in service for six months out of the year.²⁸⁶ In the *NRO III Order*, the Commission clarified that these types of numbers should generally be categorized as “assigned” numbers if they meet certain thresholds and that, if they do not meet these thresholds, they “must be made available for use by other customers” (i.e., they are “available” numbers).²⁸⁷ Because these numbers are assigned to end users, we find they should be included in the

²⁸¹ For purposes of the definition of Assessable Numbers, we include only the NANP telephone numbers used in the United States and its Territories and possessions.

²⁸² See *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206, para. 844; see also, e.g., Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President-Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, at 7 (filed Sept. 24, 2008) (Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008, *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 1–2; Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel for XO Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket No. 04-36, Attach. at 9 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Letter from Donna N. Lampert, Counsel for Google, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also 47 C.F.R. § 54.5 (defining “contributor” as “an entity required to contribute to the universal service support mechanism pursuant to § 54.706 [of the Commission’s rules]”).

²⁸³ See *supra* para. 103 (discussing the public interest in requiring these entities to support the network).

²⁸⁴ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 2; see also *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24978, para. 50.

²⁸⁵ 47 C.F.R. § 54.712.

²⁸⁶ See *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 96-98, 95-116, Third Report and Order and Second Order on Reconsideration in CC Docket No. 96-98 and CC Docket No. 99-200, 17 FCC Rcd 252, 303, para. 119 (2001) (*NRO III Order*).

²⁸⁷ *NRO III Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 304, para. 122 (“With this requirement, we seek to limit the amount of numbers that are set aside for use by a particular customer, but are not being used to provide service on a regular basis. Thus, in order to categorize such blocks of numbers as assigned numbers, carriers may have to decrease the amount [of] numbers set aside for a particular customer. We also clarify that numbers ‘working’ periodically for regular

(continued....)

definition of Assessable Numbers we adopt today.

115. We exclude from our definition of Assessable Numbers those telephone numbers that satisfy the section 52.15 definition of “assigned numbers” solely because the “numbers [are] not yet working but hav[e] a customer service order pending” for five days or less.²⁸⁸ Providers generally do not bill for services that have yet to be provisioned and therefore are not compensated for services during the pendency of the service order. Moreover, such numbers are not yet operational to send or receive calls. Thus, under the existing contribution methodology, providers would not contribute for services they are about to provide (but have not yet provided) under a pending service order. We continue to find it appropriate for contributors not to be required to contribute to the universal service fund for pending service orders.

116. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those telephone numbers that telecommunications providers have transferred or ported to a carrier using resale or the unbundled network element platform. Under prior numbering orders, such telephone numbers would still be included in the NRUF assigned number count of the transferring-out carrier.²⁸⁹ Consistent with our definition of Assessable Numbers, because the underlying provider no longer maintains the retail relationship with the end user, the provider should not include these numbers in its Assessable Number count. Conversely, the receiving provider of such transferred customers would include the associated telephone numbers in their count of Assessable Numbers.

117. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those numbers that meet the definition of an Available Number, an Administrative Number, an Aging Number, or an Intermediate Number as those terms are defined in section 52.15(f) of the Commission’s rules.²⁹⁰ For a particular carrier, the carrier will not have an end user associated with a number in any of these categories of numbers. For example, an intermediate number is a number that is “made available for use by another telecommunications carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer.”²⁹¹ The receiving provider will be responsible for including the number as an Assessable Number once it provides the number to an end user.²⁹²

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intervals of time, such as numbers assigned to summer homes or student residences, may be categorized as assigned numbers, to the extent that they are ‘working’ for a minimum of 90 days during each calendar year in which they are assigned to a particular customer. Any numbers used for intermittent or cyclical purposes that do not meet these requirements may not be categorized as assigned numbers, and must be made available for use by other customers.”).

²⁸⁸ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(iii).

²⁸⁹ *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7586–87, para. 18. Ported-out numbers, a subcategory of assigned numbers, are not reported to NANPA although NRUF reporting carriers are required to maintain internal records associated with these numbers for five years. *Id.* at 7592, 7601, paras. 36, 62.

²⁹⁰ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f); see also Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 7 (arguing, among other things, that numbers used for administrative purposes and numbers that are not “actively” working, such as aging, unassigned, reserved numbers, and numbers donated back to the industry pool should be excluded from the contributor’s base).

²⁹¹ See 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(v).

²⁹² See *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7587, para. 21 (2000) (“We agree with commenters who opine that [intermediate] numbers should not be categorized as *assigned* numbers because they have not been assigned to an end user. . . . We therefore conclude that numbers that are made available for use by another carrier or non-carrier entity for the purpose of providing telecommunications service to an end user or customer should be categorized as *intermediate* [numbers].”).

118. We exclude non-working telephone numbers from the definition of Assessable Number. Carriers report as assigned numbers for NRUF purposes entire codes or blocks of numbers dedicated to specific end-user customers if at least fifty percent of the numbers in the code or block are working in the PSTN.²⁹³ Consistent with our definition of Assessable Numbers, carriers should not include the non-working numbers in these blocks in their Assessable Number counts, because the non-working numbers portion of these blocks are not providing service to the end user.

119. We exclude from the definition of Assessable Number those numbers that are used merely for routing purposes in a network, so long as such numbers are always—without exception—provided without charge to the end user, are used for routing only to Assessable Numbers for which a universal service contribution has been paid, and the ratio of such routing numbers to Assessable Numbers is no greater than 1:1. For example, a NANP number used solely to route or forward calls to a residential number, office number, and/or mobile number would be excluded from our definition of Assessable Number if such routing number were provided for free, and such number routes calls only to Assessable Numbers. If, however, such routing or forwarding is provided for a fee, such as with remote call forward service or foreign exchange service, both the routing number and the end user number to which calls are routed or forwarded would be considered Assessable Numbers.

120. In addition, incumbent LECs need not include numbers assigned to wireless providers that interconnect at the end office of an incumbent LEC and have obtained numbers directly from the incumbent LEC.²⁹⁴ Because the incumbent LEC does not have the retail relationship with the end user, it should not include these numbers in its Assessable Number count. The wireless carriers that have the retail relationship with the end users must include these telephone numbers in their Assessable Number count.

121. Finally, we exclude from the definition of Assessable Numbers those numbers associated with Lifeline services for the reasons described below.²⁹⁵

122. We do not restrict our definition to numbers that exclusively use the PSTN.²⁹⁶ As noted above, evolution in communications technology away from the PSTN to alternative networks that may only partially (if at all) traverse the PSTN is one of the causes in the erosion of the contribution base under the current revenue-based methodology. As more service providers migrate to alternative networks that partially access the PSTN, continuing to assess universal service contributions based only on traffic that exclusively traverses the PSTN will not account for this migration; nor will it allow us to meet our principle of competitive neutrality.²⁹⁷ Moreover, if a service provider connects a private network to a

²⁹³ *NRO III Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 304, para. 122.

²⁹⁴ When a wireless carrier interconnects at an incumbent LEC end office it is known as a Type 1 interconnection. *See Federal Communications Commission Seeks Comment on Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis in Telephone Number Portability Proceeding*, CC Docket No. 95-116, Public Notice, 20 FCC Rcd 8616, 8632, App. B at para. 19 n.53 (2005) (“Type 1 numbers reside in an end office of a LEC and are assigned to a Type 1 interconnection group, which connects the wireless carrier's switch and the LEC's end office switch.”).

²⁹⁵ *See infra* paras. 140–46.

²⁹⁶ The record is split over whether the definition of an assessable number should be restricted to the PSTN. AT&T and Verizon, for example, do not include such a requirement in their proposed definitions. *See* AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1. Other commenters, however, argue for such a requirement. *See* Google Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (the definition of an assessable number should be “premised on a telephone number acting as a proxy for an underlying two-way PSTN connection”). As we explain herein, such a restriction is not warranted.

²⁹⁷ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9207, paras. 845–46.

public network, the service provider and its customers benefit from the connection to the PSTN. Because universal service supports the PSTN and these parties connect to the PSTN, they benefit from universal service.²⁹⁸ Thus, it is increasingly important that we conform our regulatory definitions to recognize this reality. Indeed, the Commission has already begun to recognize the need to create a level regulatory playing field. For example, calls to end users that utilize interconnected VoIP service are not wholly within the PSTN. Indeed, calls between two interconnected VoIP users may not touch the PSTN at all. Yet we found in 2006 that interconnected VoIP providers must contribute to the universal service fund.²⁹⁹ For these reasons, we conclude that our definition must account for public or private interstate networks, regardless of the technology of the network (e.g., circuit-switched, packet-switched) or the transmission medium of the network (e.g., wireline, wireless).

123. Finally, we recognize that, by declining to adopt for contribution purposes verbatim the definition of “assigned numbers” in section 52.15(f) of our rules, which is used by carriers to file NRUF reports,³⁰⁰ we may nominally increase some of the administrative burden associated with universal service contribution filings. We find, however, that any minor administrative cost increases arising from not using the pre-existing definition are outweighed by the benefits of modifying the definition to achieve sound universal service policy. For example, as stated above, the existing definition of assigned numbers would not enable us to meet our universal service contribution goal of ensuring that the provider with the retail relationship to the end user be the one responsible for contributing.³⁰¹

124. Under our numbers-based approach, certain providers will be required to contribute to the universal service fund based on Assessable Numbers even though they are not today required to submit NRUF data. Section 52.15(f) of the Commission’s rules requires only “reporting carriers” to submit NRUF data to the NANPA.³⁰² A “reporting carrier” is defined as a telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the NANPA, the Pooling Administrator, or another telecommunications carrier.³⁰³ In the case of numbers provided by a telecommunications carrier to a non-carrier entity, the carrier providing the numbers to such entities must report NRUF data to the NANPA for those numbers. Thus, non-carrier entities that use telephone numbers in a manner that meets our definition of Assessable Numbers do not report NRUF data yet must contribute.³⁰⁴ For example, interconnected VoIP providers may use telephone numbers that meet our definition of Assessable Numbers even though these providers do not report NRUF data.³⁰⁵ These non-carrier entities that use numbers in a manner that meets our definition of Assessable Number will be required to determine their Assessable Number count based on their internal records (e.g., billing system records) and will be

²⁹⁸ *Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9184, para. 796.

²⁹⁹ *See 2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7536–37, paras. 33-34.

³⁰⁰ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(iii).

³⁰¹ *See Universal Service First Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 9206, para. 844.

³⁰² 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f).

³⁰³ 47 C.F.R. § 52.15(f)(2).

³⁰⁴ *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7587, para. 21.

³⁰⁵ *See Administration of the North American Numbering Plan*, Order, 20 FCC Rcd 2957, 2961–62, para. 9 (2005) (*SBCIS Waiver Order*) (noting that most VoIP providers’ numbering utilization data are embedded in the NRUF data of the LEC). In the *SBCIS Waiver Order*, the Commission granted SBCIS, an Internet service provider, permission to obtain numbering resources directly from the NANPA and/or Pooling Administrator, conditioned on, among other things, SBCIS reporting NRUF data. *Id.* at 2959, para. 4.

required to report such numbers to USAC.³⁰⁶

125. We are mindful that our move to a numbers-based contribution methodology may encourage entities to try to avoid their contribution obligations by developing ways to bypass the use of NANPA-issued numbers.³⁰⁷ To the extent, however, these alternative methods are the functional equivalent of numbers and otherwise meet our definition of Assessable Numbers, such entities must report these functional equivalents as Assessable Numbers to the universal service fund administrator.

3. Contribution Assessment Methodology for Business Services

126. Although we find that a numbers-based contribution mechanism is superior to the existing revenue-based mechanism for residential services, applying a numbers-based approach to business services would result in inequitable contribution obligations. Specifically, certain business services that do not utilize numbers, or that utilize them to a lesser extent, would not be contributing to the universal service fund on an equitable basis.³⁰⁸ Section 254(d) of the Act requires “every carrier” that provides interstate telecommunications services to contribute to the universal service fund.³⁰⁹ Thus, providers of business services, including non-numbers based services, must continue to contribute. We conclude that these services should be assessed based on their connection to the public network.

127. A number of commenters supported moving to a methodology that would assess telephone numbers for those services that are associated with a telephone number and assess based on capacity of the connection to the public switched network those services not associated with a telephone number.³¹⁰ Other commenters supported retaining a revenue-based methodology for these services.³¹¹ As

³⁰⁶ See *infra* paras. 147–53.

³⁰⁷ See Letter from Jeanine Poltronieri, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, BellSouth D.C., Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2 (filed July 6, 2005) (“If voice service is provided without using telephone numbers, but with IP address or other identifier, FCC will need to establish a ‘functional equivalency’ test.”).

³⁰⁸ Business services such as private line and special access services do not typically utilize telephone numbers in the same manner as residential services, and would not contribute equitably to the universal service fund under a numbers-based approach. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel to Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, at 3 (filed Oct. 9, 2002); Letter from Robert Quinn, Vice President Federal Government Affairs, AT&T, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 98-171, 90-571, 92-237, 99-200, 95-116, 98-170, NSD File No. L-00-72, at 2 (filed Oct. 22, 2002). Moreover, unlike residential services, which usually have one telephone number assigned per access line, business services do not usually have a number of telephone numbers assigned that aligns with the number of access lines utilized.

³⁰⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d). Therefore, we disagree with those parties that continue to support a numbers-only based approach because we find such an approach would be inconsistent with the statutory requirement that every telecommunications carrier must contribute to the universal service fund. See, e.g., Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, Attach. at 5 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).

³¹⁰ See *Staff Study*; see also Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee 2003 Staff Study Reply; Letter from John Nakahata, Counsel for the Coalition for Sustainable Universal Service, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Oct. 31, 2002).

³¹¹ See Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President-Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 6 (filed Mar. 21, 2006) (Qwest Mar. 21, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

discussed above, a revenue-based contribution methodology is no longer sustainable in today's telecommunications marketplace.³¹² Additionally, a connections-based contribution methodology will provide a basis for assessing services not associated with telephone numbers, and will recognize the greater utility derived by business end users from these high capacity business service offerings.³¹³ Further, in contrast to the revenues on which contributions are currently based, the number and capacity of connections continues to grow over time, providing a contribution base that is more stable than the current revenue-based methodology. Moreover, a connections-based mechanism can be easily applied to all business services. We, therefore, conclude that a connections-based contribution mechanism is the better option for business services. We seek comment below on the implementation of the connections-based contribution mechanism for business services.³¹⁴

128. We find that it is equitable and nondiscriminatory, consistent with the requirements of section 254(d) of the Act, to establish different contribution methodologies for residential and business services.³¹⁵ Although the statute states that “[a]ll providers of telecommunications services should make an equitable and nondiscriminatory contribution to the preservation and advancement of universal service,” it does not require that all contributors or all services be assessed in the same manner.³¹⁶ Under the current revenue-based mechanism, the Commission has established different contribution methodologies through the use of proxies for wireless and interconnected VoIP services.³¹⁷ As noted above, continuing to use a revenues-based contribution methodology has become increasingly complex, and a numbers-based system would avoid many of those complexities.³¹⁸ At the same time, however, if we relied exclusively on a numbers-based contribution methodology, there are some business services—such as private line and special access—that would escape contribution requirements entirely. That result would be inconsistent with the obligation that all providers of interstate telecommunications services contribute to universal service, and would impose an unfair burden on providers that contribute on the basis of numbers.³¹⁹ We therefore conclude that adopting different contribution assessment methodologies for residential and business services will result in equitable and nondiscriminatory contribution obligations.

129. On an interim basis, while we conduct a proceeding to implement the connections-based contribution methodology, we continue to require providers to contribute to the universal service fund

³¹² See *supra* para. 97.

³¹³ Time Warner 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 2.

³¹⁴ We decline at this time to adopt AT&T and Verizon's proposal for assessing contributions on connections based on flat rate charges that would differ based on the speed of the connection. AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2. Instead, we seek further comment on implementing assessments based on connections.

³¹⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 254(d).

³¹⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 254(b)(4).

³¹⁷ The proxies offer an alternative to contributions assessed on actual interstate revenues; they are intended to approximate the portion of revenues derived from the provision of interstate telecommunications services. *First Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 13 FCC Rcd at 21258–60, paras. 13–15 (establishing safe harbors for wireless service providers); *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 14954, para. 1 (modifying the wireless safe harbors); *2006 Interim Contribution Methodology Order*, 21 FCC Rcd at 7532, 7545, paras. 23, 53 (revising the wireless safe harbor and establishing a safe harbor for interconnected VoIP providers).

³¹⁸ See *supra* para. 95.

³¹⁹ 47 U.S.C. §§ 254(b)(4), (d).

using the current revenue-based methodology for their business services.³²⁰ We find that providers of business services should continue to bear their portion of the universal service contribution obligation to ensure the sufficiency of the fund while the connections-based contribution mechanism is being implemented.³²¹

130. During the interim period in which the revenue-based contribution assessment for business services remains in place, the contribution factor for providers of business services will be determined based on the funding requirements not covered by the \$1.00 assessment on Assessable Numbers. We will hold constant the contribution assessment on Assessable Numbers and determine the revenue contribution factor based on the quarterly projected demand of the universal service mechanisms divided by the quarterly projected-collected interstate and international end user telecommunications revenues from business services in the same manner in which the current contribution factor is calculated.³²² This approach will ensure a specific, predictable, and sufficient funding source for the Commission's universal service mechanisms.

4. Wireless Prepaid Plans

131. We adopt an alternative methodology for telephone numbers assigned to handsets under a wireless prepaid plan. Some commenters assess prepaid wireless services on a per-minute-of-use basis.³²³ For example, prepaid wireless providers argue that their customers are typically low-income or low-volume consumers and, as such, should be subject to a lesser assessment.³²⁴ Verizon and TracFone further assert that prepaid wireless providers may have difficulty administering a per-number

³²⁰ Contributors will base their contributions on business service revenues in the same manner as they do currently. We make no change to the *de minimis* exemption or to the Limited International Revenue Exception (LIRE) for business contributions based on revenues. 47 U.S.C. § 254(d); 47 C.F.R. § 54.708; *Fifth Circuit Remand Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 1687–88, para. 19; *Contribution First FNPRM*, 17 FCC Rcd at 3806–07, paras. 125–28. These exceptions do not apply to residential contributions based on numbers.

³²¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(d). Prepaid calling card providers, as well as any other current contributors who provide services to residential consumers but do not assign Assessable Numbers, shall continue to contribute based on their revenues during the interim period until these business services are assessed on the basis of connections and/or numbers. Despite IDT's recent request that its prepaid calling card services be treated as residential for purposes of universal service contribution assessments, we find that, consistent with arguments made over the years by such providers, these calling card services are provided to businesses. See Request for Review of Decision of the Universal Service Administrator by IDT Corporation and IDT Telecom, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 3 (filed June 30, 2008) ("The vast majority of [prepaid calling card sales] are completed through a network of distributors and resellers before being purchased by the ultimate end user consumer."). But see Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel, IDT Corporation, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (asking the Commission to treat prepaid calling cards as residential services if the Commission adopts a numbers-based methodology limited to residential numbers).

³²² The Commission may revise the specific per-number residential assessment amount in the future, if market conditions warrant.

³²³ AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 4.

³²⁴ Letter from Mitchell F. Brecher, Counsel for TracFone, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2 (filed Sept. 17, 2008) (TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); CTIA 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 6; Leap Wireless 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4; Letter from John M. Beahn and Malcolm Tuesley, Counsel to Virgin Mobile USA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 4–7 (filed June 12, 2006) (Virgin Mobile June 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

assessment.³²⁵ Verizon, therefore, recommends that any new contribution methodology accommodate prepaid wireless service providers by adopting a per-number assessment that “reflects the unique characteristics of [the] service,” and TracFone similarly agrees.³²⁶ Finally, CTIA essentially argues that the sheer number of prepaid wireless end users—over 44 million—combined with the likelihood that most of these end users would see a rise in their pass-through assessments warrants an exception.³²⁷

132. To accommodate the unique situation of prepaid wireless service providers, we find it appropriate to create a limited modification in contribution assessments for providers of prepaid wireless services and their end users.³²⁸ We agree with commenters that it is considerably more difficult for wireless prepaid providers to pass-through their contribution assessments in light of their “pay-as-you-go” service offerings.³²⁹ Because of this significant practical issue, we will modify the numbers-based assessment for prepaid wireless providers with regard to their offering of these services. Further, we note that, just as with Lifeline customers, many prepaid wireless end users are low income consumers. For example, TracFone states that about half of its customers have incomes of \$25,000 or less.³³⁰

133. We find that TracFone’s “USF by the Minute” proposal best addresses the concerns of prepaid wireless providers within the context of the new numbers-based contribution methodology we adopt today.³³¹ TracFone’s proposed USF by the Minute Plan would calculate universal service contribution assessments on prepaid wireless services by dividing the residential per-number assessment (the \$1.00 flat fee adopted above) by the number of minutes used by the average postpaid wireless customer in a month. This per-minute number would then be multiplied by the number of monthly prepaid minutes generated by the provider. This amount would be the provider’s monthly universal service contribution obligation. The per-minute assessment, however, would be capped at an amount equal to the current per month contribution per Assessable Number, the per-number assessment amount adopted above.³³² We illustrate the proposal below.

³²⁵ See, e.g., Verizon Mar. 28, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3; TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2; Virgin Mobile June 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 7.

³²⁶ See Verizon Mar. 28, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3; TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach.; see also Letter from Antoinette Bush, Counsel for Virgin Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 11 (filed Mar. 18, 2005) (Virgin Mobile Mar. 18, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); AT&T and Verizon Sept. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

³²⁷ See CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1 (raising a concern that current proposals could harm the large number of prepaid wireless customers).

³²⁸ See *supra* para. 141.

³²⁹ See Letter from Mitchell F. Brecher, Counsel for TracFone, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 3 (filed June 15, 2007) (TracFone June 15 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³³⁰ TracFone June 15, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3. TracFone also asserts that an exception is warranted because it provides service to low volume end users (i.e., end users that do make a small amount of calls, measured in minutes). *Id.* However, as explained below, we decline to provide a contribution exception for low-volume users. See *infra* para. 143.

³³¹ AT&T and Verizon support the TracFone discount approach for prepaid wireless providers. AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 3; see also Letter from David L. Sieradzki, Counsel to OnStar Corp., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (dated Oct. 28, 2008) (OnStar “strongly supports” the TracFone per-minute of use proposal for prepaid wireless services) (OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³³² TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 4–5.

134. According to CTIA data submitted by TracFone, the average wireless postpaid customer used 826 minutes per month for the period ending December 2007.³³³ The residential per-number assessment of \$1.00 would be divided by 826 minutes to calculate a per-minute assessment of \$0.001210654. The wireless prepaid provider's contribution obligation would be calculated by multiplying the per-minute assessment by the number of prepaid minutes generated for the month. If the wireless prepaid provider generated a billion prepaid minutes in a month, its contribution for that month would be \$1,210,654.³³⁴ If the prepaid provider had 10 million prepaid customers that month, the average contribution per customer would be \$0.12 and its contribution obligation would remain at \$1,210,654. If, on the other hand, it had only 1 million customers, the average contribution per-customer would be \$1.20, which exceeds the residential per-number assessment of \$1.00. In this case, because the per-customer contribution amount under the calculation would exceed the residential per-number assessment established by the Commission, the prepaid provider's contribution obligation would be capped at \$1,000,000, which is the residential per-number assessment of \$1.00 multiplied by the 1 million monthly prepaid customers. Under this scenario, the average per-customer contribution for the prepaid wireless provider would be equal to the per-number contribution of \$1.00 for non-prepaid residential numbers.

135. We find the TracFone discount approach superior to other forms of a discount proposed by parties. For example, CTIA proposed a fifty percent discount for prepaid wireless providers.³³⁵ The TracFone approach is based on actual wireless calling data, whereas the CTIA approach represents a more arbitrary half-off discount. Moreover, the CTIA proposal makes no allowance for the type of end user that is using the prepaid wireless service. This contrasts with the TracFone proposal, which would not provide any discount to those end users that use more than the average monthly post-paid number of minutes. As explained above, for those customers whose usage would result in more than the \$1.00 pass-through, the assessment on the provider and the pass-through would be capped at \$1.00 per month per Assessable Number. Thus, high volume users would neither benefit from, nor be penalized by, the discount mechanism. Finally, we make clear that if the prepaid provider is an ETC and is providing service to qualifying Lifeline customers, the provider is exempt from contribution assessments on the qualifying Lifeline customers and we prohibit the provider from assessing any universal service pass-through charges on their Lifeline customers.

5. Exceptions to Contribution Obligations

136. A number of parties have asked for exceptions from the contribution obligation. We find that, in general, providing an exception or exemption to a particular provider or to a particular category of end users would complicate the administration of the numbers-based methodology we adopt today. The result would unfairly favor certain groups by reducing or eliminating their contribution obligations, while increasing the contribution obligations on providers that are not exempted from contributing. Therefore, we conclude that grant of an exemption from the contribution obligations is only warranted for those who are truly unable to bear the burden of contributing to the universal service fund—low-income consumers. As discussed below, we exempt providers from contribution assessments on their qualifying Lifeline program customers and prohibit contributors from assessing any universal service pass-through charges on their Lifeline customers. As explained below, an exception for low-income consumers is consistent with the Commission's policies underlying the low-income universal service program and targets

³³³ See TracFone Sept. 17, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5. We use these data because they are the most recent publicly available data.

³³⁴ To the extent that the prepaid wireless subscriber is a Lifeline customer for the prepaid service, the prepaid provider should exclude prepaid minutes associated with the qualifying Lifeline customer. See *infra* para. 141.

³³⁵ CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5.

universal service benefits to those consumers most in need of those benefits.³³⁶

137. We conclude that telephone numbers assigned to Lifeline customers should be excluded from the universal service contribution base and providers of Lifeline service may not pass-through contribution assessments to Lifeline customers.³³⁷ The Lifeline program provides an opportunity for the Commission to ensure that low-income families are not denied access to telephone service. We find that an exception for Lifeline customers satisfies the high threshold necessary to justify an exception to the new numbers-based contribution methodology we adopt today. Lifeline customers are, by definition, among the poorest individuals in the country. As such, they are in the greatest need of relief from regulatory assessments. Prohibiting recovery of universal service contributions from Lifeline customers helps to increase subscribership by reducing qualifying low-income consumers' monthly basic local service charges.³³⁸ The record, moreover, overwhelmingly supports the creation of an exception for Lifeline customers. Consumer groups, large telecommunications customers, LECs, and wireless providers all support creating an exemption for Lifeline customers, and no commenter opposes an exemption for Lifeline customers.³³⁹ We therefore adopt an exemption to our numbers-based contribution methodology for Lifeline customers.

138. Although commenters have sought contribution exceptions for other groups of consumers or service providers, we decline to adopt any further exceptions.³⁴⁰ Some parties argue that consumers who make few or no calls, i.e., low-volume users, should be exempt from the numbers-based residential contribution assessment mechanism.³⁴¹ As discussed above, all users of the network, even those who make few or no calls, receive a benefit by being able to receive calls, and therefore it is appropriate for these consumers to contribute to universal service.³⁴² Also as discussed above, to the extent low-volume consumers may see an increase in the amount of their universal service contribution pass-through fee,³⁴³ any such increase should be slight.³⁴⁴

139. We also decline to exempt telematics providers,³⁴⁵ stand-alone voice mail providers,³⁴⁶

³³⁶ *Alenco v. FCC*, 201 F.3d at 621.

³³⁷ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4 (proposing that numbers assigned to Lifeline customers be excluded from the monthly number count for contribution purposes).

³³⁸ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24982, para. 62.

³³⁹ See, e.g., CTIA 2006 *Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5; CU et al. *High-Cost Reform NPRMs* Reply at 58; Ad Hoc Nov. 19, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4; AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 5.

³⁴⁰ We do not prejudge whether additional exceptions should apply if the Commission were to assess contributions based on numbers for business services. We note that certain businesses, such as non-profit health care providers, libraries, and colleges and universities, support such exemptions. We do not address those exemptions at this time.

³⁴¹ See, e.g., CU et al. *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 12; NASUCA *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 14; Keep USF Fair Mar. 27, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 1.

³⁴² See *supra* para. 113; see also Sprint *Contribution First FNPRM* Comments at 7.

³⁴³ But see IDT Aug. 2, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6–7 (arguing that low-volume consumers who make no long distance calls pay about \$1.40 in universal service contribution assessments).

³⁴⁴ See *supra* para. 112.

³⁴⁵ Telematics is a service that is provided through a transceiver, which is usually built into a vehicle but can also be a handheld device, that provides public safety information to public safety answering points (PSAPs) using global positioning satellite data to provide location information regarding accidents, airbag deployments, and other emergencies in real time. See, e.g., Letter from David L Sieradzki, Counsel for OnStar, to Marlene H. Dortch, FCC, (continued....)

one-way service providers,³⁴⁷ and two-way paging services³⁴⁸ from contributing based on numbers. We disagree with commenters arguing for special treatment for these services.³⁴⁹ Granting exceptions for these services would provide them with an advantage over other services that are required to contribute based on residential telephone numbers. These services are receiving the benefit of accessing the public network and therefore assessing universal service contributions on these entities is appropriate.³⁵⁰ These service providers have not shown that grant of a contribution exception is warranted.³⁵¹ Accordingly,

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CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Mar. 2, 2006); *Revision of the Commission's Rules To Ensure Compatibility with Enhanced 911 Emergency Systems*, CC Docket No. 94-102, Order, 18 FCC Rcd 21531, 21531-33, paras. 2, 8 (2003).

³⁴⁶ Letter from Jennifer D. Brandon, Executive Director, Community Voice Mail National, to Tom Navin, Wireline Competition Bureau, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed May 30, 2006) (Community Voice Mail May 30, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter) (arguing for an exemption for these services).

³⁴⁷ One-way services include, but are not limited to, one-way paging, electronic facsimile (e-fax), and voicemail services (other than stand-alone voicemail services, as discussed above).

³⁴⁸ See, e.g., Letter from Matthew Brill, Counsel for USA Mobility, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (opposing the assessment of a numbers-based fee on paging carriers and their customers); Letter from Kenneth Hardman, representing the American Association of Paging Carriers, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at Attach. (filed Oct. 22, 2008).

³⁴⁹ See Letter from Ari Q. Fitzgerald, Counsel, Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Apr. 12, 2006) (Mercedes-Benz Apr. 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); see also Letter from John E. Logan, ATX Group, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 2 (filed Mar. 16, 2006) (ATX Mar. 16, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from David M. Don, Counsel for j2 Global Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1 (filed Nov. 18, 2005) (j2 Global Nov. 18, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from William B. Wilhelm, Jr., Counsel for Bonfire Holdings, to Tom Navin, Chief, Wireline Competition Bureau, CC Docket No. 96-45 (filed Feb. 13, 2006) (Bonfire Feb. 13, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter); j2 Global *Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 2; Letter from Kenneth E. Hardman, Counsel for American Association of Paging Carriers, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1 (filed Oct. 6, 2005) (AAPC Oct. 6, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Frederick M. Joyce, Counsel for USA Mobility, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 1-3 (filed Mar. 22, 2006) (USA Mobility Mar. 22, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³⁵⁰ We similarly decline to adopt an exemption from the numbers-based contribution assessment method for services provided by alarm companies. See Letter from Donald J. Evans, Counsel for Corr Wireless Communications, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket No. 06-122, WT Docket No. 05-194, at 2 (filed Oct. 23, 2008). These services are receiving the benefit of having access to the PSTN and should therefore contribute to universal service.

³⁵¹ Telematics providers argue against imposition of a \$1.00 per number per month contribution assessment on telematics numbers due to the service's critical role in advancing public safety, and because the \$1.00 assessment would be prohibitively expensive. See, e.g., Letter from Gary Wallace, Vice President Corporate Relations, ATX Group, Inc., to Kevin Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122 at 1-2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3-4; Letter from Matthew Brill, Counsel for Toyota Motor Sales USA, Inc., to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1-2 (filed Oct. 24, 2008). We find, however, that treating these services differently than other residential services would not be equitable, given their use of the PSTN and the ability of telematics providers to recover the assessment from their end users. Given the public safety benefit to consumers, we find unpersuasive the telematics' providers assertions that consumers will discontinue use of the service based on an assessment of only \$1.00 per number. Furthermore, we disagree with commenters who argue that telematics service should be treated as a business service, and conclude that telematics service is a residential service that should be assessed under the \$1.00 per number per

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providers of these services will be assessed the full per-number charge. Some one-way service providers argue that their services are currently offered on a free, or nearly-free basis, and if these services are assessed on a per telephone number basis, providers will no longer be able to offer them.³⁵² We disagree that our change in contribution policy necessitates this result. Although these services may be marketed as “free” to the end user, these services are not truly free. Commercial providers of free or nearly-free services generate revenue in other ways, such as advertising or through more sophisticated paid service offerings or product offerings, and, therefore, whether they continue to offer free services would be a business decision based upon the circumstances of the particular business.³⁵³ Indeed, we find that assessing a per-number contribution obligation on these services is consistent with our determination that services that benefit from a ubiquitous public network are fairly charged with supporting the network.

140. We also decline to adopt an exception from the residential numbers-based contribution mechanism for additional handsets provided through a wireless family plan. We do not agree with commenters who argue that telephone numbers assigned to the additional handsets in family wireless plans should be assessed at a reduced rate, either permanently or for a transitional period.³⁵⁴ These commenters assert that assessing contributions at the full per-number rate would cause family plan customers to experience “rate shock.”³⁵⁵ Although family plan customers may see an increase in universal service contribution pass-through charges on their monthly bills, we are not persuaded that the fear of “rate shock” justifies special treatment. We find that each number associated with a family plan obtains the full benefits of accessing the public network, and thus it is fair to assess each number with a separate contribution obligation. We also note that wireless service is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the industry and the record does not include persuasive data showing that a move to a numbers-based contribution methodology would have a significant, detrimental impact on wireless subscribership.³⁵⁶ We agree with Qwest that an exception for additional family plan handsets would not be competitively neutral and would advantage approximately 70 million wireless family plan consumers over other residential service consumers.³⁵⁷ Multiple wireline lines in a household are not given a discounted contribution assessment rate. We therefore decline to adopt a reduced assessment for wireless family plan numbers.

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month residential contribution methodology. See OnStar Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; Letter from Tamara Preiss, Legal and External Affairs, Verizon Wireless, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 1 (filed Oct. 29, 2008).

³⁵² See, e.g., j2 *Global Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 7 (arguing that a connections-based universal service methodology would force many heavily used one-way communications services out of existence).

³⁵³ See, e.g., j2 *Global Contribution Second FNPRM* Comments at 8 (describing a “free” service supported by advertising revenue).

³⁵⁴ See, e.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4; CTIA *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5–6; Leap Wireless *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³⁵⁵ E.g., AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 4; CTIA *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 5–6; Leap Wireless *2006 Contribution FNPRM* Comments at 2–3; T-Mobile Apr. 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2–3. *But see* AAPC Oct. 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³⁵⁶ There are, as of December 2007, 249,235,715 mobile wireless subscribers, a more than 9% increase from the previous year. See FCC, LOCAL TELEPHONE COMPETITION: STATUS AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2007, tbl. 14 at 18 (2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-285509A1.pdf. Moreover, where a wireless provider is eligible to receive universal service support, it receives the same level of support for each handset. See WTA/OPASTCO/ITTA Oct. 10, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

³⁵⁷ Qwest Sept. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 7; Qwest May 4, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 9; see also CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 1.

141. Some parties seek an exception to the contribution methodology we adopt today to exclude Internet-based telecommunications relay services (TRS), including video relay services (VRS) and IP Relay services.³⁵⁸ We decline to adopt an exception for such providers at this time. The Commission has an open proceeding on a number of issues related to these providers, including whether certain costs to these providers related to the acquisition of ten-digit numbers by their customers should be reimbursed by the TRS fund.³⁵⁹ We defer to that proceeding consideration of whether to adopt an exception to the contribution methodology we adopt today for numbers assigned to Internet-based TRS users.³⁶⁰

6. Reporting Requirements and Recordkeeping

142. Under the existing revenue-based contribution methodology, contributors report their historical gross-billed, projected gross-billed, and projected collected end-user interstate and international revenues quarterly on the FCC Form 499-Q and their gross-billed and actual collected end-user interstate and international revenues annually on the FCC Form 499-A.³⁶¹ Contributors are billed for their universal service contribution obligations on a monthly basis based on their quarterly projected collected revenue.³⁶² Actual revenues reported on the FCC Form 499-A are used to perform true-ups to the quarterly projected revenue data.³⁶³

143. We will develop a new and unified reporting system to accommodate our new universal service contribution methodology.³⁶⁴ Contributors will report their Assessable Number counts on a

³⁵⁸ See Letter from Deb MacLean, Communication Access Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, et al. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45, at 1–2 (filed Sept. 29, 2008) (CSDVRS Sept. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

³⁵⁹ See *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, CG Docket No. 03-123, WC Docket No. 05-196, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 23 FCC Rcd 11591, 11646, para. 149 (2008) (“We . . . seek comment on whether, and to what extent, the costs of acquiring numbers, including porting fees, should be passed on to the Internet-based TRS users, and not paid for by the [TRS] Fund. . . . We also seek comment on whether there are other specific costs that result from the requirements adopted in the *Order* that, mirroring voice telephone consumers, should be passed on to consumers, including, for example, E911 charges.”).

³⁶⁰ To the extent that Internet-based TRS users utilize a proxy number or identifier other than an assigned ten-digit number during/pending the transition to ten-digit numbering for Internet-based TRS services, we make clear that those numbers or identifiers are NOT subject to universal service contribution at this time. This treatment is necessary to ensure the smooth transition to ten-digit numbering for these services, and to prevent duplicative charges for end users of these services.

³⁶¹ See, e.g., *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24969, para. 29. Filers are required to file revisions to FCC Form 499-Q within 45 calendar days of the original filing date. See FCC, INSTRUCTIONS TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET, FCC Form 499-Q, at 10 (Feb. 2008), available at <http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form499-Q/499q.pdf>. Filers are required to file revisions to FCC Form 499-A by March 31 of the year after the original filing date. See FCC, INSTRUCTIONS TO THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REPORTING WORKSHEET, FCC Form 499-A, at 11–12 (Feb. 2008), available at <http://www.fcc.gov/Forms/Form499-A/499a-2008.pdf>.

³⁶² See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24972, para. 35.

³⁶³ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24972, para. 36.

³⁶⁴ We decline to adopt the suggestion by AT&T and Verizon to transition the Telecommunications Relay Services Fund, local number portability cost recovery, and numbering administration to a numbers/connections-based assessment methodology. See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6. Although these programs rely

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monthly basis. Contributors must report as an Assessable Number any such number that is in use by an end user during any point in the relevant month. The Commission will develop an additional version of the FCC Form 499 for use in reporting Assessable Numbers. Under the interim business revenue-based reporting component, contributors will report their revenue information on the modified FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q.

144. Under the new numbers-based system we adopt today, contributors will report historical Assessable Numbers monthly. Contributors will then be invoiced and required to contribute the following month. By reporting actual, historical numbers, the numbers-based component of our contribution methodology remains simple and straightforward. As explained above, a key reason to move to a primarily numbers-based approach is its simplicity. Indeed, several commenters propose monthly reporting of historical number counts.³⁶⁵ We find that reporting Assessable Numbers on a projected collected basis would unnecessarily complicate the numbers-reporting system. Although we are mindful of the issues inherent in historical reporting,³⁶⁶ we find that a one month lag between the reported Assessable Numbers and the contribution based on those numbers is minimal and will not unfairly disadvantage any provider, even those with a declining base.

145. We allow contributors to self-certify which telephone numbers are, consistent with this order, considered “residential.” Contributors will be subject to audit, however, and their method for distinguishing residential from other numbers must be reasonable and supportable. For example, in the Commission’s *Broadband Data Gathering Order* released earlier this year, the Commission directed mobile wireless service providers “to report as residential subscriptions those subscriptions that are not billed to a corporate account, to a non-corporate business customer account, or to a government or institutional account.”³⁶⁷ We added that “[f]or purposes of Form 477, subscriptions billed to a federal government department or agency, for example, will not be ‘residential’ subscriptions, while subscriptions to a service plan offered to all federal government employees will be considered to be residential subscriptions.”³⁶⁸ For purposes of identifying numbers associated with business services (which are not Assessable Numbers), contributors may rely on the fact that the line associated with that number is assessed a *multi-line* end user common line charge (i.e., SLC); provided, however, that the SLC must be a mandatory charge, rather than a discretionary charge.³⁶⁹ For determining residential numbers (which are Assessable Numbers), however, a contributor may not rely on the assessment of a residential SLC, because SLC rates are the same for residential and single-line business end users. Therefore, the

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on the revenue information reported in the current FCC Form 499-A, they do not rely on many of the revenue distinctions, such as interstate and intrastate, that necessitate the change from a revenue-based assessment for the universal service fund.

³⁶⁵ See AT&T and Verizon Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 1 at 2-3; CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5; USF by the Numbers Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

³⁶⁶ See *Second Wireless Safe Harbor Order*, 17 FCC Rcd at 24969–70, paras. 29–32.

³⁶⁷ *Development of Nationwide Broadband Data to Evaluate Reasonable and Timely Deployment of Advanced Services to All Americans, Improvement of Wireless Broadband Subscribership Data, and Development of Data on Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Subscribership*, WC Docket No. 07-38, 23 FCC Rcd 9691, 9704, para. 24 (2008) (*Broadband Data Gathering Order*), Order on Reconsideration, 23 FCC Rcd 9800 (2008).

³⁶⁸ *Broadband Data Gathering Order* at para. 24 n.91.

³⁶⁹ In other words, the SLC type and rate must be established pursuant to the Commission’s rules. 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(o)(1), 69.152(k)(1). To the extent that the contributor is not required to charge a SLC (e.g., is not rate-regulated by the Commission), a voluntary business choice to include a “subscriber line charge” on a customer’s bill may not be dispositive of the type of service, residential or business, being provided.

fact that a contributor charges the single-line business/residential SLC may not accurately indicate whether the service provided is a business or residential service.³⁷⁰

146. Each contributor must maintain the necessary internal records to justify, in response to an audit or otherwise, its reported Assessable Number counts and the data reported on the Commission's contribution forms.³⁷¹ Contributors are responsible for accurately including all Assessable Numbers associated with residential services in their Assessable Number counts and revenues from all business services in the interim business services revenue component of the methodology. Failure to file the required form by the applicable deadline, or failure to file accurate information on the form, could subject a contributor to enforcement action.³⁷² In addition, as with the current FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q, we will require that an officer of the filer certify to the truthfulness and accuracy of the forms submitted to the administrator.

147. To ensure that filers report correct information, we continue to require all reporting entities to maintain records and documentation to justify the information reported in these forms, and to provide such records and documentation to the Commission and to USAC upon request.³⁷³ All universal service fund contributors are required to retain their records for five years.³⁷⁴ Specifically, contributors to the universal service fund must retain all documents and records that they may require to demonstrate to auditors that their contributions were made in compliance with the program rules, assuming that the audits are conducted within five years of such contribution. Contributors further must make available all documents and records that pertain to them, including those of contractors and consultants working on their behalf, to the Office of Inspector General, to USAC, and to their respective auditors. These documents and records should include without limitation the following: financial statements and supporting documentation; accounting records; historical customer records; general ledgers; and any other relevant documentation.³⁷⁵

148. Further, we make clear that for purposes of the interim business revenue component, we retain all existing reporting requirements associated with the filing of the FCC Forms 499-A and 499-Q for business service revenue. Finally, we direct the Bureau, and delegate to the Bureau the authority, to develop or modify the necessary forms to ensure proper contribution reporting occurs, consistent with this order.

7. Transition to New Methodology

149. The new reporting procedures discussed above will require reporting entities to adjust their record-keeping and reporting systems in order to provide reports to USAC regarding the number of Assessable Numbers and to adjust their revenue information to include only business service revenue.

³⁷⁰ 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1), 69.152(d)(1).

³⁷¹ *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, para. 27.

³⁷² Pursuant to section 1.80 of the Commission's rules, failure to file required forms or information carries a base forfeiture amount of \$3,000 per instance and is subject to adjustment criteria. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 1.80.

³⁷³ *Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16372, para. 27; *see also* 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.706(e), 54.711(a).

³⁷⁴ *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16372, para. 27; 47 C.F.R. § 54.706(e).

³⁷⁵ *See Comprehensive Review Report and Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 16387, paras. 27–28. We note that contributors who also report NRUF data to the NANPA are currently required to maintain internal records of their numbering resources for audit purposes. *NRO I Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 7601, para. 62.

Accordingly, we implement a 12-month transition period for the new contribution mechanisms.³⁷⁶ This transition period will give contributors ample time to adjust their record-keeping and reporting systems so that they may comply with modified reporting procedures. As explained below, a 12-month transition period will also allow reporting entities to submit several reports for informational purposes before being assessed on the basis of projected Assessable Numbers for residential services.³⁷⁷ We find, therefore, that a 12-month transition period balances administrative burdens on contributors with the need to implement the new contribution methodologies in a balanced and equitable manner.

150. During 2009, filers will continue reporting their interstate telecommunications revenue on a quarterly basis and USAC will continue assessing contributions to the federal universal service mechanisms based on those quarterly reports. This one-year period and, in particular, the first six months of that period, should be used by contributors to adjust their internal and reporting systems to prepare for the reporting of Assessable Numbers and business revenues.

151. Beginning in July 2009, contributors will continue to report and contribute based on their quarterly reported interstate and international revenues for the last two quarters of the year, but they will also begin filing with USAC monthly reports of their Assessable Numbers and quarterly reports of their business revenues. USAC will thus collect data under the old revenue-based methodology, while collecting and reviewing data under the new Assessable Number and business revenues methodologies for the last six months of 2009. We find that this six-month period of double-reporting is necessary to help reporting entities, Commission staff, and USAC identify implementation issues that may arise under this new methodology prior to it taking effect.³⁷⁸ Although only the December 2009 Assessable Numbers and the fourth quarter 2009 business revenue data will be used to compute contributors' January 2010 and first quarter 2010 assessments, we find it is reasonable to require contributors to begin filing under the new methodologies prior to these periods to ensure that there is adequate time for all affected parties to address any implementation issues that may arise. Moreover, we conclude that the short overlap of reporting under both the old and new methodologies will not be unduly burdensome for contributors given the limited duration of the dual reporting.

V. REFORM OF INTERCARRIER COMPENSATION

152. Since Congress first passed the Communications Act in 1934, the Commission has sought "to make available, so far as possible, to all the people of the United States . . . a rapid, efficient, Nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges."³⁷⁹ To promote universal service, regulators have long relied on a complex array of intercarrier compensation mechanisms, which generally have included implicit subsidies. Through the years, the introduction of competition into first long-distance and then local markets, as well as the development and

³⁷⁶ See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3 (proposing a 12-month transition to the new mechanism taking effect).

³⁷⁷ See CTIA 2006 Contribution FNPRM Comments at 7; see also Verizon and AT&T Sept. 11, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2 (advocating a 12-month implementation period followed by a 6-month transition period). Some parties advocated for a transition period as short as possible. See, e.g., Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, Attach. at 2 (filed Sept. 19 2008) (CenturyTel Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Sprint Nextel June 14, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter. Others advocated for a longer transition period. See, e.g., Qwest Mar. 21, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3 (advocating 18 months); XO Communications Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 11 (advocating at least 18 months).

³⁷⁸ See AT&T and Verizon Oct. 20, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3 (recommending a six-month transition period for filers and USAC to test and calibrate the new system prior to its taking effect).

³⁷⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 151.

deployment of new technologies, have eroded the fundamental economic underpinnings of the current intercarrier compensation regimes. The reforms we adopt in this order are designed to unify and simplify the myriad intercarrier compensation systems in existence today. This unification and simplification will encourage the efficient use of, and investment in, advanced telecommunications and broadband networks, spur intermodal competition throughout the United States, and minimize the need for future regulatory intervention.

153. Today, we adopt a new approach to intercarrier compensation and establish the blueprint for moving to new uniform termination rates that are economically efficient and sustainable in our increasingly competitive telecommunications markets. At the same time, we recognize, as the Commission has in the past, that we need to be cognizant of market disruptions and potential adverse effects on consumers and carriers of moving too quickly from the existing intercarrier compensation regimes to our new uniform approach to intercarrier compensation. Accordingly, we adopt here a gradual ten-year transition plan, with separate stages, designed to reduce rates over a sufficient period to minimize market disruptions and to cushion the impact of our reform on both customers and carriers. At the end of the transition period, all telecommunications traffic will be treated as falling within the reciprocal compensation provisions of section 251(b)(5), and states will set default reciprocal compensation rates pursuant to the new methodology we adopt herein.

A. A Brief History of Intercarrier Compensation

154. This section provides an overview of the development of intercarrier compensation regulation in the United States. Although not comprehensive, it highlights several important goals that have emerged in Commission precedent, which are relevant to intercarrier compensation reform.

- *Promoting universal service.* The Commission has sought to promote universal service, and, in furtherance of that objective, an intricate web of implicit subsidies evolved that were intended to keep the price of residential local telephone service affordable, even if that price was below cost. With the introduction of competition for long-distance telephone service, regulators sought to maintain implicit subsidies of local service when they created regulated intercarrier compensation charges, known as “access charges,” that long-distance service providers paid local telephone companies to originate and terminate long-distance calls.
- *Encouraging efficient use of the network.* The Commission has long recognized that requiring end-users to bear a greater proportion of the cost of the local network encourages them to make rational choices in their use of telephone service. The Commission nevertheless has declined to shift a significant percentage of the cost of the network to those end users in light of universal service concerns.
- *Realigning cost recovery in response to competition.* For much of the twentieth century, telephone service was viewed as a natural monopoly. The emergence of competition for long-distance services in the 1970s and for local services, particularly after the 1996 Act, has placed pressure on above-cost intercarrier compensation charges. Although the Commission, in response to competitive entry, sought to develop intercarrier compensation rules that align more closely with the economic principle that costs should be recovered in the way they are incurred, marketplace developments confirm that those efforts were incomplete. As new competitors entered, a series of regulatory arbitrage strategies developed, some of which the Commission has attempted to address on a case-by-case basis.
- *Technological advancements.* As carriers shift from circuit-switched telephone-only networks to packet-switched broadband networks supporting numerous services and applications, it is important that intercarrier compensation rules create the proper incentives for carriers to invest in new

broadband technology and that consumers have the opportunity to take full advantage of the new capabilities of this broadband world.

1. Intercarrier Compensation Regulation Before the Telecommunications Act of 1996

155. When AT&T began offering telephone service in 1877,³⁸⁰ it held all the essential patents and effectively operated as a legal monopoly. When the original patents expired in 1894, however, thousands of independent telephone companies began offering competing local telephone service.³⁸¹ This new competition led to lower rates,³⁸² and reduced AT&T's average return on investments by over 80 percent.³⁸³ AT&T responded by refusing to interconnect with any independent telephone company to exchange long-distance or local traffic.³⁸⁴ Without interconnection, independent telephone companies could not offer a viable service unless such entities duplicated the AT&T system, which was not economically feasible. As a result, independent telephone companies began to go out of business or were acquired by AT&T.³⁸⁵

156. AT&T's predatory strategy led the Department of Justice to file an antitrust suit against AT&T in 1913. The government alleged that AT&T's interconnection and acquisition policies violated Section 2 of the Sherman Act.³⁸⁶ The case was eventually dropped after AT&T committed to abide by certain principles in what became known as the Kingsbury Commitment of 1913. Under the Kingsbury

³⁸⁰ The company that became AT&T was originally called the Bell Telephone Company. See AT&T, A Brief History: Origins, <http://www.corp.att.com/history/history1.html> (last visited Sept. 11, 2008) (AT&T Brief History). For simplicity, we use the term "AT&T" to include all predecessor companies.

³⁸¹ Between 1894 and 1904, "over six thousand independent telephone companies went into business in the United States, and the number of telephones boomed from 285,000 to 3,317,000." See AT&T Brief History. By 1900, independent telephone companies controlled "38 percent of the phones installed in the United States." GERALD W. BROCK, THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY, THE DYNAMICS OF MARKET STRUCTURE 148 (1981) (THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY). And, by 1902, 451 out of 1002 cities with telephone service had two or more competing providers. See MICHAEL K. KELLOGG ET AL. FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW 11 (1992) (FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW).

³⁸² THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 116.

³⁸³ FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11; see also Adam D. Thierer, *Unnatural Monopoly: Critical Moments In The Development Of The Bell System Monopoly*, 14 CATO J. 2 (1994), available at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/journal/cjv14n2-6.html> (*Unnatural Monopoly*). Although independent companies competed with AT&T for local service, AT&T had the only long-distance network operating at the time and possessed important long-distance technology patents. See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 148. According to Brock, there is some evidence that the independent companies had planned on starting a separate long-distance network until AT&T refused interconnection. GERALD W. BROCK, THE SECOND INFORMATION REVOLUTION 30–32 (2003) (SECOND INFORMATION REVOLUTION).

³⁸⁴ FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11–12; THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 148; David F. Weiman & Richard C. Levin, *Preying for Monopoly? The Case of Southern Bell Telephone Company, 1894–1912*, 102 J. POL. ECON. 103, 103–26 (1994).

³⁸⁵ FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11. In 1912 alone, AT&T purchased 136,000 telephone companies and sold 43,000. See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 156.

³⁸⁶ Original Petition, *United States v. AT&T*, No. 6082 (D. Or. 1913); *United States v. AT&T*, No. 6082, 1 DECREES AND JUDGMENT IN CIVIL ACTION CASES 483 (D. Or. 1914); see also PETER TEMIN, THE FALL OF THE BELL SYSTEM: A STUDY IN PRICES AND POLITICS 9–10 (1987); ROBERT W. GARNET, THE TELEPHONE ENTERPRISE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BELL SYSTEM'S HORIZONTAL STRUCTURE, 1876–1909 152–53 (1985).

Commitment, AT&T agreed to: (i) allow independent telephone companies to interconnect with AT&T's long-distance network; and (ii) not acquire any additional independent telephone companies absent regulatory approval.³⁸⁷ In exchange, the government sanctioned AT&T's monopoly control over markets where it already offered service.

157. In essence, the Kingsbury Commitment and subsequent regulation assumed that both the local and long-distance telephone businesses were natural monopolies.³⁸⁸ Policymakers embraced the view that, because of economies of scale, a natural monopoly could provide service more efficiently than would occur in a competitive market.³⁸⁹ Rates for these natural monopolies were subject to rate-of-return regulation.³⁹⁰ In setting regulated rates, a primary policy objective of regulators was to promote universal service to all consumers through affordable local telephone rates for residential customers. To accomplish this objective, however, regulators created a patchwork of what has become known as implicit subsidies. Thus, for example, regulators permitted higher rates to business customers so that residential rates could be lower, and they frequently required similar rates to urban and rural customers, even though the cost of serving rural customers was higher.³⁹¹ Similarly, AT&T was permitted to charge artificially high long-distance toll rates, and its interstate toll revenues were placed into an interstate "settlements" pool.³⁹² AT&T then shared a portion of these interstate revenues with independent telephone companies

³⁸⁷ The Kingsbury Commitment was a "unilateral letter rather than an actual consent decree." See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 155. The Kingsbury Commitment was republished in AT&T's 1913 Annual Report at 24–26, available at http://www.porticus.org/bell/pdf/1913ATTar_Complete.pdf. AT&T also agreed to sell off its Western Union stock, a large independent telephone company that AT&T had recently acquired. See *id.* at 24. See FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 11–12; see also *Unnatural Monopoly*.

³⁸⁸ See, e.g., *Unnatural Monopoly* (noting that a Senate Commerce Committee hearing in 1921 stating that "telephoning is a natural monopoly" and a House of Representative committee report stated that "[t]here is nothing to be gained by local competition in the telephone business.") (quoting G. H. Loeb, *The Communications Act Policy Toward Competition: A Failure to Communicate*, 1 DUKE LAW J. 14 (1978)); see also *id.* (explaining that many state regulatory agencies began refusing requests by telephone companies to construct new lines in areas already served by another carrier and continued to encourage monopoly swapping and consolidation in the name of "efficient service") (citing Warren G. Lavey, *The Public Policies That Changed the Telephone Industry Into Regulated Monopolies: Lessons From Around 1915*, 39 FED. COMM. L.J. 171, 184–85 (1987)); FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 17.

³⁸⁹ A natural monopoly arises "when a single firm can efficiently serve the entire market because average costs are lower with one firm than with two firms." R. PRESTON MCAFEE, INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMIC ANALYSIS 6–241 (2006), available at <http://www.mcafee.cc/Introecon/IEA.pdf>; see also DANIEL F. SPULBER, REGULATION AND MARKETS 3–4 (1989) ("Natural monopoly generally refers to a property of productive technology, often in conjunction with market demand, such that a single firm is able to serve the market at less cost than two or more firms. Natural monopoly is due to economies of scale or economies of multiple-output production.").

³⁹⁰ For discussions of rate of return regulation, see, e.g., JAMES C. BONBRIGHT ET AL., PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY RATES 197–376 (1988); CHARLES F. PHILLIPS, JR., THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC UTILITY INDUSTRIES 260–302 (1969) (PHILLIPS, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION); 1 ALFRED E. KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION: PRINCIPLES AND INSTITUTIONS 20–58 (1970) (THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION).

³⁹¹ See, e.g., JONATHAN E. NUECHTERLEIN & PHILIP J. WEISER, DIGITAL CROSSROADS: AMERICAN TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY IN THE INTERNET AGE 10–15 (2007) (DIGITAL CROSSROADS).

³⁹² See *Economic Implications and Interrelationships Arising from Policies and Practices Relating to Customer Information, Jurisdictional Separations and Rate Structures*, Docket No. 20003, First Report, 61 FCC 2d 766, 796–97, paras. 81–82 (1976).

and AT&T's affiliated Bell Operating Companies (BOCs).³⁹³ These high long-distance rates enabled regulators to set lower local rates for the BOCs and independent local telephone companies.

158. The use of microwave technology by Microwave Communications, Inc. (MCI), to offer a competitive alternative to AT&T's switched long-distance service beginning in the 1970s cast into doubt the assumption that long-distance telecommunications was a natural monopoly.³⁹⁴ MCI focused initially on private line service, where AT&T's rates were above cost. MCI's service offerings grew after a series of Commission and court decisions rejected AT&T's objections to MCI's entry.³⁹⁵ Despite these victories, MCI was not entitled to equal access to local exchange service,³⁹⁶ and MCI and other IXCs were dependent on the BOCs and independent local telephone companies to complete long-distance calls to the end users.³⁹⁷

159. For a number of reasons, including AT&T's resistance to the introduction of competition in the long-distance market, the Department of Justice in 1974 filed an antitrust suit alleging that AT&T had engaged in unlawful monopolization in the local, long-distance, and equipment manufacturing markets.³⁹⁸ After eight years of litigation, AT&T and the Department of Justice entered into a consent decree, which federal District Court Judge Greene approved in 1982.³⁹⁹ Under the Modification of Final Judgment (MFJ), AT&T agreed to divest its affiliated BOCs from AT&T long distance, and the BOCs

³⁹³ Under the settlements process, the local exchange companies were allowed to recover the portion of their costs allocated to the interstate jurisdiction from the interstate toll revenues. The process for affiliated companies was a process of intracorporate accounting known as "division of revenues," while the process for unaffiliated companies represented real payments from AT&T to the independent companies. See THE SECOND INFORMATION REVOLUTION at 188. According to Brock, the revenue sharing settlements process was a major source of support for small rural companies, which often could recover a large share of their costs from the interstate toll revenue pool (in some cases as much as 85 % of their non-traffic sensitive costs). See *id.*

³⁹⁴ See DIGITAL CROSSROADS at 60–64.

³⁹⁵ AT&T argued that MCI would cherry pick the most profitable customers (those paying above-cost rates) and force AT&T to increase local rates thereby undermining the goal of universal service. AT&T opposed the entry of MCI before the Commission and the courts. See FEDERAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAW at 602–14; *Bell System Tariff Offerings of Local Distribution Facilities for Use by Other Common Carriers*, Docket No. 19896, Decision, 46 FCC 2d 413 (1974), *aff'd Bell Tel. Co. of Pa. v. FCC*, 503 F.2d 1250 (3d Cir. 1974); see also DIGITAL CROSSROADS at 60–64 (noting that AT&T fought "tooth and nail" to deprive MCI of effective access and even unplugged certain MCI lines from AT&T's network).

³⁹⁶ Equal access requires that all long-distance carriers be accessible by dialing a 1 and not a string of long-distance codes before dialing the called party's telephone number. See, e.g., HARRY NEWTON, NEWTON'S TELECOM DICTIONARY 326 (16th ed. 2000).

³⁹⁷ During much of the 1970s, AT&T and MCI debated before the Commission and courts about the charges that MCI should pay the BOCs for originating and terminating interstate calls placed by or to end users on the BOCs' local networks. In December 1978, under the Commission's supervision, AT&T, MCI, and other IXCs entered into a comprehensive interim agreement, known as Exchange Network Facilities for Interstate Access (ENFIA), which set the rates that AT&T's affiliated BOCs would charge IXCs for originating and terminating access to local exchange networks. See *Exchange Network Facilities for Interstate Access (ENFIA)*, CC Docket No. 78-371, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 71 FCC 2d 440 (1979) (subsequent history omitted).

³⁹⁸ See *United States v. AT&T*, 524 F. Supp. 1336, 1346 (D.D.C. 1981).

³⁹⁹ See *United States v. AT&T*, 552 F. Supp. 131 (D.D.C. 1982), *aff'd sub nom. Maryland v. United States*, 460 U.S. 1001 (1983). The 1982 consent decree, as entered by the court, was called the Modification of Final Judgment because it modified a 1956 Final Judgment against AT&T stemming from a 1949 antitrust lawsuit. See THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY at 116–20.

were required to provide equal access and dialing parity.⁴⁰⁰ In addition, the MFJ barred the BOCs from entering the long-distance, information services, equipment manufacturing, or other competitive markets to prevent predatory cross subsidization by their regulated monopoly local telephone service.⁴⁰¹ Although the MFJ applied only to the BOCs, the Commission subsequently extended interconnection and nondiscriminatory equal access obligations to all incumbent LECs.⁴⁰² As a result of the MFJ, MCI, and other competitors were able to compete directly with AT&T to provide long-distance or interstate service, and all IXCs paid interstate access charges to the BOCs and other incumbent LECs to originate and terminate service to end users.

160. While the AT&T antitrust suit was pending, the Commission began to take the first steps toward reforming intercarrier compensation. In 1978, the Commission commenced a review of intercarrier compensation for originating and terminating access.⁴⁰³ In 1983, following the MFJ, the Commission eliminated the “existing potpourri of [compensation] mechanisms,”⁴⁰⁴ and replaced it “with a single uniform mechanism . . . through which local carriers [could] recover the cost of providing access services needed to complete interstate and foreign telecommunications.”⁴⁰⁵ The access charge rules adopted by the Commission provided for the recovery of incumbent LECs’ costs assigned to the interstate jurisdiction and detailed “the precise manner in which [incumbent LECs] may assess charges on IXCs and end users.”⁴⁰⁶ In designing the interstate access charge rules, the Commission sought to balance a number of competing objectives.⁴⁰⁷ For one, the Commission recognized that “[a]rtificial pricing structures, while perhaps appropriate for use in achieving social objectives under the right conditions, cannot withstand the pressures of a competitive marketplace.”⁴⁰⁸ Consequently, the Commission sought to follow more closely the principle that costs should be recovered in the way they are incurred, consistent

⁴⁰⁰ The Act defines “dialing parity” to mean that a “person that is not an affiliate of a local exchange carrier is able to provide telecommunications services in such a manner that customers have the ability to route automatically, without the use of any access code, their telecommunications to telecommunications services provider of the customer’s designation from among 2 or more telecommunications services providers (including such local exchange carrier).” 47 U.S.C. § 153(15).

⁴⁰¹ See *United States v. AT&T*, 552 F. Supp. 131 (D.D.C. 1982).

⁴⁰² *MTS and WATS Market Structure*, CC Docket No. 78-72, Phase I, Third Report and Order, 93 FCC 2d 241 (1983) (*1983 Access Charge Order*), modified on recon., 97 FCC 2d 682 (1983), modified on further recon., 97 FCC 2d 834 (1983), *aff’d in part and remanded in part*, *Nat’l Ass’n of Regulatory Util. Commissioners v. FCC*, 737 F.2d 1095 (D.C. Cir. 1984).

⁴⁰³ See *MTS and WATS Market Structure*, CC Docket No. 78-72, Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 67 FCC 2d 757 (1978); Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 73 FCC 2d 222 (1979); Second Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 77 FCC 2d 224 (1980); Report and Third Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 81 FCC 2d 177 (1980); and Fourth Supplemental Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 90 FCC 2d 135 (1982).

⁴⁰⁴ See *MTS and WATS Market Structure*, CC Docket No. 78-72, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 97 FCC 2d 682, 683, para. 2 (1983) (*First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*).

⁴⁰⁵ See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d 682.

⁴⁰⁶ See *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15991–92, para. 22.

⁴⁰⁷ See, e.g., *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d at 683, para. 3 (identifying the four primary objectives of: (1) elimination of unreasonable discrimination and undue preferences among rates for interstate services; (2) efficient use of the local network; (3) prevention of uneconomic bypass; and (4) preservation of universal service).

⁴⁰⁸ See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d. at 686, para. 7.

with principles of cost-causation.⁴⁰⁹ Under this rate structure principle, the cost of facilities that do not vary based on the amount of traffic carried over those facilities (i.e., non-traffic-sensitive costs) should be recovered through fixed, flat-rated charges, while only costs that vary with usage of facilities (i.e., traffic-sensitive costs) should be recovered through corresponding per-minute rates.⁴¹⁰

161. Despite these rate structure principles, the Commission concluded that a sudden introduction of large flat-rated charges on end-users could have “adverse effects” on subscribership. It therefore adopted a “plan [that] provides for the gradual introduction of these end-user charges.”⁴¹¹ Thus, the Commission limited the amount of the interstate loop costs assessed to residential and business customers as a flat-rated monthly charge, and it recovered the remaining interstate loop costs through a per-minute charge imposed on IXCs.⁴¹² Moreover, the Commission continued to apply traditional rate-of-return regulation based on carriers’ embedded, fully distributed costs, including common costs and overhead.⁴¹³

162. In 1991, the Commission took another step toward intercarrier compensation reform by replacing rate-of-return regulation with an incentive-based system of regulation for the BOCs and GTE.⁴¹⁴ This new regulatory regime, known as price cap regulation, was designed to replicate some of the efficiency incentives found in competitive markets. In particular, price caps were designed to encourage companies to: (1) improve their efficiency by creating incentives to reduce costs; (2) invest efficiently in new plant and facilities; and (3) develop and deploy innovative service offerings.⁴¹⁵ Although many

⁴⁰⁹ See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d. at 688–89, para. 10; see also *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15992, para. 24 (“The Commission has recognized in prior rulemaking proceedings that, to the extent possible, costs of interstate access should be recovered in the same way that they are incurred, consistent with principles of cost-causation.”).

⁴¹⁰ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15992, para. 23.

⁴¹¹ *1983 Access Charge Order*, 93 FCC 2d at 253, para. 35; see also *id.* at 243, para. 4 (finding that a “transitional plan is necessary” in part because “[i]mmediate recovery of high fixed costs through flat end user charges might cause a significant number of local exchange service subscribers to cancel local exchange service despite the existence of a Universal Service Fund” and “[s]uch a result would not be consistent with the goals of the Communications Act.”). As a result, the Commission initially limited the flat rate charge imposed on end users, also known as the subscriber line charge or SLC, to \$1.00 (subsequent orders raised the cap on the subscriber line charge for residential users to \$6.50).

⁴¹² This per-minute charge was called the carrier common line charge. See *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15992, para. 24. Additional charges were imposed on IXCs to recover the interstate portion of the costs of other parts of a local exchange carrier’s network, such as local switches and transport. See *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d at 735–40, paras. 129–34, 137–43.

⁴¹³ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.301–.502; see also *Policy and Rules Concerning Rates for Dominant Carriers*, CC Docket No. 87-313, Second Report and Order, 5 FCC Rcd 6786, 6787, para. 1 (1990) (*LEC Price Cap Order*). The rate-of-return regulations are set forth in Part 69 of our rules. See generally 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.1–701.

⁴¹⁴ Price cap regulation was mandatory for the BOCs and GTE and optional for other incumbent local exchange carriers. See *LEC Price Cap Order*, 5 FCC Rcd at 6818–20, paras. 257–79; see also *Access Charge Reform; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchanges Carriers; Interexchange Carrier Purchases of Switch Access Services Offered by Competitive Local Exchange Carriers; Petition of U.S. West Comm’ns, Inc. for Forbearance from Regulation as a Dominant Carrier in the Phoenix, Arizona MSA*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, 98-157, Fifth Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 14 FCC Rcd 14221, 14224 n.1 (1999) (*Pricing Flexibility Order*).

⁴¹⁵ *LEC Price Cap Order*, 5 FCC Rcd at 6789–91, paras. 21–37; *Special Access Rates for Price Cap Carriers*, WC Docket No. 05-25, Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 1994, 1998–99, para. 11 (2005); *Section* (continued....)

smaller and rural incumbent LECs remain subject to the Part 69 rate-of-return rules, most of the larger incumbent LECs are now subject to price cap regulation.⁴¹⁶

163. The Commission's reforms during the 1980s and early 1990s yielded many public interest benefits. For example, economists have estimated that above-cost access charges reduced U.S. economic welfare by an estimated \$10–17 billion annually during the late 1980s, but that the annual welfare loss declined substantially to between \$2.5 billion and \$7 billion following the Commission's access charge reforms in the 1980s and early 1990s.⁴¹⁷ Despite these reforms, however, per-minute access rates remained high.⁴¹⁸ These high switched access rates created an opportunity for competitive access providers (CAPs) to begin offering facilities-based competition. CAPs could offer carriers a competitive alternative to the BOCs, often with lower rates and higher quality.⁴¹⁹ The entry of CAPs and the potential entry of cable companies into local residential telephone markets created pressure toward opening the local telephone markets to competition, which ultimately resulted in the passage of the 1996 Act.

2. Intercarrier Compensation Regulation Since the 1996 Act

164. Recognizing these fundamental market changes, Congress's goals in passing the 1996 Act were to: (1) open local exchange and exchange access markets to competition; (2) promote increased competition in telecommunications markets that were already open to competition; and (3) reform the existing universal service system to be consistent with competitive markets.⁴²⁰ With respect to the last

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272(b)(1)'s "Operate Independently" Requirement for Section 272 Affiliates, WC Docket No. 03-228, CC Docket Nos. 96-149, 98-141, 96-149, 01-337, Report and Order, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 19 FCC Rcd 5102, 5115, para. 22 (2004); *Access Charge Reform; Price Cap Performance Review for LECs; Low-Volume Long Distance Users; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, 99-249, 96-45, Order on Remand, 18 FCC Rcd 14976, 14979, para. 4 (2003); *Cost Review Proceeding for Residential and Single-Line Business Subscriber Line Charge (SLC) Caps; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, Order, 17 FCC Rcd 10868, 10873, para. 9 (2002). See also *Windstream Petition for Conversion to Price Cap Regulation and for Limited Waiver Relief*, WC Docket No. 07-171, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 5294 (2008); *Petition of Puerto Rico Telephone Company, Inc., for Election of Price Cap Regulation and Limited Waiver of Pricing and Universal Service Rules; Consolidated Communications Petition for Conversion to Price Cap Regulation and for Limited Waiver Relief; Frontier Petition for Limited Waiver Relief upon Conversion of Global Valley Networks, Inc., to Price Cap Regulation*, WC Docket Nos. 07-291, 07-292, 08-18, Order, 23 FCC Rcd 7353 (2008).

⁴¹⁶ See generally 47 C.F.R. §§ 61.1–.193, 69.1–.701.

⁴¹⁷ See Letter from Jerry Ellig, Senior Research Fellow, Mercatus Center, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 08-183, 07-135, 05-337, 99-68 at 2 (filed Sept. 22, 2008) (Mercatus Center Sept. 22, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (citing ROBERT W. CRANDALL, *AFTER THE BREAKUP: U.S. TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN A MORE COMPETITIVE ERA* 141 (1991) and ROBERT W. CRANDALL & LEONARD WAVERMAN, *WHO PAYS FOR UNIVERSAL SERVICE?* 120 (2000)).

⁴¹⁸ Among the reasons that switched access rates remained high were that they were based on fully distributed costs and included a large allocation of common and overhead network costs. See *supra* note 414.

⁴¹⁹ See, e.g., *Expanded Interconnection with Local Telephone Company Facilities*, CC Docket No. 91-141, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 5154, 5158, para. 8 (1994) (recognizing that local competition should lead to more efficient operations, the deployment of "new technologies facilitating innovative service offerings, increase the choices available to access customers, and reduce the prices of services subject to competition").

⁴²⁰ See *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and Interconnection between Local Exchange Carriers and Commercial Mobile Radio Service Providers*, CC Docket

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goal, Congress recognized that implicit subsidies, which were implemented when the industry was considered a natural monopoly, were neither consistent with, nor sustainable in, a competitive market, and that they should be replaced with explicit support where necessary.⁴²¹ It also recognized, however, that conversion of the existing web of implicit subsidies to a system of explicit support would be a difficult task that could not be accomplished immediately.⁴²² Accordingly, when Congress established the statutory scheme to open local markets to competition,⁴²³ it included a transitional mechanism in section 251(g) providing for the continued enforcement of certain pre-Act obligations.⁴²⁴ Notably, section 251(g) provides for the continued enforcement of exchange access and interconnection obligations only “until such restrictions and obligations are explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission after the date of such enactment,” suggesting that such obligations would be re-evaluated based on the requirements imposed by the 1996 Act.⁴²⁵

165. Congress also recognized the need to impose new obligations on carriers to open local telephone markets to competition, and directed the Commission to adopt implementing rules. Specifically, section 251(b) imposed certain obligations on all LECs, while section 251(c) imposed additional obligations on incumbent LECs, including the obligation to provide access to network elements on an unbundled basis.⁴²⁶ Of relevance here, section 251(b)(5) of the 1996 Act imposed on all LECs a “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications.”⁴²⁷

166. In requiring LECs to enter into reciprocal compensation agreements with requesting carriers, Congress introduced another mechanism through which carriers compensate each other for the exchange of traffic besides the access charge regime preserved under section 251(g). Although Congress expressed a preference for negotiated interconnection agreements to implement the requirements of section 251, section 252 provided procedures for the resolution of interconnection disputes involving incumbent LECs, including standards governing arbitration of such disputes by state regulatory commissions.⁴²⁸ For such state arbitrations, section 252(d) also established general pricing guidelines for

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Nos. 96-98, 95-185, First Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 15499, 15505, para. 3 (1996) (subsequent history omitted) (*Local Competition First Report and Order*).

⁴²¹ Specifically, Congress directed that universal service support “should be explicit and sufficient to achieve the purposes” of section 254. 47 U.S.C. § 254(e); *see also* S. REP. NO. 104-230, at 131 (1996) (Conf. Rep) (stating that, “[t]o the extent possible, . . . any support mechanisms continued or created under new section 254 should be explicit, rather than implicit as many support mechanisms are today”).

⁴²² *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9.

⁴²³ *See* 47 U.S.C. §§ 251–52; *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15505, para. 3.

⁴²⁴ *See* 47 U.S.C. § 251(g); *WorldCom, Inc. v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429, 432 (D.C. Cir. 2002) (*WorldCom*) (subsequent history omitted) (holding that section 251(g) appears to provide for the continued enforcement “of certain pre-Act regulatory ‘interconnection restrictions and obligations’”); *see also Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 117 F.3d 1068, 1072 (8th Cir. 1997) (finding that section 251(g) preserves certain rate regimes already in place and “leaves the door open for the promulgation of new rates at some future date”).

⁴²⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

⁴²⁶ *See* 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(b)–(c). Certain rural carriers were exempt from section 251(c) until such time as a requesting carrier met the statutory test for removing the so-called “rural exemption.” *See* 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(1).

⁴²⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

⁴²⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 252.

incumbent LECs, including guidelines for setting the price of unbundled network elements (UNEs)⁴²⁹ and reciprocal compensation rates.⁴³⁰

167. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission adopted pricing rules for states to use in setting the price of interconnection and UNEs when arbitrating interconnection disputes.⁴³¹ In particular, the Commission directed the states to employ a forward-looking, long-run average incremental cost methodology, which it called “Total Element Long-Run Incremental Cost” or “TELRIC.”⁴³² The Commission found that TELRIC prices should include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs, including overheads.⁴³³ Although the Commission recognized that peak-load pricing was the most efficient way to recover the cost of traffic-sensitive facilities, it did not require states to adopt peak-load pricing because of the administrative difficulties associated with such an approach.⁴³⁴ In interpreting the statutory pricing rules for reciprocal compensation contained in section 252(d)(2)(A) of the 1996 Act,⁴³⁵ the Commission found that costs for transport and termination should

⁴²⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(1).

⁴³⁰ See 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2).

⁴³¹ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15812–929, paras. 618–862 (implementing the pricing principles contained in sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(3) and section 252(d)(1) of the 1996 Act); see also 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(c)(2)–(3), 252(d)(1). Among other things, the 1996 Act required incumbent LECs to make portions of their networks (the physical facilities and features, functions, and capabilities associated with those facilities) available to requesting competitive carriers on an unbundled basis. See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15624, 15631, paras. 241, 258.

⁴³² See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15844–56, paras. 672–703.

⁴³³ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15851–54, paras. 694–98; 47 C.F.R. §§ 51.503, 51.505. The term “common costs” refers to “costs that are incurred in connection with the production of multiple products or services, and remains unchanged as the relative proportion of those products or services varies.” *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15845, para. 676. In its rules, the Commission defines forward-looking common costs as “economic costs efficiently incurred in providing a group of elements or services . . . that cannot be attributed directly to individual elements or services.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.505(c)(1). The term “overhead costs” refers to common costs incurred by the firm’s operations as a whole, such as the salaries of executives. *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15851, para. 694.

⁴³⁴ The Commission recognized that, “[b]ecause the cost of capacity is determined by the volume of traffic that the facilities are able to handle during peak load periods, we believe, as a matter of economic theory, that if usage-sensitive rates are used, then somewhat higher rates should apply to peak period traffic, with lower rates for non-peak usage.” *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15878, para. 755. The Commission recognized that higher costs are incurred to carry additional traffic at peak volumes, because additional capacity is required to carry that traffic. *Id.* at 15878, para. 755. In contrast, “off-peak traffic imposes relatively little additional cost because it does not require any incremental capacity to be added to base plant.” *Id.* at 15878, para. 755. The Commission found that there would be administrative difficulties with establishing peak-load prices, however, and did not require or forbid states from adopting that approach. *Id.* at 15878–79, paras. 756–57.

⁴³⁵ See generally *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16008–58, paras. 1027–118 (implementing the reciprocal compensation obligations contained in section 251(b)(5) of the 1996 Act). The reciprocal compensation rules currently require the calling party’s LEC to compensate the called party’s LEC for the additional costs associated with transporting a call subject to section 251(b)(5) from the carriers’ interconnection point to the called party’s end office, and for the additional costs of terminating the call to the called party. Section 51.701(c) of the Commission’s rules defines transport as “the transmission and any necessary tandem switching of telecommunications traffic subject to section 251(b)(5) of the Act from the interconnection point between the two carriers to the terminating carrier’s end office switch that directly serves the called party, or equivalent facility provided by a carrier other than an incumbent LEC.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(c). Section 51.701(d) of the

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“be recovered in a cost-causative manner and that usage based charges should be limited to situations where costs are usage sensitive.”⁴³⁶ In particular, the Commission found that the “additional costs” to the LEC of terminating a call that originates on another carrier’s network “primarily consists of the traffic-sensitive component of local switching” and that non traffic-sensitive costs, such as the costs of local loops and line ports, should not be considered “additional costs.”⁴³⁷ The Commission further found that the “additional costs” standard of section 252(d)(2) permits the use of the same TELRIC standard that it established for interconnection and unbundled elements.⁴³⁸ The pricing rules governing reciprocal compensation that the Commission adopted in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* remain in effect today.⁴³⁹

168. Following passage of the 1996 Act, the Commission also began reforming both interstate access charges and federal universal service support mechanisms by moving the implicit subsidies contained in interstate access charges into explicit universal service support, consistent with the 1996 Act’s directives. In particular, in the 1997 *Access Charge Reform Order*, the Commission modified the price cap rules for larger incumbent LECs by aligning the price cap LECs’ rate structure more closely with the manner in which costs are incurred.⁴⁴⁰ Recognizing Congress’s direction that universal service (continued from previous page) _____

Commission’s rules defines termination as “the switching of telecommunications traffic at the terminating carrier’s end office switch, or equivalent facility, and delivery of such traffic to the called party’s premises.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(d). In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission also concluded that “the new transport and termination rules should be applied to LECs and CMRS providers.” 11 FCC Rcd at 16016–17, para. 1043.

⁴³⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16028, para. 1063. This determination led to per-minute pricing for transport and termination, except in the case of dedicated facilities, which may be flat-rated. *Id.* at 16028, para. 1063. Specifically, the Commission required that all interconnecting parties be offered the option of purchasing dedicated facilities on a flat-rated basis. *Id.* at 16028, para. 1063.

⁴³⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16024–25, para. 1057. Although the Commission concluded that “non-traffic sensitive costs should not be considered ‘additional costs,’” the only non-traffic sensitive costs specifically identified and required to be removed were the costs of local loops and line ports. *Id.* at 16025, para. 1057.

⁴³⁸ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16023–25, paras. 1054–58. As with its pricing rules for UNEs, the Commission determined that termination rates established pursuant to the TELRIC methodology should include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs. *Id.* at 16025, para. 1058. Similarly, the Commission again noted that the costs of transporting and terminating traffic during peak and off-peak hours may not be the same. *Id.* at 16028–29, para. 1064. In light of administrability concerns, the Commission once again neither required nor forbid states from adopting rates that reflected peak and off-peak costs, but expressed hope that some states or negotiating parties would consider peak-load pricing. *Id.* at 16028–29, para. 1064.

⁴³⁹ A number of parties appealed the Commission’s *Local Competition First Report and Order*, including the rules it adopted governing the setting of rates for unbundled network elements and reciprocal compensation. In *AT&T v. Iowa Utilities Board*, the Supreme Court upheld the Commission’s jurisdiction to “design a pricing methodology” to govern state rate setting under section 252 of the Act. *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. 366, 397 (1999) (*AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*). Subsequently, in *Verizon Commc’ns, Inc. v. FCC*, the Supreme Court affirmed the Commission’s choice of TELRIC as a permissible methodology for states to use in ratemaking proceedings. *Verizon Commc’ns, Inc. v. FCC*, 535 U.S. 467, 497–529 (2002) (*Verizon v. FCC*). The court held that the Commission’s decision to adopt a forward-looking cost methodology was a reasonable interpretation of the statute and that the Commission did not err in rejecting alternative methodologies advocated by the incumbent LECs. *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 507–08. The Court also rejected arguments that various aspects of the TELRIC methodology were unlawful. *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 523.

⁴⁴⁰ See *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16004–07, paras. 54–66 (summarizing the rate structure changes).

support should be “explicit,” the Commission adopted rules to “reduce usage-sensitive interstate access charges by phasing out local loop and other non-traffic sensitive costs from those charges and directing incumbent LECs to recover those NTS [non-traffic sensitive] costs through more economically efficient, flat-rated charges.”⁴⁴¹

169. The Commission acknowledged, however, that the measures it adopted in the *Access Charge Reform Order* would not “remove all implicit support from all access charges immediately.”⁴⁴² Rejecting suggestions that all implicit subsidies be eliminated from access charges immediately, the Commission noted that it did not have the tools to identify the existing subsidies precisely, and it expressed concern that eliminating all implicit subsidies at once might have an “inequitable impact on the incumbent LECs.”⁴⁴³ Moreover, while stating its desire to rely on competition to drive access charges toward cost,⁴⁴⁴ the Commission recognized that “some services may prove resistant to competition,” and it reserved the right to “adjust rates in the future to bring them into line with forward-looking costs.”⁴⁴⁵

170. To limit possible rate shock to retail customers, the Commission also limited the amount of allocated interstate cost of a local loop that could be assessed directly on residential and business customers as a flat-rated monthly charge.⁴⁴⁶ Although the *Access Charge Reform Order* started the process toward establishing explicit subsidies, the Commission concluded that “a process that eliminates implicit subsidies from access charges over time [was] warranted.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴¹ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15986, para. 6.

⁴⁴² *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9.

⁴⁴³ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9; *see also id.* at 16002–03, paras. 45–47.

⁴⁴⁴ Explaining its reliance on a “market-based” approach to access reform, it stated its belief that emerging competition in the local exchange markets would provide a more accurate means of identifying implicit subsidies and moving access rates to economically sustainable levels. *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16001–02, para. 44.

⁴⁴⁵ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16003, para. 48. The Commission also applied its market-based approach to the terminating access rates charged by competitive LECs and declined to adopt any regulations governing competitive LEC access charges. *Id.* at 16141, para. 363. It reasoned that “the possibility of competitive responses by IXCs will have a constraining effect on non-incumbent LEC pricing.” *Id.* at 16141, para. 362. This reliance on a market-based approach proved misplaced. In subsequent years, competitive LECs, instead of reducing access charges, frequently raised them above the regulated rates of incumbent LECs. As a result, the Commission was forced to regulate competitive LEC access charges. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 61.26; *Access Charge Reform, Reform of Access Charges Imposed by Competitive Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 96-262, Seventh Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 9923, 9924, paras. 1–3 (2001) (*CLEC Access Charge Order*) (establishing benchmark rates for competitive LEC access charges), *recon.*, *Access Charge Reform, Reform of Access Charges Imposed by Competitive Local Exchange Carriers, Petition of Z-Tel Commc’ns Inc. For Temporary Waiver of Commission Rule 61.26(d) to Facilitate Deployment of Competitive Service in Certain Metropolitan Statistical Areas*, CC Docket No. 96-262, CCB/CPD File No. 01-19, Eighth Report and Order and Fifth Order on Reconsideration, 19 FCC Rcd 9108 (2004) (*CLEC Access Charge Recon. Order*).

⁴⁴⁶ *See, e.g., Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16010–11, para. 73. To reduce per-minute carrier common line (CCL) charges, the Commission created the presubscribed interexchange carrier charge (PICC), a flat-rated, monthly charge imposed on IXCs on a per-line basis. *Id.* at 15998–16000, paras. 37–40. The Commission also shifted the cost of line ports from per-minute local switching charges to the common line category and established a mechanism to phase out the per-minute Transport Interconnection Charge (TIC). *Id.* at 16035–40, 16073–86, paras. 125–34, 210–43.

⁴⁴⁷ *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 15987, para. 9.

171. In the 2000 *CALLS Order*,⁴⁴⁸ the Commission continued its effort to remove implicit subsidies and replace them with explicit universal service support for price cap LECs by, among other things, reducing per-minute intercarrier charges, raising the SLC cap, phasing out the Presubscribed Interexchange Carrier Charge (PICC),⁴⁴⁹ and permitting price-cap LECs to deaverage the SLC once the affected carrier charges were eliminated.⁴⁵⁰ The Commission also created a new universal service fund to compensate price-cap incumbent LECs, in part, for lost interstate access revenues.⁴⁵¹

172. In the *MAG Order*, the Commission extended similar reforms to incumbent LECs subject to rate-of-return regulation.⁴⁵² As with the *CALLS Order*, these reforms were designed to rationalize the interstate access rate structure by aligning it more closely with the manner in which costs are incurred.⁴⁵³ Among other things, the *MAG Order* increased the SLC caps for rate-of-return carriers and phased out the per-minute CCL charge from the common line rate structure.⁴⁵⁴ The Commission also created a universal service support mechanism to replace implicit support with explicit support, in order to foster competition and more efficient pricing.⁴⁵⁵ Many, but not all, states have also addressed intercarrier compensation

⁴⁴⁸ See *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962.

⁴⁴⁹ See *supra* note 455 (discussing the PICC).

⁴⁵⁰ See generally *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 13025–28, paras. 151–59 (reducing interstate switched access rates); *id.* at 12991–13007, paras. 76–112 (raising SLC caps and eliminating PICCs); *id.* at 13007–14, paras. 113–28 (deaveraging SLCs).

⁴⁵¹ See *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 13046–49, paras. 201–05 (establishing a “\$650 million interstate access universal service support mechanism”).

⁴⁵² *Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Interstate Services of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 00-256, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Fifteenth Report and Order, *Access Charge Reform for Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers Subject to Rate-of-Return Regulation*, CC Docket No. 98-77, Report and Order, *Prescribing the Authorized Rate of Return From Interstate Services of Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 98-166, Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 19613 (2001) (*MAG Order*), *recon. in part, Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 00-256, First Order on Reconsideration, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket 96-45, Twenty-Fourth Order on Reconsideration, 17 FCC Rcd 5635 (2002), *amended on recon., Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers*, CC Docket No. 00-256, *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket 96-45, Third Order on Reconsideration, 18 FCC Rcd 10284 (2003); see also *Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket Nos. 00-256, 96-45, Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 19 FCC Rcd 4122 (2004).

⁴⁵³ *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19617, para. 3.

⁴⁵⁴ *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19621, para. 15.

⁴⁵⁵ *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19617, para. 3. A new universal service support mechanism, Interstate Common Line Support (ICLS), was implemented to replace the CCL charge beginning July 1, 2002. *Id.* at 19621, para. 15. This mechanism recovers any shortfall between the allowed common line revenue requirement of rate-of-return carriers and their SLC and other end-user revenues, thereby ensuring that changes in the rate structure did not affect the overall recovery of interstate access costs by rate-of-return carriers serving high-cost areas. *Id.* at 19642, 19667–73, paras. 61, 128–41. To reform the local switching and transport rate structure of rate-of-return carriers, the Commission shifted the non-traffic sensitive costs of local switch line ports to the common line category, and reallocated the remaining costs contained in the TIC to other access rate elements, thus reducing per-minute switched access charges. *Id.* at 19649–61, paras. 76–111.

regulation. In addition to setting rates for reciprocal compensation, many states have revised their rules governing intrastate access charges. Although some states have chosen to mirror interstate access charges,⁴⁵⁶ others continue to maintain intrastate access charges that far exceed interstate charges.⁴⁵⁷

3. Problems Associated With the Existing Intercarrier Compensation Regimes

173. The introduction of competition into local telephone markets revealed weaknesses in the existing intercarrier compensation regimes that remained notwithstanding the efforts of the Commission and certain states to reform interstate and intrastate access charges. As the Commission observed in 2001, “[i]nterconnection arrangements between carriers are currently governed by a complex system of intercarrier compensation regulations . . . [that] treat different types of carriers and different types of services disparately, even though there may be no significant differences in the costs among carriers or services.”⁴⁵⁸ We have seen numerous examples of regulatory arbitrage in the marketplace both because of the different rates for similar functions under different intercarrier compensation regimes and because none of these regimes currently set rate levels in an economically efficient manner.⁴⁵⁹

174. One example of regulatory arbitrage involves traffic to dial-up ISPs. Following adoption of the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, state commissions set reciprocal compensation rates for the exchange of local traffic. These reciprocal compensation rates were sufficiently high that many competitive LECs found it profitable to target and serve ISP customers who were large recipients of local traffic, since dial-up Internet customers would call their ISP and then stay on the line for hours. This practice led to significant traffic imbalances, with competitive LECs seeking billions of dollars in reciprocal compensation payments from other LECs.⁴⁶⁰ The Commission responded by adopting a separate interim intercarrier compensation regime for this traffic.

175. On February 26, 1999, the Commission issued a Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in which it held that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate because end users access websites across state lines. Because the *Local Competition First Report and Order* concluded that the reciprocal compensation obligation in section 251(b)(5) applied to only local traffic,

⁴⁵⁶ See, e.g., *BA-WV's Intrastate Access Charges*, Case No. 00-0318-T-GI, Commission Order, 2001 WL 935643 (West Virginia PSC June 1, 2001) (ordering that “the traffic-sensitive intrastate access charges of Verizon-WV shall be modified to mirror the interstate rate structure and rate elements”); *Tariff Filing of BellSouth Telecommunications, Inc to Mirror Interstate Rates*, Case No. 98-065, Order (Kentucky PSC Mar. 31, 1999) (requiring BellSouth “to eliminate the state-specific Non-Traffic Sensitive Revenue Requirement . . . , thus moving its aggregate intrastate switched access rate to the FCC’s ‘CALLS’ interstate rate”); *Establishment of Carrier-to-Carrier Rules*, Case No. 06-1344-TP-ORD, Order, 2007 WL 3023991 (Ohio PUC Oct. 17, 2007) (“[T]his Commission requires ILECs to mirror their interstate switched access rate on the intrastate side . . .”).

⁴⁵⁷ See, e.g., Letter from David C. Bartlett, Vice President of Federal Government Affairs, Embarq, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Exh. C (filed Aug. 1, 2008) (noting intrastate terminating switched access rates five to ten times higher than interstate rates in Missouri, Washington, Virginia, and several other States).

⁴⁵⁸ *Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 16 FCC Rcd 9610 (2001) (*Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*).

⁴⁵⁹ The phrase “regulatory arbitrage” refers to profit-seeking behavior that can arise when a regulated firm is required to set difference prices for products or services with a similar cost structure. See, e.g., PATRICK DEGRABA, BILL AND KEEP AT THE CENTRAL OFFICE AS THE EFFICIENT INTERCONNECTION REGIME 1, para. 2 n.3 (Federal Communications Commission, OPP Working Paper No. 33, 2000), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OPP/working_papers/oppwp33.pdf.

⁴⁶⁰ See *Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68, Order on Remand and Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 9151, 9183, para. 70 (2001) (subsequent history omitted) (*ISP Remand Order*).

the Commission found in the *Declaratory Ruling* that ISP-bound traffic is not subject to section 251(b)(5).⁴⁶¹ On March 24, 2000, in the *Bell Atlantic* decision, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit (D.C. Circuit) vacated certain provisions of the *Declaratory Ruling*.⁴⁶² The court did not question the Commission's finding that ISP-bound traffic is interstate. Rather, the court held that the Commission had not adequately explained how its end-to-end jurisdictional analysis was relevant to determining whether a call to an ISP is subject to reciprocal compensation under section 251(b)(5).⁴⁶³ In particular, the court noted that a LEC serving an ISP appears to perform the function of "termination" because the LEC delivers traffic from the calling party through its end office switch to the called party, the ISP.⁴⁶⁴

176. On April 27, 2001, the Commission released the *ISP Remand Order*, which concluded that section 251(g) excludes ISP-bound traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5).⁴⁶⁵ The Commission explained that section 251(g) maintains the pre-1996 Act compensation requirements for "exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access," thereby excluding such traffic from the reciprocal compensation requirements that the 1996 Act imposed. The Commission concluded that ISP-bound traffic is "information access" and, therefore, is subject instead to the Commission's section 201 jurisdiction over interstate communications.⁴⁶⁶ The Commission concluded that a bill-and-keep regime might eliminate incentives for arbitrage and force carriers to look to their own customers for cost recovery.⁴⁶⁷ To avoid a flash cut to bill-and-keep, however, the Commission adopted an interim compensation regime pending completion of the *Intercarrier Compensation* proceeding.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶¹ See *Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 14 FCC Rcd 3689, 3703-06, paras. 21-27 (1999) (*Declaratory Ruling*), vacated and remanded, *Bell Atlantic Tel. Cos. v. FCC*, 206 F.3d 1 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (*Bell Atlantic*).

⁴⁶² *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 1.

⁴⁶³ See *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 5.

⁴⁶⁴ *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 6.

⁴⁶⁵ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9171-72, para. 44.

⁴⁶⁶ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9175, para. 52. Thus, the Commission affirmed its prior finding in the *Declaratory Ruling* that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. See *id.*; see also *Declaratory Ruling*, 14 FCC Rcd at 3701-03, paras. 18-20.

⁴⁶⁷ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9184-85, paras. 74-75. The Commission discussed at length the market distortions and regulatory arbitrage opportunities created by the application of per-minute reciprocal compensation rates to ISP-bound traffic. In particular, the Commission found that requiring compensation for this type of traffic at existing reciprocal compensation rates undermined the operation of competitive markets because competitive LECs were able to recover a disproportionate share of their costs from other carriers, thereby distorting the price signals sent to their ISP customers. See *id.* at 9181-86, paras. 67-76.

⁴⁶⁸ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9155-57, paras. 7-8. The interim regime adopted by the Commission consisted of: (1) a gradually declining cap on intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic, beginning at \$.0015 per minute-of-use and declining to \$.0007 per minute-of-use; (2) a growth cap on total ISP-bound minutes for which a LEC may receive this compensation; (3) a "new markets rule" requiring bill-and-keep for the exchange of this traffic if two carriers were not exchanging traffic pursuant to an interconnection agreement prior to the adoption of the interim regime; and (4) a "mirroring rule" that gave incumbent LECs the benefit of the rate cap only if they offered to exchange all traffic subject to section 251(b)(5) at the same rates. *Id.* at 9187-89, 9193-94, paras. 78, 80, 89. In a subsequent order, the Commission granted forbearance to all telecommunications carriers with respect to the growth caps and the new markets rule. See *Petition of Core Commc'ns Inc. for Forbearance Under 47 U.S.C. § 160(c) from Application of the ISP Remand Order*, WC Docket No. 03-171, Order, 19 FCC Rcd 20179 (2004) (*Core Forbearance Order*). Thus, only the rate caps and mirroring rule remain in effect today.

177. On May 3, 2002, the D.C. Circuit found that the Commission had not provided an adequate legal basis for the rules it adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*.⁴⁶⁹ Once again, the court did not question the Commission's finding that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. Rather, the court held that section 251(g) of the Act did not provide a basis for the Commission's decision. The court held that section 251(g) is simply a transitional device that preserved obligations that predated the 1996 Act until the Commission adopts superseding rules, and there was no pre-1996 Act obligation with respect to intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic.⁴⁷⁰ Although the court rejected the legal rationale for the interim compensation rules, the court remanded, but did not vacate, the *ISP Remand Order* to the Commission, and it observed that "there is plainly a non-trivial likelihood that the Commission has authority" to adopt the rules.⁴⁷¹ Accordingly, the interim rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* have remained in effect.

178. On November 5, 2007, Core filed a petition for writ of mandamus with the D.C. Circuit seeking to compel the Commission to enter an order resolving the court's remand in the *WorldCom* decision.⁴⁷² On July 8, 2008, the court granted a writ of mandamus and directed the Commission to respond to the *WorldCom* remand in the form of a final, appealable order that "explains the legal authority for the Commission's interim intercarrier compensation rules that exclude ISP-bound traffic from the reciprocal compensation requirement"⁴⁷³ The court directed the Commission to respond to the writ of mandamus by November 5, 2008.⁴⁷⁴

179. Another regulatory arbitrage opportunity arose as a result of the Commission's 1997 decision not to regulate the interstate access charges of competitive LECs. As a result, many competitive LECs filed tariffs with access charges that were well above the rates charged by incumbent LECs for similar services.⁴⁷⁵ In response, the Commission adopted new rules that effectively capped the interstate access charges that competitive LECs could tariff.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁶⁹ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 429.

⁴⁷⁰ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433.

⁴⁷¹ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434.

⁴⁷² Pet. for Writ of Mandamus, In re Core Communications Inc., No. 07-1446 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 5, 2007).

⁴⁷³ *In re Core Commc'ns Inc.*, 531 F.3d 849, at 861-62 (D.C. Cir. 2008) (*Core Decision*).

⁴⁷⁴ See *Core Decision*, 531 F.3d at 861-62. If the Commission fails to comply with the writ by the November 5th deadline, the interim rules will be vacated on November 6, 2008. See *id.* at 862.

⁴⁷⁵ See *CLEC Access Charge Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9931, para. 22. For instance, the Commission found that certain competitive LECs charged \$0.09 per minute and that the weighted average of competitive LEC access rates was above \$0.04 per minute. *Id.* In contrast, the same underlying data showed a composite incumbent LEC rate of \$0.0056 for that same traffic. See AT&T Additional Comments, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 97-146, CCB/CPD File No. 98-63, App. A. (Jan. 11, 2001). The Commission found that competitive LECs could impose excessive charges due to two factors. First, the Commission observed that access charges are paid by the IXC rather than the end-user customer. Because the IXC has no ability to affect the calling or called party's choice of service providers, it cannot avoid carriers with high access charges. *CLEC Access Charge Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9935, para. 31. Second, the Commission found that the rate averaging requirements in section 254(g) of the Act precluded IXCs from passing through particular competitive LECs' excessive access charges to the end user customers of those competitive LECs. *Id.* As a result, the Commission found the existing regulatory regime did not effectively create the incentives for the end users to select a lower-priced access provider. *Id.*

⁴⁷⁶ See 47 C.F.R. § 61.26 (containing rules governing the tariffing of competitive LEC interstate switched exchange access services). As a general matter, the Commission's rules governing competitive LEC access charges limit these rates to those charged by the competing incumbent LEC. *Id.*

180. Two more recent examples of regulatory arbitrage involve billing problems and the “Access Stimulation” problem. Commenters describe problems billing for traffic when it arrives for termination with insufficient identifying information.⁴⁷⁷ Because the existing intercarrier compensation mechanisms have vastly disparate rates that apply to different types of traffic, carriers have both the opportunity and incentive to disguise the nature, or conceal the source, of the traffic being sent in order to avoid or reduce payments to other carriers.⁴⁷⁸ “Access Stimulation” refers to allegations that certain LECs may have entered into agreements with providers of services that generate large volumes of incoming calls to substantially increase the number of calls sent to the LEC.⁴⁷⁹ It has been alleged that this significantly increased “growth in terminating access traffic may be causing carriers’ rates to become unjust or unreasonable” in violation of section 201 of the Act.⁴⁸⁰ In the *Access Stimulation NPRM*, the Commission has sought information about the extent of this practice, its potential impact on the rates of price cap, rate-of-return, and competitive LECs, and how this practice should be addressed.⁴⁸¹

B. Comprehensive Reform

1. Introduction

181. Evidence of increasing regulatory arbitrage, as well as increased competition and changes in technology, has led the Commission to consider comprehensive reform of intercarrier compensation. In 2001, the Commission adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to examine possible alternatives to existing intercarrier regimes with the intent of moving toward a more unified system.⁴⁸² The notice generated extensive comments that generally confirmed the need for comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform, including a number of competing proposals.⁴⁸³ In 2005, the Commission adopted a

⁴⁷⁷ See *infra* Part V.D.

⁴⁷⁸ See *infra* para. 326.

⁴⁷⁹ See, e.g., *Qwest Commc’ns Corp. v. Farmers and Merchs. Mut. Tel. Co.*, File No. EB-07-MD-001, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 17973, para. 1 (2007) (addressing Qwest’s allegations that Farmers deliberately planned to “increase dramatically the amount of terminating access traffic delivered to its exchange, via agreements with conference calling companies”).

⁴⁸⁰ See *Establishing Just and Reasonable Rates for Local Exchange Carriers*, WC Docket No. 07-135, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 17989, para. 1 (2007) (*Access Stimulation NPRM*).

⁴⁸¹ *Access Stimulation NPRM*, 22 FCC Rcd 17989.

⁴⁸² See *Inter-carrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd 9610. The Commission acknowledged a number of problems with the existing regimes, including inefficient rates and different rates for the same types of calls. *Id.* at 9616–18, paras. 11–18. The Commission thus sought comment on alternative approaches to reforming intercarrier compensation, including moving to a bill-and-keep approach to intercarrier compensation. *Id.* at 9611–13, paras. 2–4.

⁴⁸³ See, e.g., Regulatory Reform Proposal of the Intercarrier Compensation Forum (ICF Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Gary M. Epstein and Richard R. Cameron, Counsel for the Intercarrier Compensation Forum, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, App. A (filed Oct. 5, 2004) (ICF Oct. 5, 2004 *Ex Parte* Letter); Comprehensive Plan For Intercarrier Compensation Reform of Expanded Portland Group (EPG Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Glenn H. Brown, EPG Facilitator, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Nov. 2, 2004); Intercarrier Compensation Reform Plan of Alliance for Rational Intercarrier Compensation (ARIC Plan), *attached to* Letter from Wendy Thompson Fast, President, Consolidated Companies, and Ken Pfister, Vice President—Strategic Policy, Great Plains Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, 96-98, WC Docket No. 04-36 (filed Oct. 25, 2004); Cost-Based Intercarrier Compensation Coalition (CBICC Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Richard M. Rindler, Counsel for the Cost-Based Intercarrier Compensation Coalition, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Sept. 2, 2004); Updated Ex Parte of Home Telephone Company, Inc. and PBT Telecom (Home/PBT Proposal), *attached to* Letter from

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Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comment on the various industry proposals.⁴⁸⁴ In 2006, another industry coalition submitted an alternative comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform proposal, known as the Missoula Plan.⁴⁸⁵ The Commission separately requested and received comments on the Missoula Plan proposal.⁴⁸⁶ Finally, in 2008, the Commission stabilized the universal service fund by adopting an interim cap on payments to competitive ETCs, helping pave the way for comprehensive intercarrier compensation and universal service reform, and leading to a number of new reform proposals.⁴⁸⁷

182. As a result of the *Inter-carrier Compensation NPRM*, the *Inter-carrier Compensation FNPRM*, the filing of the Missoula Plan, and the more recent proposals that have been filed, the Commission has compiled an extensive record over the past seven years. The Commission has received comments or proposals from a wide variety of interested parties, including, states, incumbent LECs, competitive LECs, rural companies, IXCs, new technology companies, consumer advocates, business customers, and industry associations. As demonstrated throughout this order, the Commission has thoroughly reviewed and analyzed the voluminous record, has considered the evidence submitted by the parties supporting the alternatives, and has carefully evaluated each of the proposals that have been presented. Based on this examination of the options, we find that the approach we describe below and adopt in this order best achieves the goals of promoting universal service, encouraging the efficient use of, and investment in, broadband technologies, spurring competition, and ultimately, further reducing the need for regulation.

2. A New Approach to Intercarrier Compensation

183. Since the introduction of competition into long-distance telephone service, the Commission has moved toward eliminating implicit subsidies from intercarrier charges. At every stage, however, the Commission has had to balance the desire to establish more efficient intercarrier charges

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Keith Oliver, Vice President, Finance, Home Telephone Company, and Ben Spearman, Vice President, Chief Regulatory Officer, PBT Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Nov. 2, 2004); NASUCA Intercarrier Compensation Proposal at 1 (NASUCA Proposal), *attached to* Letter from Philip F. McClelland, Senior Assistant Consumer Advocate, NASUCA, to Marlene Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Dec. 14, 2004); Western Wireless Intercarrier Compensation Reform Plan at 9 (Western Wireless Proposal), *attached to* Letter from David L. Sieradzki, Counsel for Western Wireless Corp., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Dec. 1, 2004).

⁴⁸⁴ See *Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 4685, 4687, para. 4 (2005) (*Inter-carrier Compensation FNPRM*).

⁴⁸⁵ See Missoula Plan for Intercarrier Compensation Reform (Missoula Plan), *attached to* Letter from Tony Clark, Commissioner and Chair, NARUC Committee on Telecommunications, Ray Baum, Commissioner and Chair, NARUC Task Force, and Larry Landis, Commissioner and Vice-Chair, NARUC Task Force, to Hon. Kevin Martin, Chmn., FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed July 24, 2006) (NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁴⁸⁶ *Comment Sought on Missoula Intercarrier Compensation Reform Plan*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, 21 FCC Rcd 8524 (2006). Subsequently, the Missoula Plan supporters filed additional details concerning specific aspects of the plan, on which the Commission continued to seek comment. See *Comment Sought on Missoula Plan Phantom Traffic Interim Process and Call Detail Records Proposal*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, 21 FCC Rcd 13179 (2006); *Comment Sought on Amendments to the Missoula Plan Intercarrier Compensation Proposal to Incorporate a Federal Benchmark Mechanism*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 3362 (2007).

⁴⁸⁷ The Commission invited parties to refresh the record in these and other relevant dockets. *Interim Cap Clears Path for Comprehensive Reform: Commission Poised to Move Forward on Difficult Decisions Necessary to Promote and Advance Affordable Telecommunications for All Americans*, News Release (May 2, 2008), available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-281939A1.pdf.

against the potential adverse effects on consumers (in the form of higher flat-rated charges) and carriers (in the form of reduced intercarrier revenues). The introduction of competition into local telephone markets accelerated the need for reform. As discussed above, since the implementation of the 1996 Act, not only has local competition increased, but so has the incidence and severity of regulatory arbitrage.

184. We conclude today that, with the universal service fund now stabilized, we can wait no longer to begin the process of comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform. The differences in existing intercarrier compensation regimes impose significant inefficiencies on users and distort carriers' investment incentives, which can result in losses of billions of dollars in consumers and producers surplus. Possibly more important, these legacy regulatory regimes pose an obstacle to the transition to an all-IP broadband world. Because carriers currently can receive significant revenues from charging above-cost rates to terminate telecommunications traffic, they have a reduced incentive to upgrade their networks to the most efficient technology or to negotiate interconnection agreements that are designed to accommodate the efficient exchange of IP traffic, as both actions would likely lead to reduced intercarrier payments.⁴⁸⁸

185. In this order, we therefore adopt a new approach to intercarrier compensation and establish the blueprint for moving to new uniform termination rates that are economically efficient and sustainable in our increasingly competitive telecommunications markets. At the same time, we recognize, as the Commission has in the past, the need to be cognizant of market disruptions and potential adverse effects on consumers and carriers of moving too quickly from the existing intercarrier compensation regimes to our new uniform approach to intercarrier compensation. Accordingly, we adopt here a gradual ten-year transition plan with separate stages, designed to reduce rates over a sufficient period to minimize market disruptions and to cushion the impact of our reform on both customers and carriers. At the end of the transition period, all telecommunications traffic will be treated as falling within the reciprocal compensation provisions of section 251(b)(5), and states will set default reciprocal compensation rates pursuant to the new methodology we adopt herein.

186. The requirements that we adopt for intercarrier compensation do not apply to providers operating in Alaska, Hawaii, or any U.S. Territories and possessions. We find that these areas have very different attributes and related cost issues than the continental states.⁴⁸⁹ For this reason, we are exempting providers in Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. Territories and possessions from the requirements and rules adopted herein, and we will address them in a subsequent proceeding.⁴⁹⁰

187. *Transition Plan.* As described below, we adopt a ten-year transition plan.⁴⁹¹ In the first

⁴⁸⁸ See, e.g., T. RANDOLPH BEARD & GEORGE S. FORD, DO HIGH CALL TERMINATION RATES DETER BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT? (Phoenix Center Policy Bulletin No. 22, Oct. 2008), available at <http://www.phoenix-center.org/PolicyBulletin/PCPB22Final.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁹ See, e.g., *Verizon/América Móvil Transfer Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 6211, para. 36 (describing “difficult to serve terrain and dramatic urban/rural differences” in Puerto Rico); *Rates and Services Integration Order*, 4 FCC Rcd at 396, paras. 7–8 (describing the unique market conditions and structure in Alaska); GCI Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (citing cost distinctions between Alaska and the continental United States).

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. *Policies and Service Rules for the Broadcasting-Satellite Service Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 8860, para. 47 (“The Commission is committed to establishing policies and rules that will promote service to all regions in the United States, particularly to traditionally underserved areas, such as Alaska and Hawaii, and other remote areas.”).

⁴⁹¹ A number of parties argue for a shorter transition period than that provided here. See, e.g., Letter from Robert W. Quinn, Senior Vice President, Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 23, 2008) (AT&T Oct. 23, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Kyle McSlarrow, President and CEO, NCTA, to Kevin J. Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (NCTA Oct. 28, 2008

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stage, intrastate access rates are reduced to the levels of interstate rates. During stage two, carriers will reduce their rates to an interim uniform termination rate, set by the state. Carriers whose current rates are below the interim uniform rate set by the state, however, may not increase their rates. During stage three, the rates carriers charge at the end of stage two (either the interim uniform rates or their prior rates, whichever are lower) will be gradually reduced to the rates that will apply at the end of the transition. This transition will be designed by the state so as to minimize market disruptions and adverse economic effects. This transition is described in more detail below.

188. *Intrastate Rate Reductions.* One year from the effective date of this order, we require that all LECs reduce their terminating *intrastate* switched access rates by 50 percent of the difference between their intrastate switched access rates and their *interstate* switched access rates.⁴⁹² Two years from the effective date of this order, we require that all LECs reduce their terminating intrastate switched access rates by the remaining 50 percent of the difference between their intrastate switched access rates and their interstate switched access rates so that their intrastate rates equal their interstate rates. Carriers will comply with state tariffing requirements or other applicable state law in effectuating those changes in intrastate terminating access rates.

189. *State Establishment of Interim, Uniform Reciprocal Compensation Rates.* Within two years from the effective date of this order, states must adopt a state-wide interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate applicable to all carriers (except carriers whose rates are below the interim, uniform rate, in which case, those carriers' rates shall be capped at those lower, existing rates). Three years from the effective date of this order, we require that all LECs reduce their terminating rates by 50 percent of the difference between their current terminating rate and the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate established by the state. Four years from the effective date of this order we require that all LECs reduce their terminating rates by the remaining 50 percent of the difference between their current terminating rate and the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate established by the state so that their terminating rates equal the state-set interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate. This rate will become the starting point for stage three—a six-year gradual downward transition to the final uniform reciprocal compensation rate, which the states will also set, consistent with the methodology we adopt in this order. The states will have discretion to determine the glide path, which begins four years from the effective date of this order and ends ten years from the effective date of this order. This glide path will determine the trajectory of the interim reciprocal compensation rate as it trends down to the final reciprocal compensation rate. All carriers are subject to this glide path. However, if a carrier's rate is below the rate specified in the glide path, such carrier cannot raise its rates, but is subject to the trajectory when the interim rate equals that carrier's rate. At the end of ten years (i.e., at the end of stage two), all the terminating rates of all carriers in each state will be reduced to the new final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate established by each state. We believe that, by establishing this ten-year, multiple-stage transition to a state-set final uniform reciprocal compensation rate, we will provide a sufficiently smooth and gradual glide path so that carriers will be able to adjust their other rates and revenues in a measured way over time, as allowed by the reforms adopted in this order, without creating unacceptable rate or

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Ex Parte Letter); Letter from Paul W. Garnett, Assistant Vice-President, CTIA—The Wireless Association, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed October 27, 2008) (CTIA October 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy (SBA) *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 5–7. We note that the reforms adopted today do not preclude carriers from entering into agreements that would reduce intercarrier charges more quickly, (*See, e.g.*, Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice-President, Verizon, to Kevin J. Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed October 28, 2008) at 6.) nor do they prevent state commissions from accelerating the glide path toward the final reciprocal compensation rate if they deem it appropriate.

⁴⁹² To the extent that a carrier's intrastate terminating access rate already is below its interstate terminating access rate, it will not change that rate.

revenue effects.

190. Although we permit the states to establish the particular interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate for each step of the final six years of the transition, we establish certain conditions on the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate and on the terminating intercarrier rates that carriers may charge. First, although we do not set forth a methodology that states must use in setting the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates, we do require that, within each state, there must be a single, state-wide interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate during each year and at each stage of the transition.⁴⁹³ Therefore, in establishing interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates, a state may wish to consider the impact of those rates on all the carriers in the state. States are permitted to adopt an interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate that may be higher at the beginning of the transition than some existing incumbent LEC rates today. If they do so, however, carriers with lower termination rates may not raise them to the interim uniform rate. Second, states may determine the glide path for moving from the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate to the final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, subject to the requirement that the interim uniform rate be identical for all carriers at each step in the transition. By the end of the transition period, the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates must decrease to a single final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate for all carriers established pursuant to the Commission's new "additional costs" methodology.

191. *Transition of Rates During Stage Three.* Beginning four years from the effective date of this order, and through the remainder of the transition, each carrier must set each of its terminating rates at the lower of: (i) its current rate; or (ii) the state-set interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate applicable at that stage of the transition. Thus, for example, if a carrier has an interstate terminating access rate above the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate applicable at that stage of the transition, but a current reciprocal compensation rate below the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, the carrier will reduce its interstate rate to the interim rate but leave its current reciprocal compensation rate unchanged. That carrier will continue to have two separate termination rates until such time as the applicable interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate is adjusted lower and becomes less than its current reciprocal compensation rate. At that time, all the carrier's rates will be set at the level of the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate for that state.

192. We emphasize that under no circumstances shall a carrier be permitted to increase its current rates, even if the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate is higher than one or more of its current rates. In this respect, the applicable interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate set by the states will act as a ceiling or cap on such rates. We do not permit a carrier to charge a rate for terminating interstate or intrastate access, reciprocal compensation, or ISP-bound traffic that is higher than the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, but we will permit a carrier to continue to charge a rate that is lower than the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate. We note that because CMRS providers may not tariff terminating access today,⁴⁹⁴ and we do not permit a carrier to increase rates during the transition, CMRS providers therefore will not be permitted to charge for terminating access

⁴⁹³ We recognize that the state-wide interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rates may vary state-by-state as state commissions consider the best means of transitioning to a final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate.

⁴⁹⁴ Although CMRS providers may not tariff access charges, they are not prohibited from entering into contracts with interexchange carriers that provide for the payment of such charges. *Petitions of Sprint PCS and AT&T Corp. For Declaratory Ruling Regarding CMRS Access Charges*, WT Docket No. 01-316, Declaratory Ruling, 17 FCC Rcd 13192 (2002) (*CMRS Access Charges Declaratory Ruling*).

until the end of the transition period.⁴⁹⁵

193. We note that we already have an interim intercarrier compensation regime for ISP-bound traffic, and to avoid disruption in the marketplace, we will apply on a transitional basis the pricing standards we adopted for ISP-bound traffic in the *ISP Remand Order*,⁴⁹⁶ as modified by the *Core Forbearance Order*.⁴⁹⁷ Currently, two rules remain in effect: (1) ISP-bound traffic is currently subject to a reciprocal compensation rate cap of \$.0007 per minute-of-use; and (2) under the mirroring rule, the \$.0007 cap applies to traffic exchanged with an incumbent LEC only if it offers to exchange all traffic subject to section 251(b)(5) at the same rate. As explained below, we conclude that it is appropriate to retain these rules, but only on a transitional basis until a state commission, applying the “additional costs” standards adopted in this order, has established reciprocal compensation rates that are at or below \$.0007 per minute-of-use.

194. In the *ISP Remand Order* in 2001, based on “convincing evidence in the record” that carriers had “targeted ISPs as customers merely to take advantage of . . . intercarrier payments”—offering free service to ISPs, paying ISPs to be their customers, and sometimes engaging in outright fraud—the Commission adopted an interim ISP payment regime to “limit, if not end, the opportunity for regulatory arbitrage.”⁴⁹⁸ The Commission adopted a gradually declining cap on intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic, beginning at \$.0015 per minute-of-use and declining to \$.0007 per minute-of-use.⁴⁹⁹ These rate caps reflected the downward trend in intercarrier compensation rates contained in then-recently negotiated interconnection agreements.⁵⁰⁰ We have previously recognized that evidence that “carriers have agreed to rates”—through voluntary, arms-length negotiations—constitutes substantial evidence that rates are just and reasonable.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁵ Consistent with our conclusion that CMRS providers are unable to assess access charges during the transition, we make clear that our symmetry rule, set forth in Part V.C.1.b, will not apply until the transition is over. Even so, we clarify that, to the extent that any carrier has a terminating rate above the permissible rate, such carrier must reduce the rate to the permissible level. Specifically, in the first year of the transition, all carriers with intrastate access charges higher than their interstate access charges must reduce such charges by 50 percent of the difference between its interstate switched access rate and its intrastate switched access rate. Similarly, once the state-set interim, uniform rate is in effect, all carriers must reduce terminating rates, whether interstate access, reciprocal compensation, or ISP-bound traffic, by 50 percent of the difference between the current terminating switched access rate and the interim, uniform rate (as it is reduced over time). Even though rates during the transition will not reflect true symmetry, rates for most carriers should be symmetric before the transition is over as all carriers reduce charges to the final, uniform rate.

⁴⁹⁶ See *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9153, 9186–93, paras. 21, 77–88.

⁴⁹⁷ See *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20184–89, paras. 16–26.

⁴⁹⁸ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9187, para. 77.

⁴⁹⁹ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9187, para. 78.

⁵⁰⁰ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9190–91, para. 85.

⁵⁰¹ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9190–91, para. 85; see also *Petition of ACS of Anchorage, Inc. Pursuant to Section 10 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Amended, for Forbearance from Sections 251(c)(3) and 252(d)(1) in the Anchorage Study Area*, WC Docket No. 05-281, 22 FCC Rcd 1958, 1984–85, paras. 39, 40 n.136 (2007) (finding that “commercially negotiated rates” provide “just and reasonable prices”); *Review of the Section 251 Unbundling Obligations of Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers; Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996; Deployment of Wireline Services Offering Advanced Telecommunications Capability*, CC Docket Nos. 01-338, 98-147, 96-98, Report and Order and Order on Remand and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 18 FCC Rcd 16978, 17389, para. 664 (2003) (subsequent history

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195. Most commenters urge the Commission to maintain the interim compensation rules governing ISP-bound traffic until the Commission is able to transition to comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform.⁵⁰² These parties contend that a higher compensation rate would create new opportunities for arbitrage⁵⁰³ and impose substantial financial burdens on wireless companies, incumbent LECs and state public utility commissions.⁵⁰⁴ They further claim that the existing regime has simplified interconnection negotiations.⁵⁰⁵

196. We share these commenters' concerns. The record also suggests that eliminating the \$.0007 cap and instead applying higher reciprocal compensation rates that may be set by the states during the transition period to the adoption of our new methodology would have a significant negative impact on

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omitted) (*Triennial Review Order*) (finding that “arms-length agreements . . . to provide [an] element at [a] rate” “demonstrate[s]” that the rate is “just and reasonable”).

⁵⁰² See, e.g., Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 10 (filed July 8, 2008) (asking the Commission to maintain the existing compromises reached with respect to ISP-bound traffic); Letter from Gary L. Phillips, Associate General Counsel, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-98, 99-68 at 8 (filed May 9, 2008) (asserting that the public interest would be best served by maintaining the existing transitional rates pending broader intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Sage Telecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at 6 (Sage Telecom May 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (stating that retaining the ISP rate serves broad policy goals); Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68 at 1 (filed May 7, 2008) (supporting continuation of the interim compensation rules); Letter from Joshua Seidmann, Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 2 (filed Apr. 28, 2008) (ITTA Apr. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (asking the Commission to retain the current \$0.0007 rate for ISP-bound traffic); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98 at 1 (filed Apr. 7, 2008) (urging the Commission to support its earlier finding that \$0.0007 is appropriate compensation for dial-up ISP traffic); Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, Attach. (filed May 1, 2008) (describing how elimination of the existing ISP rate would create substantial burdens on a number of carriers and state commissions) (Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Glenn Reynolds, Vice President, Policy, USTelecom, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-262, WC Docket No. 07-135 at 2 (filed Apr. 29, 2008) (noting that the Commission’s existing rules have “largely mitigated the debate around compensation for ISP-bound traffic, but there is every reason to believe the same problems would arise if the Commission were to reverse direction on this issue”) (USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵⁰³ See, e.g., USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2; Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, WC Docket No. 07-135, Attach. at 3–5 (filed Apr. 25, 2008) (Qwest April 25, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Verizon and BellSouth, Further Supplemental White Paper on ISP Reciprocal Compensation at 20 (Verizon/BellSouth Further Supp. ISP White Paper), attached to Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-98, 99-68 (filed Sept. 27, 2004).

⁵⁰⁴ See, e.g., Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach.

⁵⁰⁵ See, e.g., Verizon Wireless May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (stating that “the [m]irroring [r]ule simplified wireless-ILEC interconnection negotiations tremendously.”); Supplemental Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless on Intercarrier Payments for ISP-Bound Traffic and the *WorldCom* Remand, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-98, 99-68 at 38–40 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments) (indicating that Verizon entered into multiple agreements using the \$.0007 rate cap established in the *ISP Remand Order*).

carriers serving rural markets and broadband deployment.⁵⁰⁶ The record demonstrates that dial-up minutes remain at high levels in rural areas and that the application of reciprocal compensation to these minutes would generate significant costs to carriers serving these rural areas.⁵⁰⁷ Thus, it remains the case that the “rate caps help avoid arbitrage and market distortions that otherwise would result from the availability of reciprocal compensation for ISP-bound traffic.”⁵⁰⁸ We further believe that maintaining the cap on a transitional basis will minimize the disruptive effects and regulatory uncertainty that otherwise would result from the abrupt elimination of clear compensation rules for ISP-bound traffic.

197. We expect that state commissions, applying the new “additional costs” standard adopted in this order, will set final reciprocal compensation rates at or below \$.0007 per minute-of-use. As noted below, the evidence in the record suggests that the incremental cost of call termination on modern switches is de minimis.⁵⁰⁹ We have given state commissions up to ten years to transition to new rates based on the “additional costs” standard. Accordingly, the rate cap will only have an impact in a particular state on a transitional basis until that state sets rates at or below \$.0007.

198. The mirroring rule has also succeeded in promoting the Commission’s “goal of a more unified intercarrier compensation regime by requiring LECs to offer similar rates for like traffic.”⁵¹⁰ Most intraMTA traffic is now exchanged pursuant to the rate caps, and a substantial portion of wireline intraexchange traffic is being exchanged at rates at or below the rate caps as well.⁵¹¹ Eliminating the mirroring rule and allowing carriers to charge higher transitional reciprocal compensation rates for traffic currently subject to the mirroring rule would significantly increase the cost carriers incur in exchanging that traffic. Those increased costs would divert funds from investment in next generation wireless networks and likely would be borne by consumers, through increases in the costs of wireless offerings.⁵¹²

199. We reject arguments that the Commission unlawfully delegated its authority in the *ISP Remand Order* and arguments that the Commission addressed previously in the *Core Forbearance*

⁵⁰⁶ See, e.g., ITTA April 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3, 5; Embarq May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2, 5–7.

⁵⁰⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel for Earthlink, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at iii, 11–12 (filed Aug. 14, 2008) (estimating that 24% of dial-up users in rural America say that broadband service is not available where they live); Sage Telecom May 9, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4; Embarq May 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 6 (calculating its cost to be \$100 million if all ISP-bound minutes were subject to TELRIC-based rates under section 251(b)(5)); ITTA Apr. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (noting that dial-up usage remains strong in rural areas); USTelecom Apr. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter (noting a “recent study from the Pew Internet & American Life Project that indicated that while the number of dial-up subscribers had dropped 63% since 2001, the number of minutes spent online by each dial-up subscriber had increased approximately 70%. As a result, some USTelecom member companies are actually seeing an *increase* in dial-up minutes.”) (emphasis in original); Letter from Bennett L. Ross, General Counsel—D.C., BellSouth D.C., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, WC Docket No. 03-171 (filed Aug. 29, 2005) (attaching a chart showing that “dial-up subscribers would continue to generate substantial minutes of dial-up ISP calls, notwithstanding projections of a continued decline in the number of dial-up subscribers.”).

⁵⁰⁸ *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20815–16, para. 18.

⁵⁰⁹ See *infra* para. 250.

⁵¹⁰ *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20816, para. 19.

⁵¹¹ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 40.

⁵¹² Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments. at 40.

Order.⁵¹³ We also disagree with parties who suggest that the Commission, in responding to the D.C. Circuit's remand in *WorldCom*, must offer detailed new justifications for each of the four features of the ISP intercarrier payment regime: the rate caps, the mirroring rule, the growth cap, and the new markets rule.⁵¹⁴ The prior policy justifications offered for those rules by the Commission have not been overturned by any court, and our current policy justification for retaining these rules is simply to maintain the status quo in this area on a transitional basis until our new "additional costs" methodology has been fully implemented. Indeed, pursuant to our new "additional costs" methodology, we believe that the rate caps set forth in 2001 may well be higher than the final, uniform reciprocal compensation rates set by the states. However, discarding these rules during the transition to our new methodology would be unwise and unwarranted because the "rate caps are necessary to prevent discrimination *between* dial-up Internet access customers and basic telephone service customers," those caps "protect consumers of basic telephone service" from being forced to subsidize dial-up Internet access service, and the rate caps minimize the "classic regulatory arbitrage" that reciprocal compensation for ISP-bound traffic had made possible.⁵¹⁵

200. In sum, we maintain the \$.0007 cap and the mirroring rule, on a transitional basis, pursuant to our section 201 authority. These interim rules shall remain in place in a state until the state commission, applying the "additional costs" standard adopted in this order, has established reciprocal compensation rates that are at or below \$.0007 per minute-of-use.

201. We find that our transition plan is necessary and appropriate to prevent undue economic hardships to carriers caused by a too-rapid reduction in intercarrier compensation rates. If there is evidence that carriers are attempting to abuse the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate and/or transition process to create arbitrage opportunities, we encourage carriers to bring such evidence to our attention or that of the state commission so such claims can be investigated and, if appropriate, action taken.

3. Legal Authority

a. Legal Authority for Comprehensive Reform—Interpretation of Sections 251(b)(5) and 251(g)

202. The history of intercarrier compensation reveals many policy reasons for comprehensively reforming intercarrier compensation rates, including reducing arbitrage, promoting competition, facilitating the introduction of new technologies, and benefiting consumers. The dual structure of separate federal and state jurisdiction over communications has made accomplishing such reforms more complex, however. Although our reform does not disturb those fundamental jurisdictional distinctions, we find that, through the tools made available by the 1996 Act, we have the means to accomplish this reform by electing to partner with the states.

⁵¹³ See Letter from Michael B. Hazzard, Counsel for Core Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, Attach. at 18 & n.8 (filed May 14, 2008) (Core May 14, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). We also reject Core's argument that the *ISP Remand Order* unlawfully delegates to incumbent LECs the decision of whether the *ISP Remand Order* applies. See *id.* at 19–20. The Commission did not delegate its authority in the *ISP Remand Order* but rather provided options that were not mandatory. See, e.g., *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9193, para. 89. Additionally, Core argues that the Commission provided no reasoned explanation for the growth cap and new market rules adopted in the *ISP Remand Order* and never provided notice or an opportunity for comment on those specific rules. These rules, as applicable to all carriers, were forborne from in the *Core Forbearance Order*. See *Core Forbearance Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 20186–87, paras. 20–21. As such, this argument is moot.

⁵¹⁴ See Core May 14, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 20–26.

⁵¹⁵ *In re Core Commc'ns* 455 F.3d at 277–80 (internal quotation marks omitted).

203. The Commission unquestionably has authority to reform intercarrier compensation with respect to interstate access services, rates charged by CMRS providers, and IP/PSTN traffic. Section 2(a) of the Act establishes the Commission's jurisdiction over interstate services, for which the Commission ensures just, reasonable, and not unjustly and unreasonably discriminatory rates under section 201 and 202.⁵¹⁶ Likewise, the Commission has authority over the rates of CMRS providers pursuant to section 332 of the Act.⁵¹⁷ We also make clear that authority to impose economic regulation with respect to IP/PSTN traffic rests exclusively with this Commission. The Commission has adopted a number of regulatory requirements applicable to interconnected VoIP services and providers.⁵¹⁸ With respect to the statutory classification of IP-enabled services, however, the Commission only has addressed two situations.⁵¹⁹

204. We now classify as "information services" those services that originate calls on IP networks and terminate them on circuit-switched networks, or conversely that originate calls on circuit-switched networks and terminate them on IP networks (collectively "IP/PSTN" services).⁵²⁰ Such traffic

⁵¹⁶ 47 U.S.C. §§ 152(a), 201, 202.

⁵¹⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 332.

⁵¹⁸ See, e.g., *Telephone Number Requirements for IP-Enabled Services Providers; Local Number Portability Porting Interval and Validation Requirements; IP-Enabled Services; CTIA Petitions for Declaratory Ruling on Wireline-Wireless Porting Issues*, CC Docket Nos. 99-200, 95-116, WC Docket Nos. 07-243, 07-244, 04-36, Report and Order, Declaratory Ruling, Order on Remand, and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 19531, 19538-40, paras. 14, 16 (2008) (*LNP Order*) (imposing LNP requirements, and noting that the Commission previously imposed the requirement to provide 911 service, to contribute to universal service, to protect the privacy of customers, to comply with disability access and telecommunications relay service requirements, and to satisfy certain CALEA obligations).

⁵¹⁹ On one hand, the Commission classified as an "information service" Pulver.com's free service that did not provide transmission and offers a number of computing capabilities. *Petition for Declaratory Ruling that Pulver.com's Free World Dialup is Neither Telecommunications nor a Telecommunications Service*, WC Docket No. 03-45, Memorandum Order and Opinion, 19 FCC Rcd 3307 (2004) (*Pulver.com Order*). On the other hand, the Commission found that certain "IP-in-the-middle" services were "telecommunications services" where they: (1) use ordinary customer premises equipment (CPE) with no enhanced functionality; (2) originate and terminate on the public switched telephone network (PSTN); and (3) undergo no net protocol conversion and provide no enhanced functionality to end users due to the provider's use of IP technology. See, e.g., *Petition for Declaratory Ruling that AT&T's Phone-to-Phone IP Telephony Services are Exempt from Access Charges*, WC Docket No. 02-361, Order, 19 FCC Rcd 7457 (2004) (*IP-in-the-Middle Order*). See also, e.g., *Regulation of Prepaid Calling Card Services*, WC Docket No. 05-68, Declaratory Ruling and Report and Order, 21 FCC Rcd 7290 (2006) (*Prepaid Calling Card Order*).

⁵²⁰ We use the term "IP/PSTN" as a shorthand, without reaching any universal conclusions regarding the technology underlying the PSTN. Today the PSTN continues to rely primarily on circuit-switched technology to connect to end-user customers, although we recognize that carriers increasingly are converting portions of their networks to IP technology. See, e.g., *IP-Enabled Services; E911 Requirements for IP-Enabled Service Providers*, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-196, First Report and Order and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Rcd 10245, 10258, para. 24 & n.77 (2005) (distinguishing the "specialized" CPE required for interconnected VoIP services from the standard CPE used for typical telephone calls); *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report to Congress, 13 FCC Rcd 11501, 11532, para. 84 (1998) ("IP telephony" services enable real-time voice transmission using Internet protocols. The services can be provided in two basic ways: through software and hardware at customer premises, or through 'gateways' that enable applications originating and/or terminating on the PSTN. Gateways are computers that transform the circuit-switched voice signal into IP packets, and vice versa, and perform associated signaling, control, and address translation functions."). Insofar as a service allows a customer to originate a communication on an IP network and terminate it on a circuit-switched network, or vice versa, it involves a net

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today involves a net protocol conversion between end-users, and thus constitutes an “enhanced” or “information service.”⁵²¹

205. Although there are certain exceptions to this treatment, we do not find them applicable.⁵²² In particular, we do not find this to be “protocol conversion in connection with the introduction of new technology to implement existing services” that would be treated as a “basic,” rather than “enhanced” service.⁵²³ That exception was designed to address situations “involving no change in an existing service, but merely a change in electrical interface characteristics to facilitate transitional introduction of new technology.”⁵²⁴ By contrast, we find that IP/PSTN services are not mere changes to the underlying technology used for “existing” basic services, but are entirely new services with characteristics in many ways distinct from pre-existing telephone services.⁵²⁵

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protocol conversion, and we classify it as an “information service” today. Insofar as that service allows communications with no net protocol conversion, it is not subject to our “information service” classification here. We note that the presence of a net protocol conversion is not the only basis for classifying a service as an “enhanced” or “information service.” See, e.g., 47 C.F.R. § 64.702(a); *Computer II Final Decision*, 77 FCC 2d at 420–21, para. 97. We do not reach those issues at this time, however.

⁵²¹ See, e.g., *Implementation of the Non-Accounting Safeguards of Sections 271 and 272 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Amended*, CC Docket No. 96-149, First Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 11 FCC Rcd 21905, 21957–58, para. 106 (1996) (*Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*). Interpreting the 1996 Act’s definition of “information services,” the Commission held that “all of the services that the Commission has previously considered to be ‘enhanced services’ are ‘information services.’” *Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 21956, para. 103. For the all reasons discussed in Part V.B.2, we decline to defer the classification of IP/PSTN services, as requested by some parties, instead finding it appropriate to address this issue as part of our comprehensive reforms. See, e.g., Letter from Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 at 15 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (Free Press Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus and Genevieve Morelli, Counsel for Broadview Networks, et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008).

⁵²² Two of the exceptions are: (1) protocol processing involving communications between an end user and the network itself (e.g., for initiation, routing, and termination of calls) rather than between or among users; and (2) protocol conversion to facilitate the interconnection of networks. *Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 21957–58, para. 106. These categories of protocol processing services may involve protocol conversions, but they result in no net protocol conversion between the end users. *Implementation of the Non-Accounting Safeguards of Sections 271 and 272 of the Communications Act of 1934, as Amended*, CC Docket No. 96-149, Order on Reconsideration, 12 FCC Rcd 2297, 2297–99, para. 2 (1997). Thus, they are not relevant here.

⁵²³ *Amendment to Sections 64.702 of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations (Third Computer Inquiry); and Policy and Rules Concerning Rates for Competitive Common Phase II Carrier Service and Facilities Authorization Thereof; Communications Protocols Under Section 64.702 of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations*, CC Docket No. 85-229, Report and Order, 2 FCC Rcd 3072, 3081, para. 65 (1987) (*Computer III Phase II Order*). See also *Non-Accounting Safeguards Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 21957–58, para. 106.

⁵²⁴ *Communications Protocols under Section 64.702 of the Commission’s Rules and Regulations*, GN Docket No. 80-756, Memorandum Opinion, Order, and Statement Of Principles, 95 FCC 2d 584, para. 16 (1983) (*Protocols Order*).

⁵²⁵ See, e.g., Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 9–11 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President, Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, WC Docket No. 04-36, at 10–11 (filed Aug. 6, 2007); Letter from AT&T et al., to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, et al., WC Docket No. 04-36, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2–3 (filed Aug. 6, 2008); VON Coalition *IP-Enabled Services NPRM* Comments at 3–16; AT&T *IP-Enabled Services NPRM* Comments at 13–17. We thus disagree with parties who suggest, in essence, that IP/PSTN services are no different than “basic” services. See, e.g., Letter from

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206. Consistent with the *Pulver.com Order* and the *Vonage Order*, we preempt any state efforts to impose “traditional ‘telephone company’ regulations” as they relate to IP/PSTN information services as inconsistent with our generally unregulated treatment of information services.⁵²⁶ Of course, neither the *Vonage Order*, the *Pulver.com Order*, nor our actions here preempt state actions that are consistent with federal policy.⁵²⁷ Moreover, as we describe below, we allow states to establish reciprocal compensation rates, pursuant to our methodology, including for IP/PSTN traffic.

207. In sections 251 and 252 of the Act, Congress altered the traditional regulatory framework based on jurisdiction by expanding the applicability of national rules to historically intrastate issues and state rules to historically interstate issues.⁵²⁸ In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that the 1996 Act created parallel jurisdiction for the Commission and the states over interstate and intrastate matters under sections 251 and 252.⁵²⁹ The Commission and the states “are to address the same matters through their parallel jurisdiction over both interstate and intrastate matters under sections 251 and 252.”⁵³⁰ Moreover, section 251(i) provides that “[n]othing in this section shall be construed to limit or otherwise affect the Commission’s authority under section 201.”⁵³¹ The Commission concluded that section 251(i) “affirms that the Commission’s preexisting authority under section 201 continues to apply for purely interstate activities.”⁵³²

208. In implementing sections 251 and 252 in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission’s treatment of LEC-CMRS traffic provides an instructive approach. Prior to the 1996 Act, the Commission expressly preempted “state and local regulations of the kind of interconnection to which CMRS providers are entitled” based on its authority under section 201 and 332 of the Act.⁵³³ Nevertheless, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission brought LEC-CMRS

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Thomas Jones and Jonathan Lechter, Counsel for tw telecom et al., to Marlene H Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 99-68, 04-36, Attach. at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008) (tw telecom et al Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). We note that whether a service is viewed by consumers as a possible substitute for a “basic” service is a distinct question from whether, as a matter of technology and the nature of the service offering, the service simply replaces the technology underlying a pre-existing basic service. Thus, our conclusion here is not inconsistent with the Commission’s recognition that interconnected VoIP services increasingly are viewed by consumers as a substitute for traditional telephone services. *See, e.g., LNP Order*, 22 FCC Rcd at 19547, para. 28.

⁵²⁶ *Vonage Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 22404; *see also Pulver.com Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 3316, para. 15 (“We determine, consistent with our precedent regarding information services, that FWD is an unregulated information service and any state regulations that seek to treat FWD as a telecommunications service or otherwise subject it to public-utility type regulation would almost certainly pose a conflict with our policy of nonregulation.”).

⁵²⁷ For example, states are free to require contributions to state universal service or telecommunications relay service funds through methodologies that are consistent with federal policy. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Robert W. Quinn, Jr. Senior Vice President, Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, CC Docket No. 96-45 at 11–16 (filed July 23, 2008) (describing ways that states could require contributions to state universal service or telecommunications relay service funds in a manner that is consistent with federal policy).

⁵²⁸ *See Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15544, para. 83.

⁵²⁹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15544–45, para. 85.

⁵³⁰ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15546–47, para. 91.

⁵³¹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(i).

⁵³² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15546–47, para. 91.

⁵³³ *Implementation of Sections 3(n) and 332*, Second Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 1411, 1498, para. 230 (1994).

interconnection within the section 251 framework as it relates to intraMTA (including interstate intraMTA) traffic.⁵³⁴ The Commission recognized, however, that it continued to retain separate authority over CMRS traffic.⁵³⁵

209. Courts confirmed that, in permitting LEC-CMRS interconnection to be addressed through the section 251 framework, the Commission did not in any way lose its independent jurisdiction or authority to regulate that traffic under other provisions of the Act. Thus, although the Eighth Circuit invalidated the Commission's TELRIC pricing rules in general,⁵³⁶ it recognized that "because section 332(c)(1)(B) gives the FCC the authority to order LECs to interconnect with CMRS carriers, we believe that the Commission has the authority to issue the rules of special concern to the CMRS providers, [including the reciprocal compensation rules] but only as these provisions apply to CMRS providers. Thus, [the pricing] rules . . . remain in full force and effect with respect to the CMRS providers, and our order of vacation does not apply to them in the CMRS context."⁵³⁷ Subsequently, the D.C. Circuit held that CMRS providers were entitled to pursue formal complaints under section 208 of the Act for violations of the Commission's reciprocal compensation rules.⁵³⁸

210. We build upon our actions in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, and now permit states to establish a uniform reciprocal compensation rate, in accordance with the new methodology we establish in this order, pursuant to the section 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework. In particular, section 251(b)(5) imposes on all LECs a "duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications."⁵³⁹ Section 252(d)(2)(A) sets forth an "additional costs" standard that state commissions, in arbitrating interconnection disputes involving incumbent LECs, should apply in setting the "charges for transport and termination of traffic."⁵⁴⁰ Although we allow states to set new uniform termination rates under this framework, pursuant to our methodology, we retain our authority under section 201 to find that reciprocal compensation charges are unjust and unreasonable as they relate to interstate, CMRS, and IP/PSTN traffic within our jurisdiction.⁵⁴¹ We expect that states will faithfully implement the pricing standards adopted in this order,

⁵³⁴ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16005, para. 1023.

⁵³⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16005, para. 1023 ("By opting to proceed under sections 251 and 252, we are not finding that section 332 jurisdiction over interconnection has been repealed by implication, or rejecting it as an alternative basis for jurisdiction.")

⁵³⁶ We note that the Supreme Court later reversed this decision and affirmed the TELRIC methodology. See *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 467.

⁵³⁷ *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC*, 120 F.3d 753, 800 n.21 (8th Cir. 1997) (*Iowa Utils. Bd.*), *rev'd in part and remanded on other grounds*, *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. 366.

⁵³⁸ *Qwest Corp. v. FCC*, 252 F.3d 462, 465–66 (D.C. Cir. 2001) (describing the Eighth Circuit's analysis of section 332(c)(1)(B) in *Iowa Utils. Bd.* and concluding that an attempt to relitigate the issue was barred by the doctrine of issue preclusion).

⁵³⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

⁵⁴⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A).

⁵⁴¹ See *supra* paras. 203–09. See also, e.g., Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 01-92 at 9–11 (filed on Aug. 18, 2008) (Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). Contrary to Verizon's claims, we thus find no tension between permitting states to set reciprocal compensation rates for interstate traffic under the section 251 and 252 framework and the Commission's continuing authority over traffic subject to its jurisdiction, including section 201 authority expressly preserved under section 251(i).

and thus it will not be necessary for us to exercise that authority.⁵⁴²

211. The Commission unquestionably has authority to interpret and adopt rules implementing sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2). Congress delegated to the Commission the task of administering the Communications Act. Section 201(b) authorizes the Commission to “prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act.”⁵⁴³ “[T]he grant in § 201(b) means what it says: The FCC has rulemaking authority to carry out the ‘provisions of this Act.’”⁵⁴⁴ The Commission’s rulemaking authority is not limited to interstate matters; it extends to all provisions of the Communications Act.⁵⁴⁵

212. In addition, we find that the section 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework is broad enough to facilitate our intercarrier compensation reform. We acknowledge that, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic,⁵⁴⁶ and some commenters continue to press for such an interpretation.⁵⁴⁷ As other commenters recognize, however, the Commission, in the *ISP Remand Order*, reconsidered that judgment and concluded that it was a mistake to read section 251(b)(5) as limited to local traffic, given that “local” is not a term used in section 251(b)(5).⁵⁴⁸ We recognize, as the Supreme Court noted in *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utilities Board*, that “[i]t

⁵⁴² We recognize that “the just and reasonable rates required by Sections 201 and 202 . . . must ordinarily be cost-based, absent a clear explanation of the Commission’s reasons for a departure from cost-based ratemaking.” *Access Charge Reform*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, 91-213, Second Order on Reconsideration and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 16606, 16619–20, para. 44 (*Access Charge Reform Second Order*) (citing *Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 87 F.3d 522, 529 (D.C. Cir. 1996)). In this order, we adopt an incremental cost methodology for setting termination rates. We find that the proper application of that methodology produces rates that are “just and reasonable” under section 201. As discussed below, we find it appropriate to adopt a transition before carriers begin charging rates set pursuant to our incremental cost methodology.

⁵⁴³ 47 U.S.C. § 201(b) (“The Commission may prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act.”).

⁵⁴⁴ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378.

⁵⁴⁵ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378 n.6 (“[T]he question in these cases is not whether the Federal Government has taken the regulation of local telecommunications competition away from the States. With regard to the matters addressed by the 1996 Act, it unquestionably has.”).

⁵⁴⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16012–13, para. 1033.

⁵⁴⁷ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 24–32; Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President, Legal and Industry, NTCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 9 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (NCTA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Verizon *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 38–42; NARUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 6–7; Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 144–49; Cincinnati Bell *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 5–11; Maine PUC and Vermont Pub. Serv. Bd. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7; New York State PSC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7; Verizon and BellSouth, Supplemental White Paper on ISP Reciprocal Compensation, CC Docket No. 96-98, 99-68 at 16–20 (filed July 20, 2004) (Verizon/BellSouth Supp. ISP White Paper); NARUC’s Initial Comments at 7 n.13 (May 23, 2004). *But see*, e.g., ICF *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 39.

⁵⁴⁸ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9166–67, para. 35. See also, e.g., Qwest, Legal Authority for Comprehensive Intercarrier Compensation Reform at 2–4, attached to Letter from Melissa Newman, Counsel for Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 06-45, 99-68, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, 05-195, 06-122 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham et al., Counsel for T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 9–10 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2, 15–18; AT&T *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 35–41; Brief from Gary M. Epstein, Counsel for ICF, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 29–35 (filed Oct. 5, 2004)

would be a gross understatement to say that the 1996 Act is not a model of clarity.”⁵⁴⁹ Nevertheless, we find that the better view is that section 251(b)(5) is not limited to local traffic.

213. We begin by looking at the text of the statute. Section 251(b)(5) imposes on all LECs the “duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for the transport and termination of telecommunications.”⁵⁵⁰ The Act broadly defines “telecommunications” as “the transmission, between or among points specified by the user, of information of the user’s choosing, without change in the form or content of the information as sent and received.”⁵⁵¹ Its scope is not limited geographically (“local,” “intrastate,” or “interstate”) or to particular services (“telephone exchange service,”⁵⁵² telephone toll service,⁵⁵³ or “exchange access”⁵⁵⁴). We find that the traffic we elect to bring within this framework fits squarely within the meaning of “telecommunications.”⁵⁵⁵ Had Congress intended to preclude the Commission from bringing certain types of telecommunications traffic within the section 251(b)(5) framework, it could have easily done so by incorporating restrictive terms in section 251(b)(5). Because Congress used the term “telecommunications,” the broadest of the statute’s defined terms, we conclude that section 251(b)(5) is not limited only to the transport and termination of certain types of telecommunications traffic, such as local traffic.

214. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order* the Commission concluded that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic, but recognized that “[u]ltimately . . . the rates that local carriers impose for the transport and termination of local traffic and for the transport and termination of long distance traffic should converge.”⁵⁵⁶ In the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission reversed course on the scope of section 251(b)(5), finding that “the phrase ‘local traffic’ created unnecessary ambiguities, and we correct that mistake here.”⁵⁵⁷ The *ISP Remand Order* noted that “the term ‘local,’ not being a statutorily defined category, . . . is not a term used in section 251(b)(5).”⁵⁵⁸ The Commission found that the scope of section 251(b)(5) is limited only by section 251(g), which temporarily grandfathered the pre-1996 Act rules governing “exchange access, information access, and exchange services for such access” provided to IXCs and information service providers until “explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission.”⁵⁵⁹ On appeal, the D.C. Circuit left intact the Commission’s findings concerning the scope

⁵⁴⁹ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 397.

⁵⁵⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(5).

⁵⁵¹ 47 U.S.C. § 153(43).

⁵⁵² *Id.* at § 153(47).

⁵⁵³ *Id.* at § 153(48).

⁵⁵⁴ *Id.* at § 153(16).

⁵⁵⁵ As discussed above, we classify IP/PSTN services as “information services.” We note, however, that information services, by definition, are provided “via telecommunications,” enabling us to bring IP/PSTN traffic within the section 251(b)(5) framework. 47 U.S.C. § 153(20). Moreover, given that we retain independent authority under section 201, we find it reasonably ancillary to that authority to regulate IP/PSTN services in this regard, consistent with our efforts to ensure uniform treatment of all traffic on the PSTN for intercarrier compensation purposes. Thus, IP/PSTN traffic ultimately will be subject to the final uniform reciprocal compensation rates established pursuant to the methodology adopted in this order. We maintain the status quo for this traffic during the transition, however.

⁵⁵⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16012, para. 1033.

⁵⁵⁷ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9173, para. 46.

⁵⁵⁸ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9167, para. 34.

⁵⁵⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

of section 251(b)(5), although it took issue with other aspects of the *ISP Remand Order*.⁵⁶⁰

215. We agree with the finding in the *ISP Remand Order* that traffic encompassed by section 251(g) is excluded from section 251(b)(5) except to the extent that the Commission acts to bring that traffic within its scope. Section 251(g) preserved the pre-1996 Act regulatory regime that applies to access traffic, including rules governing “receipt of compensation.”⁵⁶¹ There would have been no need for Congress to have preserved these compensation rules against the effects of section 251 if the scope of section 251(b)(5) was not broad enough for the Commission to bring within its scope the traffic covered by section 251(g), i.e., access traffic. Because Congress is presumed not to have wasted its breath, particularly with a provision as lengthy and detailed as section 251(g), we find that section 251(g) confirms that section 251(b)(5) applies to the transport and termination of all telecommunications traffic exchanged with LECs, including ISP-bound traffic. And because section 251(g) “is worded simply as a transitional device, preserving various LEC duties that antedated the 1996 Act until such time as the Commission should adopt new rules pursuant to the Act,”⁵⁶² we clearly have authority under the Act to adopt regulations superseding that regime. We exercise that authority today.⁵⁶³

216. By placing all traffic under the umbrella of one compensation scheme, we eliminate jurisdictional and regulatory distinctions that are not tied to economic or technical differences between services. As the Commission observed in the *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, regulatory arbitrage arises from different rates that different types of providers must pay for essentially the same functions.⁵⁶⁴ Our current classifications require carriers to treat identical uses of the network differently, even though such disparate treatment usually has no economic or technical basis. These artificial distinctions distort the telecommunications markets at the expense of healthy competition. Similar types of traffic should be subject to similar rules. Similar types of functions should be subject to similar cost recovery mechanisms. We achieve that result by moving away from the regime preserved by section 251(g) and bringing that traffic within the section 251(b)(5) framework.

217. We disagree with commenters who argue that section 251(b)(5) only can be applied to traffic exchanged between LECs, and not traffic exchanged between a LEC and another carrier.⁵⁶⁵ The

⁵⁶⁰ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 429.

⁵⁶¹ 47 U.S.C. 251(g).

⁵⁶² *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 430.

⁵⁶³ Verizon notes that although the Commission in the *ISP Remand Order* deleted the word “local” from its regulations governing reciprocal compensation, the regulations continued to exclude access services from the scope of section 251(b)(5). See Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 24–32; 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(b)(1). At that time, it made sense to retain the access exemption because the Commission had not issued rules superseding the access regime preserved by section 251(g). We supersede the grandfathered access regime in this order, at least in part.

⁵⁶⁴ *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616, para. 12.

⁵⁶⁵ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments (“The best interpretation of § 251(b)(5) – read in light of the text, structure, and history of the 1996 Act – is that the reciprocal compensation obligation applies only to intraexchange (or ‘local’) voice calls that originate on the network of one LEC (or wireless provider) and terminate on the network of another LEC (or wireless provider) operating in the same exchange (or, in the case of wireless providers, the same MTA.”); Verizon and BellSouth, Internet-Bound Traffic is Not Compensable Under Sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) at 26 (Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper) (“By its nature, ‘reciprocal compensation’ must . . . apply to ‘telecommunications’ exchanged *between LECs* (or carriers, like CMRS providers, that the Commission is authorized to treat as LECs), not to traffic that is exchanged between LECs and non-LECs.”), attached to Letter from Ann D. Berkowitz, Associate Director, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98 (filed May 17, 2004).

Commission rejected that argument in the *Local Competition Order*, finding that section 251(b)(5) applies to traffic exchanged by a LEC and any other telecommunications carrier, and adopted rules implementing that finding.⁵⁶⁶ In a specific application of that principle, the Commission concluded that “CMRS providers will not be classified as LECs,”⁵⁶⁷ but nevertheless found that “LECs are obligated, pursuant to section 251(b)(5) (and the corresponding pricing standards of section 252(d)(2)), to enter into reciprocal compensation agreements with all CMRS providers.”⁵⁶⁸ No one challenged that finding on appeal, and it has been settled law for the past 12 years. We see no reason to revisit that conclusion now. Although section 251(b)(5) indisputably imposes the duty to establish reciprocal compensation arrangements on LECs alone, Congress did not limit the class of potential beneficiaries of that obligation to LECs.⁵⁶⁹

218. We also disagree with commenters who argue that section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) limits the scope of section 251(b)(5).⁵⁷⁰ Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) provides that a state commission “shall not consider the terms and conditions for reciprocal compensation to be just and reasonable” unless “such terms and conditions provide for the mutual and reciprocal recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier’s network facilities of calls that originate on the network facilities of the other carrier.”⁵⁷¹ Verizon and others argue that this provision necessarily excludes interexchange traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5) because at the time the 1996 Act was passed, calls neither originated nor terminated on an IXC’s network.⁵⁷² We reject this reasoning because it erroneously assumes that Congress intended the pricing standards in section 252(d)(2) to limit the otherwise broad scope of section 251(b)(5). We do not believe that Congress intended the tail to wag the dog.

⁵⁶⁶ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16013–16, paras. 1034–41. See also 47 C.F.R. 51.703(a) (“Each LEC shall establish reciprocal compensation arrangements for transport and termination of telecommunications traffic with any requesting telecommunications carrier.”); *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9193–94, para. 89 n.177 (“Section 251(b)(5) applies to telecommunications traffic between a LEC and a telecommunications carrier . . .”).

⁵⁶⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15996, para. 1005. In this regard, we note that, absent a determination that CMRS providers are LECs, IXC-CMRS traffic would not be encompassed by section 251(b)(5), since neither are LECs. Nevertheless, it is our intention that, at the end of the transition, CMRS providers be entitled to reciprocal compensation for all the traffic they terminate. As the Commission has observed, “[t]here are three ways in which a carrier seeking to impose charges on another carrier can establish a duty to pay such charges: pursuant to (1) Commission rule; (2) tariff; or (3) contract.” *Petitions of Sprint PCS and AT&T Corp. For Declaratory Ruling Regarding CMRS Access Charges, Declaratory Ruling*, 17 FCC Rcd 13192, 13196, para. 8 (2002).

⁵⁶⁸ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15997, para. 1008.

⁵⁶⁹ If Congress had intended to limit the class of potential beneficiaries of LECs’ duty to establish reciprocal obligation arrangements, it would have said so explicitly. See 47 U.S.C. § 251(b)(3) (describing the “duty to provide dialing parity to competing providers of telephone exchange service and telephone toll service”).

⁵⁷⁰ See, e.g., Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper at 41–43; New York State PSC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 8–9; TDS *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 19 n.27; Qwest *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 39; NASUCA *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 17–18.

⁵⁷¹ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(i).

⁵⁷² See, e.g., Maine PUC and Vermont Pub. Serv. Bd. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7–8; New York State PSC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7–10; Verizon/BellSouth Supp. ISP White Paper at 16–20; NARUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7 n.13.

219. Section 251(b)(5) defines the scope of traffic that is subject to reciprocal compensation. Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i), in turn, deals with the mechanics of who owes what to whom, it does not define the scope of traffic to which section 251(b)(5) applies. Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) provides that, at a minimum, a reciprocal compensation arrangement must provide for the recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier's network of calls that originate on the network of the other carrier.⁵⁷³ Section 252(d)(2)(A)(i) does not address what happens when carriers exchange traffic that originates or terminates on a third carrier's network. This does not mean, as Verizon suggests, that section 251(b)(5) must be read as limited to traffic involving only two carriers. Rather, it means that there is a gap in the pricing rules in section 252(d)(2), and the Commission has authority under section 201(b) to adopt rules to fill that gap.

220. We reject Verizon's argument that a telecommunications carrier that delivers traffic to an ISP is not eligible for reciprocal compensation because the carrier does not "terminate" telecommunications traffic at the ISP.⁵⁷⁴ In the *Local Competition Order*, the Commission defined "termination" as "the switching of traffic that is subject to section 251(b)(5) at the terminating carrier's end office switch . . . and delivery of that traffic to the called party's premises."⁵⁷⁵ As the D.C. Circuit suggested in the *Bell Atlantic* decision, "Calls to ISPs appear to fit this definition: the traffic is switched by the LEC whose customer is the ISP and then delivered to the ISP, which is clearly the 'called party.'"⁵⁷⁶ We agree.⁵⁷⁷ Consequently, ISP-bound traffic is subject to our new intercarrier compensation framework.⁵⁷⁸

221. We reject opponents' other arguments that the context and history of the 1996 Act compel a finding that section 251(b)(5) could not be applied to access traffic. Verizon argues, for example, that section 251(g) demonstrates that Congress did not intend to displace the existing access pricing regime.⁵⁷⁹ This argument ignores that Congress preserved the access regime only "until such

⁵⁷³ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(i).

⁵⁷⁴ See, e.g., Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 33–34; Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper at 31–32.

⁵⁷⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16015, para. 1040. See also 47 C.F.R. § 51.701(d).

⁵⁷⁶ 206 F.3d at 6.

⁵⁷⁷ Because ISP-bound traffic did not fall within the section 251(g) carve out from section 251(b)(5) as "there had been no pre-Act obligation relating to intercarrier compensation for ISP-bound traffic," *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433, ISP-bound traffic is, and always has been, subject to section 251(b)(5), although clearly interstate in nature and subject to our section 201 authority.

⁵⁷⁸ We reject Verizon's argument against the application of section 251(b)(5) to ISP-bound traffic because this traffic is one-way traffic and as such is not reciprocal. See Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 26; Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper at 41–43. As Level 3 points out, these arguments have been rejected by the Commission and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. See Level 3 Aug. 18, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 18; *Pacific Bell v. Cook Telecom, Inc.*, 197 F.3d 1236, 1242–44 (9th Cir. 1999) (reciprocal compensation applies to paging traffic); *TSR Wireless, LLC v. U.S. West Comm'ns, Inc.*, 15 FCC Rcd 11166, 11178, para. 21 (2000) (the Commission's reciprocal compensation rules draw "no distinction between one-way and two-way carriers"). Because our conclusion in this order concerning the scope of section 251(b)(5) is no longer tied to whether this traffic is local or long distance, we need not address arguments made by the parties as to whether ISP-bound traffic constitutes "telephone exchange service" under the Act. See, e.g., Letter from John T. Nakahata, Counsel for Level 3 Communications, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 96-98, Attach. at 1 (filed Sept. 24, 2004). We note, however, that we retain our interim ISP-bound traffic rules. See *supra* paras. 194–200.

⁵⁷⁹ See Verizon *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 41.

restrictions and obligations are explicitly superseded by regulations prescribed by the Commission.”⁵⁸⁰ As noted above, we find that section 251(g) actually supports a finding that section 251(b)(5) is broad enough to cover access traffic. Verizon also argues that the reference to reciprocal compensation in the competitive checklist in section 271,⁵⁸¹ which was designed to ensure that local markets are open to competition, somehow shows that Congress intended to limit the scope of section 251(b)(5) to local traffic.⁵⁸² We do not see how this argument sheds any light on the scope of section 251(b)(5). Congress no doubt included the reference to reciprocal compensation in section 271 because section 251(b)(5) applies to local traffic, a point that no one disputes. That does not suggest, however, that section 251(b)(5) applies *only* to local traffic.

222. We need not respond to every other variation of the argument that the history and structure of the Act somehow demonstrate that section 251(b)(5) does not apply to access traffic. At best, these arguments show that one plausible interpretation of the statute is that section 251(b)(5) applies only to local traffic, a view that the Commission embraced in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*. These arguments do not persuade us, however, that this is the only plausible reading of the statute. Moreover, many of the same arguments based on the history and context of the adoption of section 251 to limit its scope to local traffic were rejected by the D.C. Circuit in the context of section 251(c).⁵⁸³ We find that the better reading of the Act as a whole, in particular the broad language of section 251(b)(5) and the grandfather clause in section 251(g), supports our view that the transport and termination of all telecommunications exchanged with LECs is subject to the reciprocal compensation regime in sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2).

223. The approach we adopt here provides a sound basis for comprehensive reform, and we thus decline to adopt alternative proposals. On one hand, we note that some commenters advocate that the Commission adopt an intercarrier compensation rate or cap of \$0.0007 per minute of use for all traffic.⁵⁸⁴ To implement this reform proposal, parties have suggested that it would likely be necessary for

⁵⁸⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g).

⁵⁸¹ See 47 U.S.C. § 271(c)(2)(B)(xiii).

⁵⁸² See Verizon/Verizon Wireless Oct. 2, 2008 Supp. Comments at 26; Verizon/BellSouth ISP White Paper at 9.

⁵⁸³ *United States Telecom Ass’n v. FCC*, 359 F.3d 554, 592 (D.C. Cir. 2004) (*USTA II*) (“Even under the deferential *Chevron* standard of review, an agency cannot, absent strong structural or contextual evidence, exclude from coverage certain items that clearly fall within the plain meaning of a statutory term. The argument that long distance services are not ‘telecommunications services’ has no support.”). In *USTA II*, the D.C. Circuit was addressing whether the term “telecommunications services” was limited to local telecommunications services under section 251(c), while here we consider the analogous question of whether “telecommunications” is limited to local telecommunications under section 251(b).

⁵⁸⁴ See, e.g., Letter from Grace E. Koh, Policy Counsel, Cox Enterprises, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. A at 1 (filed Oct. 6, 2008); Letter from Teresa D. Bauer and Richard R. Cameron, Counsel for Global Crossing North America, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1 (filed Sept. 18, 2008); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Kevin Martin et al., Commissioners, FCC, CC Docket. 01-92 at 4 (filed Sept. 12, 2008) (Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). But see, e.g., Letter from Richard A. Askoff, Executive Director—Regulatory, NECA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (“Prescription of a nationwide uniform default rate of \$0.0007 is unnecessary to solve the rate arbitrage problems identified by Verizon. It would also represent bad policy.”); Letter from Lawrence Zawalick, Senior Vice President, Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative, to Kevin Martin et al., Commissioners, FCC, CC Docket 01-92 at 1 (filed Sept. 30, 2008) (“The Rural Telephone Finance Cooperative (RTFC) strongly opposes [the \$0.0007] proposal.”).

the Commission to preempt state regulation of intrastate access charges.⁵⁸⁵ We believe that such a significant step is not currently warranted, and elect instead to allow states to continue setting rates for intrastate traffic, as well as permitting them to set rates for traffic subject to federal jurisdiction, pursuant to our methodology. We fully expect the new pricing methodology to achieve the goals of our continuing intercarrier compensation reform. On the other hand, some parties contend that the Commission should leave matters of intrastate intercarrier compensation reform entirely to the states.⁵⁸⁶ These proposals evidence a pre-1996 Act worldview, however. Given the tools that the 1996 Act put at our disposal, we find it possible to move forward with truly comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform under an approach which still provides for a state role.

224. We note that, in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission observed that section 251(b)(5) does not address charges payable to a carrier that originates traffic and concluded, therefore, that such charges were prohibited under that provision of the Act.⁵⁸⁷ Because we elect to have the states set rates under section 251(b)(5), pursuant to our methodology, we find that retention of originating charges would be inconsistent with that statutory scheme and our new regulatory approach. Accordingly, we find that originating charges for all telecommunications traffic subject to our comprehensive intercarrier compensation framework must be eliminated at the conclusion of the transition to the new regime. We recognize, however, that changes to originating access charge rates may raise issues distinct from terminating charges. Moreover, several parties urge the Commission to delay any changes to originating charges.⁵⁸⁸ For these reasons, we ask parties to comment on the appropriate transition for eliminating originating access charges in the accompanying Further Notice.⁵⁸⁹ Although we ask parties to comment on the appropriate transition for eliminating originating access charges, we clarify that, under the transitional mechanism we adopt today, carriers are not permitted to increase any of their

⁵⁸⁵ See, e.g., Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 14–25 (filed Sept. 19, 2008) (Verizon Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵⁸⁶ In some cases, parties propose that the Commission make available universal service support as an “enticement” for states to reform intrastate rates, but ultimately the decisions would be left to the individual states. See Letter from Tom Karalis, Counsel for Rural Alliance, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 7 (filed Sept. 26, 2008).

⁵⁸⁷ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16016, para. 1042. See also 47 C.F.R. § 51.703(b) (stating that a “LEC may not assess charges on any other telecommunications carrier for telecommunications traffic that originates on the LEC’s network”).

⁵⁸⁸ See, e.g., Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5 (asking the Commission to defer reform of originating access); Letter from Grace E. Kohl, Policy Counsel, Cox, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 06-122, 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, 99-68, 96-262 at 2 (filed Oct. 6, 2008) (supporting proposals to delay reform of originating access) (Cox Oct. 6, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Brian Benison, Director—Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, Attach. at 3 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (describing model with “No Change to Current Structure and Rates” for originating access); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham, Federal Regulatory Affairs, T-Mobile, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 5 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); cf. Letter from Mary C. Albert, Assistant General Counsel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, Attach. at 1 (filed Oct. 2, 2008) (urging the Commission to delay any changes to intercarrier compensation). But see Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President, Government Affairs, COMPTTEL, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 7 (filed Oct. 1, 2008) (urging the Commission to reform originating access immediately) (Sprint Oct. 1, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁵⁸⁹ See *infra* para 343.

current rates, including their originating access rates.⁵⁹⁰ Thus, both interstate and intrastate originating switched access rates will remain capped at current levels until further action by the Commission addressing the appropriate transition for this traffic. This approach is consistent with our transition of terminating rates⁵⁹¹ and with our goal of eliminating originating access charges at the conclusion of the transition to the new regime.

b. Legal Authority for the Transition

225. Although we comprehensively reform intercarrier compensation, we do not flash cut to our new regime, but provide for a measured transition.⁵⁹² The goal of this transition is to avoid overly rapid rate changes for consumers while providing carriers with sufficient means to preserve their financial integrity as we move to the new intercarrier compensation regime.⁵⁹³ For many of the same reasons that we have authority to adopt comprehensive reform, we find that the Commission has clear authority to establish such a transitional structure to serve as a glide path to the new methodology we have developed in this order.

226. We find it reasonable to adopt a transition plan under these circumstances. As the D.C. Circuit has recognized, avoiding “market disruption pending broader reforms is, of course, a standard and accepted justification for a temporary rule,”⁵⁹⁴ and here temporary rules setting forth a glide path are needed to mitigate potentially adverse rate or revenue effects that may be caused by our comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform, including the elimination of implicit universal service subsidies in those rates. Therefore, the Commission’s exercise of its authority to create a transition plan is especially appropriate here, where the Commission is acting to reconcile the Act’s “implicit tension between . . . moving toward cost-based rates and protecting universal service.”⁵⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, most commenters have affirmatively recognized the need for a transitional regime.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, every major plan submitted to

⁵⁹⁰ This prohibition on increasing access rates also applies to the Primary Interexchange Carrier Charge in section 69.153 of the Commission’s rules, the per-minute Carrier Common Line charge in section 69.154 of the Commission’s rules, and the per-minute Residual Interconnection Charge in section 69.155 of the Commission’s rules. 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.153, 69.154, 69.155.

⁵⁹¹ See *supra* para. 194 (prohibiting carriers from increasing their current rates, even if the interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate is higher than one or more of its current rates).

⁵⁹² See *supra* section V.B.2.

⁵⁹³ This approach is consistent with Commission precedent set forth in Part V.A, which started reforming intercarrier compensation in the 1980s. There the Commission found that a “transitional plan is necessary” in part because “[i]mmediate recovery of high fixed costs through flat end-user charges might cause a significant number of local exchange service subscribers to cancel local exchange service despite the existence of a Universal Service Fund” and “[s]uch a result would not be consistent with the goals of the Communications Act.” *1983 Access Charge Order*, 93 FCC 2d at 243, para. 4. As a result, the Commission initially limited the flat rate charge imposed on end users, also known as the subscriber line charge or SLC, to \$1.00 (subsequent orders raised the cap on the subscriber line charge for residential users to \$6.50).

⁵⁹⁴ *Competitive Telecomms. Ass’n v. FCC*, 309 F.3d 8, 14 (D.C. Cir. 2002).

⁵⁹⁵ *Southwestern Bell Tel. Co. v. FCC*, 153 F.3d 523, 538 (8th Cir. 1998).

⁵⁹⁶ See, e.g., BellSouth ICC FNPRM Comments at 17 (“In order to avoid the market disruption and dislocation that would be associated with instantaneous implementation of a unified plan, BellSouth proposes a two-phase transition plan.”); CCG ICC FNPRM Comments at 2 (“Any plan that reduces access rates should be phased-in over as long a period as possible, at least for rural carriers, so these companies have time to prepare for and adjust to the economic impact.”); Cincinnati Bell ICC FNPRM Comments at 12 (“The Commission must allow carriers the opportunity to earn this lost access revenue in the transition to a new compensation regime in order to make any regime change

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us in this proceeding, whether the Missoula plan,⁵⁹⁷ the ICF plan,⁵⁹⁸ Verizon's plan,⁵⁹⁹ AT&T's plan,⁶⁰⁰ or the plan from CBICC,⁶⁰¹ ARIC,⁶⁰² NARUC,⁶⁰³ or NASUCA,⁶⁰⁴ has called for the Commission to establish an orderly transition period. We take heed of these commenters and of our statutory responsibilities to ensure a smooth transition to the new regime by setting forth a multi-stage transition plan as part of our comprehensive reform of intercarrier compensation.

227. Moreover, we have several independent sources of legal authority to adopt the transition plan established in this order. For one, section 251 explicitly contemplates our authority to adopt a transitional scheme with regard to access charges. We agree with the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that section 251(g) created a "transitional enforcement mechanism"⁶⁰⁵ preserving the access charge regimes that pre-dated the 1996 Act "until . . . explicitly superseded by regulations *prescribed by the Commission*."⁶⁰⁶ Thus, section 251(g), by its terms, anticipates that the Commission may take action to end the regimes grandfathered by section 251(g), and inherent within the power to supersede the grandfathered access regime is the lesser power to prescribe regulations that determine *how* to transition to a cost-based pricing mechanism—a power that we have twice employed in

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revenue neutral to the affected carriers."); CCAP *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 23 ("The CCAP believes that any reform of the existing intercarrier compensation regimes should take place over a three-to-five-year period . . .").

⁵⁹⁷ Missoula Plan, Executive Summary at 3 ("Recognizing the vast differences among carriers, the Plan creates three different transition schedules for intercarrier compensation rates.").

⁵⁹⁸ Letter from Gary M. Epstein and Richard R. Cameron, Counsel for ICF, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 2 at 3 (filed Aug. 16, 2004).

⁵⁹⁹ Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9–10.

⁶⁰⁰ Letter from Henry Hultquist, Federal Regulatory Vice-President, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach 1 at 4 (filed July 17, 2008).

⁶⁰¹ Letter from Richard M. Rindler, Counsel for CBICC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 1 at 2.

⁶⁰² ARIC *ICC FNPRM* Comments, Attach. 1 at 33.

⁶⁰³ NARUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments, Attach. C at 6.

⁶⁰⁴ Letter from Philip F. McClelland, Senior Assistant Consumer Advocate, NASUCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket 01-92, Attach. 1 at 1 (filed Dec. 14, 2004).

⁶⁰⁵ *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433.

⁶⁰⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 251(g) (emphasis added). At the least, section 251(g) preserved the interstate access regime the Commission had prescribed for all carriers (*see id.* (preserving "obligations (including receipt of compensation) . . . under any . . . regulation, order, or policy of the Commission . . .")) and the intrastate access regime the Bell Operating Companies had agreed to in the Modified Final Judgment. *See United States v. AT&T*, 552 F. Supp. at 169. Recognizing, however, that it would be "incongruous to conclude that Congress was concerned about the effects of potential disruption to the interstate access charge system, but had no such concerns about the effects on analogous intrastate mechanisms," the Commission has consistently interpreted section 251(g) to preserve the intrastate access regime pre-dating the Act for all carriers. *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9168 n.66 (quoting *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15869, para. 732); *see also Competitive Telecomms. Ass'n v. FCC*, 117 F.3d 1068, 1072 (8th Cir. 1997) ("[I]t is clear from the Act that Congress did not intend all access charges to move to cost-based pricing, at least not immediately. The Act plainly preserves certain rate regimes already in place.").

the past to reduce access charges without explicitly superseding that regime.⁶⁰⁷

228. In addition, as the Supreme Court has further held, the Commission has authority to prescribe the requisite pricing methodology that the States will apply in setting rates under section 252(d)(2).⁶⁰⁸ Consistent with our authority, the Commission here is providing for a transitional regime in the public interest to smooth the transition to the new pricing standard adopted by this order. The goal of this transition is to allow gradual changes to consumer rates while providing carriers with sufficient means to preserve their financial integrity as we move to the new intercarrier compensation regime.

229. Significantly, as discussed in greater detail above, although we elect to rely on the sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework for reform, that does not affect the Commission's jurisdiction over traffic or services otherwise subject to federal authority.⁶⁰⁹ With respect to interstate services, the Act has long provided us with the authority to establish just and reasonable "charges, practices, classifications, and regulations."⁶¹⁰ The Commission also has authority over the rates of CMRS providers pursuant to section 332 of the Act.⁶¹¹ The Commission thus retains full authority to adopt transition plans for traffic and services subject to federal jurisdiction, even when it is within the sections 251(b)(5) and 252(d)(2) framework. Because we re-affirm our findings concerning the interstate nature of ISP-bound traffic, it follows that such traffic falls under the Commission's section 201 authority preserved by the Act.⁶¹² This conclusion is reinforced by section 251(i) of the Act. As the Commission explained in the

⁶⁰⁷ See *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd 19613 (reducing interstate access charges for rate-of-return carriers); *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962 (reducing interstate access charges for price-cap carriers), *aff'd in relevant part by Texas Office of Pub. Util. Counsel v. FCC*, 265 F.3d at 324 (reasoning that because the Commission had not yet superseded the pre-Act interstate access regime, it retained authority under section 201(b) to set just and reasonable rates for interstate access); see also *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 433 ("We will assume without deciding that under § 251(g) the Commission might modify LECs' pre-Act 'restrictions' or 'obligations,' pending full implementation of relevant sections of the Act. The Fifth Circuit appeared to make that assumption . . .").

⁶⁰⁸ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 384; see also *id.* at 378 ("The FCC has rulemaking authority to carry out the 'provisions of this Act,' which include §§ 251 and 252, added by the Telecommunications Act of 1996.")

⁶⁰⁹ See *supra* para. 207.

⁶¹⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 201(b).

⁶¹¹ 47 U.S.C. § 332.

⁶¹² We have consistently found that ISP-bound traffic is jurisdictionally interstate. ISP-bound traffic melds a traditional circuit-switched local telephone call over the PSTN to packet switched IP-based Internet communication to Web sites. *Declaratory Ruling*, 14 FCC Rcd at 3702, para. 18; *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9175, para. 52. This conclusion has not been questioned by the D.C. Circuit. See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 431; *Bell Atlantic v. FCC*, 206 F.3d at 5 ("There is no dispute that the Commission has historically been justified in relying on this method when determining whether a particular communication is jurisdictionally interstate"). In other contexts, the Commission has likewise found that services that offer access to the Internet are jurisdictionally interstate services. In 1998, for example, the Commission found that ADSL service is jurisdictionally interstate. See *GTE Tel. Operating Cos.*, CC Docket No. 98-79, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 22466, 22481, para. 28 (1998) ("finding that GTE's ADSL service is subject to federal jurisdiction" and is "an interstate service"). More recently, the Commission has confirmed this ruling for a variety of broadband Internet access services. See *Inquiry Concerning High-Speed Access to the Internet Over Cable and Other Facilities*, GN Docket No. 00-185, CS Docket No. 02-52, Declaratory Ruling and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 17 FCC Rcd 4798, 4832, para. 59 (2002) (finding that, "on an end-to-end analysis," "cable modem service is an interstate information service"); *Wireline Broadband Internet Access Order*, 20 FCC Rcd at 14914, para. 110, *aff'd by Nat'l Cable & Telecomms. Ass'n v. Brand X Internet Servs. (Brand X)*, 545 U.S. 967 (2005); *Appropriate Regulatory Treatment for Broadband Access to the Internet Over Wireless Networks*, WT 07-53, Declaratory Ruling, 22 FCC Rcd 5901, 5911, para. 28 (2007); *United Power Line Council's Petition for Declaratory Ruling Regarding the Classification of Broadband over*

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ISP Remand Order, section 251(i) “expressly affirms the Commission’s role in an evolving telecommunications marketplace, in which Congress anticipates that the Commission will continue to develop appropriate pricing and compensation mechanisms for traffic that falls within the purview of section 201.”⁶¹³ It concluded that section 251(i), together with section 201, equips the Commission with the tools necessary to keep pace with regulatory developments and new technologies.⁶¹⁴ When read together, these statutory sections preserve the Commission’s authority to address new issues that fall within its section 201 authority over interstate traffic, including compensation for the exchange of ISP-bound traffic. Consequently, in the *ISP Remand Order*, the Commission properly exercised its authority under section 201(b) to issue interim pricing rules governing the payment of compensation between carriers for ISP-bound traffic.⁶¹⁵

230. This result is consistent with the D.C. Circuit’s opinion in *Bell Atlantic*, which concluded that the jurisdictional nature of traffic is not dispositive of whether reciprocal compensation is owed under section 251(b)(5).⁶¹⁶ It is also consistent with the court’s *WorldCom* decision, in which the court rejected the Commission’s view that section 251(g) excluded ISP-bound traffic from the scope of section 251(b)(5), but made no other findings.⁶¹⁷ Finally, this result does not run afoul of the Eighth Circuit’s decision on remand from the Supreme Court in the *Iowa Utilities Board* litigation, which held that “the FCC does not have the authority to set the actual prices for the state commissions to use” under section 251(b)(5).⁶¹⁸ At the time of that decision, under the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, section 251(b)(5) applied only to local traffic. Thus, the Eighth Circuit merely held that the Commission could not set reciprocal compensation rates for local traffic. The court did not address the Commission’s authority to set reciprocal compensation rates for interstate traffic.⁶¹⁹ In sum, the Commission plainly has authority to establish pricing rules for interstate traffic, including ISP-bound traffic, under section 201(b), and that authority was preserved by section 251(i).

4. Additional Costs Standard

231. We now turn to reconsideration of our “additional costs” standard for implementing section 252(d)(2). Before describing our new standard, we briefly review the relevant statutory language (continued from previous page) _____

Power Line Internet Access Service as an Information Service, WC 06-10, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 21 FCC Rcd 13281, 13288, para. 11 (2006). In the *Vonage Order*, the Commission likewise found that VoIP services are jurisdictionally interstate, employing the same end-to-end analysis reflected in those other orders. *Vonage Order*, 19 FCC Rcd at 22413–14, paras. 17–18.

⁶¹³ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9174, para. 50.

⁶¹⁴ See *ISP Remand Order*, at 9175, para. 51.

⁶¹⁵ We thus respond to the D.C. Circuit’s remand order in *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434, and the court’s writ of mandamus in *Core Communications*, 531 F.3d at 861–62, which directed the Commission to explain its legal authority to issue the interim pricing rules for ISP-bound traffic adopted in the *ISP Remand Order*. Specifically, we find, for the reasons set forth above and in Part V.B.3, that the Commission had the authority to adopt the interim pricing regime pursuant to our broad authority under section 201(b) to issue rules governing interstate traffic.

⁶¹⁶ See *Bell Atlantic*, 206 F.3d at 5.

⁶¹⁷ See *WorldCom*, 288 F.3d at 434.

⁶¹⁸ *Iowa Utils. Bd. v. FCC*, 219 F.3d 744, 757 (8th Cir. 2000) (*Iowa Utils. II*), *rev’d in part sub nom. Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. 467.

⁶¹⁹ Indeed, as discussed above, the court expressly confirmed the Commission’s independent authority to set rates for CMRS traffic pursuant to section 332 and declined to vacate the Commission’s pricing rules as they applied in the context of CMRS service. See *supra* para. 214; *Iowa Utils. I*, 120 F.3d at 800 n.21.

and the Commission's implementation of the “additional costs” standard in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*. We then explain the importance of incremental cost in regulated pricing. Next we examine the incremental cost of call termination on modern networks. Finally we describe in detail the “additional costs” standard we adopt in this order.

a. Background

232. Section 252(d)(2)(A) sets forth the standard that state commissions, in arbitrating interconnection disputes, should apply in setting the “charges for transport and termination of traffic.” That section states that “[f]or the purposes of compliance ... with section 251(b)(5), a State commission shall not consider the terms and conditions for reciprocal compensation to be just and reasonable unless (i) such terms and conditions provide for the mutual and reciprocal recovery by each carrier of costs associated with the transport and termination on each carrier’s network facilities of calls that originate on the network facilities of the other carrier; and (ii) such terms and conditions determine such costs on the basis of a reasonable approximation of the additional costs of terminating such calls.”⁶²⁰ Section 252(d)(2)(B) provides that the preceding standard “shall not be construed (i) to preclude arrangements that afford the mutual recovery of costs through offsetting of reciprocal obligations, including arrangements that waive mutual recover (such as bill and keep arrangements); or (ii) to authorize the Commission or any State commission to engage in any rate regulation proceedings to establish with particularity the additional costs of transporting or terminating calls, or to require carriers to maintain records with respect to the additional costs of such calls.”⁶²¹

233. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission adopted implementing rules interpreting section 252’s pricing standards for interconnection and UNEs (section 252(d)(1)), and for reciprocal compensation (section 252(d)(2)). In setting the pricing methodology for interconnection and UNEs, the Commission directed the states to employ a forward-looking, long-run average incremental cost methodology, known as TELRIC.⁶²² The TELRIC methodology assumes that the relevant increment of output is all current and reasonably projected future demand, (i.e., it is designed to calculate the total cost of building a new, efficient network).⁶²³ The Commission found that TELRIC rates should also include a reasonable allocation of forward-looking common costs, including overhead costs. Thus, TELRIC calculates the long-run average incremental cost of a network element. In setting the pricing methodology for reciprocal compensation, the Commission concluded that the statutory pricing standards for interconnection and UNEs (section 252(d)(1)), and for transport and termination of traffic (section 252(d)(2)), were “sufficiently similar” to permit the use of the same TELRIC methodology for establishing rates under both statutory provisions.⁶²⁴

⁶²⁰ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A).

⁶²¹ 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(B).

⁶²² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15515, 15844–96, paras. 29, 672–732.

⁶²³ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15850–57, paras. 690–703, *see also* 47 C.F.R. § 51.505.

⁶²⁴ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16023, para. 1054. In applying the TELRIC methodology to reciprocal compensation, the Commission found that the “additional costs” to the LEC of terminating a call that originates on another carrier’s network “primarily consists of the traffic-sensitive component of local switching.” For purposes of setting rates, the Commission concluded that “only that portion of the forward-looking, economic cost of end-office switching that is recovered on a usage-sensitive basis constitutes an ‘additional cost’ to be recovered through termination charges.” *Id.* at 16024–25, para. 1057. The Commission excluded non-traffic sensitive costs, such as the costs of local loops and line ports. *Id.* Further, the Commission concluded that termination rates established pursuant to the TELRIC methodology should include a reasonable allocation of

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234. Market developments since the adoption of the *Local Competition First Report and Order* demonstrate that application of the TELRIC methodology to reciprocal compensation has led to “excessively high reciprocal compensation rates.”⁶²⁵ More specifically, following the Commission’s order, certain carriers began designing business plans to take advantage of above-cost reciprocal compensation payments by becoming a net recipient of local traffic. The most prevalent example of regulatory arbitrage for reciprocal compensation is ISP-bound traffic where the Commission found evidence that “CLECs appear to have targeted customers that primarily or solely receive traffic, particularly ISPs, in order to become net recipients” of reciprocal compensation payments.⁶²⁶ As a result, the Commission has found that reciprocal compensation rates “do not simply compensate the terminating network, but also appear to generate profits for each minute that is terminated, thus creating a potential windfall.”⁶²⁷ In short, the evidence indicates that application of the TELRIC methodology to reciprocal compensation has not led to rates that accurately reflect a carrier’s “additional costs” as the Commission initially envisioned and Congress intended. Rather, the Commission’s existing pricing standard has led to rates that not only vary significantly among states,⁶²⁸ but are generally too high, and which ultimately create regulatory arbitrage opportunities. Based on this evidence, and as detailed further below, we therefore conclude that we need to revise the current reciprocal compensation pricing methodology to align our standard more closely with the statutory text and with economic theory to eliminate, as far as possible, opportunities for regulatory arbitrage.

b. The Importance of Incremental Cost In Regulated Pricing

235. To provide a framework for our reconsideration of the proper “additional costs” methodology, we begin with a brief overview of long-standing principles for public utility pricing. As explained below, we believe the traditional economic definition of incremental cost, as applied to multiproduct firms, is most appropriate for setting intercarrier compensation rates. The Commission’s existing TELRIC standard governing reciprocal compensation deviates from this more efficient version of

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forward-looking common costs because, the Commission reasoned, a rate equal to incremental costs may not compensate carriers fully when common costs are present. *Id.* at 16025, para. 1058. For transport, the Commission required the calling party’s LEC to compensate the called party’s LEC for the “additional costs” associated with transporting a call subject to section 251(b)(5) from the carriers’ interconnection point to the called party’s end office and for the additional costs of terminating the call to the called party. *Id.* at 16008–58, paras. 1027–118; see also 47 C.F.R. §§ 51.701(c), (d).

⁶²⁵ *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9185, para. 75); see also Letter from Norina Moy, Director, Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket No. 04-36 (filed Sept. 26, 2008) (Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 Ex Parte Letter).

⁶²⁶ *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616, para. 11.

⁶²⁷ See, e.g., *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616, para. 11; see also *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4698 n.67 (“[R]eciprocal compensation rates often substantially exceed the per-minute incremental cost of terminating a call and therefore create a potential windfall for carriers that serve customers that primarily or exclusively receive traffic.”); *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9192, para. 87 (“[T]here may be a considerable margin between current reciprocal compensation rates and the actual costs of transport and termination.”); BellSouth *ICC NPRM Comments* at 9 (“[R]eciprocal compensation payments enabled carriers to offer services to their customers at rates that bore little relationship to actual costs and provided the recipients of reciprocal compensation an advantage over their competitors.”); Verizon *2000 Remand of ISP Declaratory Ruling Public Notice Comments* at 11–12 (noting that competitive LECs with ISP customers reap a “windfall profit” because of high reciprocal compensation rates).

⁶²⁸ See, e.g., Eastern Rural Telecom Ass’n *ICC FNPRM Comments* at 2–3 (“Depending on the assumptions used to develop a company’s TELRIC study, the results can vary significantly and be open to challenge.”).

incremental cost, and is likely to lead to rates that significantly exceed efficient levels. We also consider evidence in the record concerning costs of switches and fiber.

236. In economic theory generally and in its application to regulation, the relationship of price and marginal cost is of fundamental importance. Marginal cost can be simply defined as the rate of change in total cost when output changes by an infinitesimal unit. In economics, the term incremental cost refers to a discrete change in total cost when output changes by any non-infinitesimal amount, which might range from a single unit to a large increment representing a firm's entire output.⁶²⁹ The terms additional costs and avoidable costs are commonly used to refer to incremental costs resulting from an increase or a decrease in output respectively.⁶³⁰

237. In a competitive market, it is assumed that both consumers and producers independently will choose outputs to purchase or to supply on the basis of a market price. In standard economic analysis, this price is determined by the intersection of a downward sloping demand function, which represents consumer valuations for additional units of consumption, and an upward sloping supply function, which represents the marginal cost of supplying an additional unit. The competitive price is efficient in the following sense. At any other price, consumer demands would no longer be equal to producer supply, and market transactions would be limited to the smaller of the two terms.⁶³¹ At this level of output, consumers would value an additional unit of output more than the cost of producing it as determined by the marginal cost function. Hence both consumers and producers could be made better off by increasing output by a small amount.⁶³² When price is equal to the competitive price, no alternative price can be found such that both consumer and producers are better off.

238. *Forward-looking versus Historical Cost:* When prices are determined in a regulated market, similar reasoning applies. In this context, there is a large amount of literature on practical rules and procedures that must be considered to achieve an outcome that is as close as possible to a fully efficient one.⁶³³ The cost of any economic resource is equal to its value in the best alternative use. The cost which a regulated firm incurs in producing a particular output is therefore equal to the value of the economic resources that are used to produce it, and which are therefore no longer available for the production of alternative goods and services. It follows that from the standpoint of economic efficiency,

⁶²⁹ If $C(q)$ represents the cost of producing an output q and Δq represents an increment of output, then incremental cost is equal to $C(q+\Delta q) - C(q)$. If incremental cost is used as a guide to pricing, then price should be set equal to the average incremental cost $\frac{C(q + \Delta q) - C(q)}{\Delta q}$. If there are no fixed costs and initial output $q = 0$, then

incremental cost pricing is equivalent to average cost pricing. If Δq is small, then incremental cost pricing approximates marginal cost pricing. Cf. *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15844, para. 675.

⁶³⁰ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 65–66. See also PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY RATES at 393.

⁶³¹ If price is greater than the competitive level, consumer demand is less than supply, and demand would determine market volume. If price is less than the competitive level, then producers voluntarily would supply no more than the amount at which marginal cost is equal to price.

⁶³² Where the market price exceeds marginal cost, there will be an associated deadweight loss in social welfare. The deadweight loss represents the loss in consumer plus producer surplus caused by a deviation from the competitive equilibrium. See, e.g., DENNIS W. CARLTON & JEFFREY M. PERLOFF, MODERN INDUSTRIAL ORGANIZATION 84 (1990); KENNETH E. TRAIN, OPTIMAL REGULATION 185 (1992) (OPTIMAL REGULATION).

⁶³³ See, e.g., Ronald. H. Coase, *The Theory of Public Utility Pricing and Its Applications*, 1 BELL J. ECON. 113, 113–128 (1970) (*Theory of Public Utility Pricing*); 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 63–86.

the only costs that are relevant in pricing decisions of a regulated firm are current or future costs, and that historical costs can be ignored.⁶³⁴ We acknowledge that economists and industry experts have often debated the relative merits of forward-looking (or reproduction) cost versus historical (or original) capital cost in administering rate-of-return regulation,⁶³⁵ and that regulators, including state regulators and this Commission, have continued to use historical cost in rate setting for smaller, primarily rural telephone companies. Nevertheless, since the adoption of the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission has consistently concluded that it believes that forward-looking costs are the most appropriate measure of cost.⁶³⁶ In this order, we reaffirm our conclusion that forward-looking costs should form the basis for regulation in a uniform intercarrier compensation regime.

239. *Short-Run versus Long-Run Incremental Cost:* Economists have also debated whether it is appropriate to use short-run or long-run incremental cost as a guide for regulatory pricing.⁶³⁷ Short-run incremental cost refers to the cost of an increment of demand when some inputs to production are in fixed supply. Long-run incremental cost refers to the cost of an increment when all inputs are variable. In order to set prices so as to maximize economic efficiency at any particular point in time, it is clear that short-run incremental cost is the appropriate concept.⁶³⁸ For example, if an airline carrier has empty seats for a particular scheduled flight, then it would make sense to sell capacity for those seats at any price that would recover the small additional costs of fuel and amenities for an additional passenger. Pricing based on short-run incremental cost, however, necessarily implies that prices can be adjusted freely and perhaps continuously during the day.⁶³⁹ Moreover, in a regulatory context, such flexibility is likely infeasible.

240. Short- or intermediate-run costs might also be advocated on practical grounds, since some productive inputs (e.g., poles and conduits) can have extremely long lives. Nevertheless, regulators have traditionally relied on long-run incremental costs rather than short-run incremental costs in setting regulated prices. First, setting prices on the basis of short-run incremental cost may mean that a carrier would not recover its average total cost of investment over the life of the asset.⁶⁴⁰ Second, to the extent that forward-looking costs are used, long-run incremental costs are more naturally and easily accommodated, since a forward looking cost study can legitimately assume that all inputs are variable. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission, in adopting its TELRIC methodology, explained that “[t]his ‘long run’ approach ensures that rates recover not only the operating costs that vary in the short run, but also the fixed investment costs that, while not variable in the short term, are necessary inputs directly attributable to providing the element.”⁶⁴¹ We reaffirm here the Commission’s decision in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* that long-run incremental cost rather than short-run

⁶³⁴ *Theory of Public Utility Pricing*, 1 BELL J. ECON. at 122; Alexander C. Larson, *An Economic Guide to Competitive Standards in Telecommunications Regulation*, 1 COMM.LAW CONSP. 31, 47 n.100 (1993) (quoting *Theory of Public Utility Pricing*, 1 BELL J. ECON. at 121–22).

⁶³⁵ See, e.g., 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 109–16.

⁶³⁶ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15813, 15846, paras. 620, 679.

⁶³⁷ See 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 70–75, 83–103; see also PHILLIPS, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 390–91 (rev. ed. 1969); PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC UTILITY RATES at 417–25.

⁶³⁸ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 71; DANIEL F. SPULBER, REGULATION AND MARKETS 234 (1989) (REGULATION AND MARKETS).

⁶³⁹ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 84.

⁶⁴⁰ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 88.

⁶⁴¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15851, para. 692.

incremental cost is the appropriate cost concept.⁶⁴²

241. *Peak Load Pricing*: Closely related to the question of short-run versus long-run costing is the issue of peak load pricing. When demand varies systematically by time of day, day of the week, or over longer periods, there may be periods of time when there is significant excess capacity, since productive inputs clearly cannot vary with such frequency. In such cases, economic efficiency might require that prices should vary by time or day or over longer periods even in the long run.⁶⁴³ For example, many wireless telephone carriers offer free minutes of usage during weekends or evenings. Although these arguments are indisputable, it has proven difficult in practice to incorporate peak load pricing principles into regulated rate proceedings.⁶⁴⁴ Accordingly, we conclude, as the Commission did in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, that we should not require peak-load pricing as part of an intercarrier compensation regime, although we affirm that carriers should be free to voluntarily negotiate agreements including peak pricing principles.

242. *Common Costs*: Telecommunications carriers are multiproduct firms which provide a large array of services to different groups of consumers. Within the category of traditional telephony, these services include call origination, call termination, local transport, and either access to long distance transport or long distance service through an affiliated carrier. As networks evolve, the number of services that a telecommunications network can provide is rapidly expanding to include Internet access and other data services and, in some cases, video distribution. Many of these services share common facilities.⁶⁴⁵ For example, a copper loop can be used to provide analog voice service as well as data service using DSL technology. The cost of the loop is therefore common to both voice and DSL services. The incremental cost of voice service, assuming that DSL is already provided, therefore does not include any of the long run incremental cost of the loop itself. Similarly, the incremental cost of DSL, assuming voice is already provided, includes only that portion of the loop cost that may be required to condition the loop to meet the higher quality standards that may be required for data transmission.

243. *Methodology for Computing Incremental Cost in Multiproduct Firms*: Common cost and its relationship to incremental cost in multiproduct firms can be more precisely defined as follows using an analysis developed by Faulhaber, Baumol, and others.⁶⁴⁶ Under this approach, one imagines a multiproduct firm in which a forward looking cost function is known, which allows one to compute the “stand alone cost” of any possible subset of products. For example, if the set of products is indexed by the set $N = \{1, \dots, n\}$, then the stand alone cost of the entire firm can be represented by the value $C(N)$. The incremental cost of any individual product j contained in N can then be represented by the value $IC(j) = C(N) - C(N - j)$, where $C(N - j)$ represents the stand alone cost of producing every product in the set N

⁶⁴² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16023, para. 1054.

⁶⁴³ 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 89.

⁶⁴⁴ See *Local Competition First Report and Order* at 15878, paras. 755–57. See also 1 KAHN, THE ECONOMICS OF REGULATION at 91–93.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15845, para. 676 (“The term ‘common costs’ refers to costs that are incurred in connection with the production of multiple products or services, and remains unchanged as the relative proportion of those products or services varies (e.g., the salaries of corporate managers).”).

⁶⁴⁶ See, e.g., Gerald R. Faulhaber, *Cross-Subsidization: Pricing in Public Enterprises*, 65 AM. ECON. REV. 966, 966–77 (1975). Faulhaber’s objective in the paper was to define a test for cross subsidy, which could precisely define the maximum and minimum prices that a regulated firm should be allowed to charge to any subset of customers; WILLIAM J. BAUMOL ET AL., *CONTESTABLE MARKETS AND THE THEORY OF INDUSTRY STRUCTURE* 351–56 (1982); William J. Baumol, *Minimum and Maximum Pricing Principles for Residual Regulation*, in *Current Issues in PUBLIC UTILITY ECONOMICS* (A. Danielson & D. Kamerschen eds., 1983).

except product j . Under this definition, the incremental cost may be viewed as the *additional costs* of adding product j to a firm currently producing products $(N - j)$. Alternatively, it may be viewed as the cost that may be *avoided* if the firm, currently producing products 1 through n , decides not to produce product j . The common cost for the firm as a whole is then equal to $C(N) - \sum_{j \in N} IC(j)$. When there is

significant sharing of facilities used in providing groups of services to customers, common costs are typically positive, and may be a significant portion of the firm's total cost.

244. *Multiproduct Incremental Cost versus TELRIC*: In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission adopted a pricing methodology, which it called Total Element Long Run Incremental Cost or TELRIC. Under the TELRIC methodology, prices for UNEs and interconnection would be determined by estimating the forward-looking cost of individual network elements, which the Commission defined as “physical facilities of the network, together with the features, functions, and capabilities associated with those facilities.”⁶⁴⁷ In adopting the TELRIC methodology, the Commission determined that forward-looking costs should be “based on the least cost, most efficient network . . . technology,” assuming current wire center locations.⁶⁴⁸ It further determined that the relevant increment should “be the entire quantity of the network element provided.”⁶⁴⁹ The Commission concluded that “forward-looking common costs shall be allocated among elements and services in a reasonable manner”⁶⁵⁰ In choosing to estimate the forward-looking cost of the entire network element, the Commission acknowledged that, when a requesting carrier leased access to that element, it would have exclusive control over that element.⁶⁵¹

245. With respect to reciprocal compensation, the Commission determined that “the ‘additional cost’ of terminating a call . . . primarily consists of the traffic-sensitive component of local switching.”⁶⁵² Nevertheless, the only non traffic-sensitive cost of the local switch that the Commission required states to exclude was the cost of line ports.⁶⁵³ Similarly, in the rules that the Commission adopted regarding “shared transmission facilities between tandem switches and end offices,” the Commission allowed the full forward-looking cost of those facilities to be recovered through usage sensitive charges.⁶⁵⁴ Thus, with the exception of requiring recovery of the cost of line ports through flat-rated charges, the Commission's TELRIC rules permitted the full forward-looking cost of the local switch, tandem switch, and shared interoffice transmission facilities, including a reasonable allocation of common costs, to be recovered through usage-based charges. In effect, the Commission's TELRIC methodology permitted average-cost pricing using a forward-looking cost methodology.

246. The TELRIC methodology thus differs significantly from the definition of incremental cost for multiproduct firms proposed by Faulhaber and others. First, unlike TELRIC, the traditional

⁶⁴⁷ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15631, para. 258.

⁶⁴⁸ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15848–49, paras. 683–85.

⁶⁴⁹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15850, para. 690.

⁶⁵⁰ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15852–53, para. 696.

⁶⁵¹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15693, para. 385.

⁶⁵² *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057.

⁶⁵³ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057. *Cf.* 47 U.S.C. § 51.509(b) (requiring only that line port costs of the unbundled local switching element be recovered through a flat-rated charge).

⁶⁵⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 51.509(d).

economic approach for determining the incremental cost of a single service excludes all common costs. Second, although the TELRIC methodology is essentially an average cost methodology, the traditional economic approach focuses on identifying the additional forward-looking cost that a network would incur if it provided an additional service—in this case call termination. Under the traditional economic definition, the incremental cost of call termination would be determined by estimating the stand alone cost of a network which incorporates all existing services except call termination (including call origination, switching, etc.) and then subtracting this amount from a comparable estimate of the total cost of providing all the same existing services, including call termination. As should be obvious, the incremental cost of call termination under the traditional economic definition should be significantly lower than that calculated under a TELRIC methodology.

247. *The Relevance of Multi-part Pricing:* One common criticism of incremental cost pricing is that it may not permit a firm to recover its total costs, particularly if there are significant common costs.⁶⁵⁵ Economists have pointed out, however, that multi-part pricing regimes can potentially lead to more efficient outcomes than uniform prices set equal to either marginal cost or average cost.⁶⁵⁶ For example, if the firm is able to charge a fixed monthly fee and a variable usage charge, then it is possible for the firm to set the usage charge at or close to marginal cost and recover any residual costs through the fixed charge. In this case, the regulator must take account of both subscription and usage elasticities in order to minimize the possibility that higher fixed fees will cause some subscribers to drop off the network.⁶⁵⁷ We note that, in the access charge regime, the Commission recognized the efficiencies associated with multi-part pricing, even if it failed to reduce usage-based charges to marginal or incremental cost.

c. The Incremental Cost of Call Termination on Modern Networks

248. We now consider the evidence in the record concerning the incremental cost of terminating calls on modern telecommunications networks. We note at the outset that there appear to be no cost studies or analyses in the record that attempt to estimate the termination costs using Faulhaber's definition of incremental cost. Thus, we would expect the cost estimates in the record to be significantly lower if they had been calculated using Faulhaber's definition.

249. We consider first evidence concerning the cost of termination on modern circuit switches. We note that, in 1996, when the Commission adopted the TELRIC methodology, circuit switches and fiber optic transmission facilities were generally considered the "least-cost, most efficient" currently available technology. And it appears that state commissions in interconnection arbitrations analyzed the forward-looking costs of circuit switches and fiber optic transmission facilities in developing TELRIC rates. Sprint Nextel filed an *ex parte* in which it analyzed state UNE rates for unbundled switching and common transport.⁶⁵⁸ Sprint Nextel reports that the national weighted average price per minute for unbundled local switching was \$0.00058 (with individual rates ranging from a low of \$0.00004 to a high

⁶⁵⁵ See, e.g., REGULATION AND MARKETS at 122–23.

⁶⁵⁶ See, e.g., *Theory of Public Utility Pricing*, 1 BELL J. ECON. at 117–20; OPTIMAL REGULATION at 191–213.

⁶⁵⁷ Demand for subscription is generally estimated to be significantly less elastic than demand for usage. See Mercatus Center Sept. 22, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3 n.15; Jerry Hausman & Howard Shelanski, *Economic Welfare and Telecommunications Regulation: The E-Rate Policy for Universal-Service Subsidies*, 16 YALE J. ON REG. 19, 39 (1999) (estimating elasticity of demand for subscription to be -.005, whereas elasticity of demand for long-distance service is closer to -.7); *Effects of Breakup of AT&T*, 83 AM. ECON. REV. at 182 (estimating elasticity of demand for basic access at -.005 and elasticity of demand for long-distances service between -.25 and -1.2).

⁶⁵⁸ See Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter. The data used in the analysis were obtained from the March 2006 "Survey of Unbundled Network Element Prices in the United States."

of \$0.0061). Similarly the national weighted average price per minute for common transport was \$0.00057 (with individual rates ranging from a low of \$0.00010 to a high of \$0.00727). Sprint Nextel further observes that “the rates for companies in the survey with a relatively small number of lines were often lower than the rates for companies with a large number of lines, indicating scale and scope economies do not significantly affect the cost of traffic termination.”⁶⁵⁹ As Sprint Nextel notes, these rates are all based on the TELRIC methodology and thus represent estimates of average, traffic-sensitive forwarding-looking costs, plus an allocation of common cost and overheads.⁶⁶⁰ These estimates, by definition, will significantly exceed incremental cost estimates using the Faulhaber definition; therefore they provide an upper bound on the rates that may result under a Faulhaber approach to incremental cost.

250. Some additional evidence concerning the incremental cost of terminating calls on modern circuit switches can be gleaned from a declaration filed by three economists in support of the Intercarrier Compensation Forum (ICF) plan.⁶⁶¹ The economists contend that modern circuit switches are to a large extent non-traffic sensitive.⁶⁶² According to the authors, whereas earlier generations of switching technologies had large shared resources that could be commandeered by any line needing to place or receive a telephone call, most of the resources in a digital switch are dedicated to individual lines through line ports and trunk ports.⁶⁶³ In addition, according to the authors, because of the “massive increases in computing power offered by modern microchips,” modern circuit switches include “call processing capacity . . . [that] is adequate to serve all reasonably offered demand.”⁶⁶⁴ In other words, modern switches are designed to be non-blocking, which would suggest that the incremental cost of termination is zero. The declaration thus concludes that the incremental cost of call termination on modern circuit switches should be de minimis.

251. The economists’ declaration further argues that the incremental costs of adding additional fiber optic transmission capacity similarly are low. They contend that fiber optic technologies have large fixed costs associated with supporting structures (poles, trenches and conduits) and relatively low incremental costs of increasing the capacity of each fiber cable by installing improved laser transmission equipment (which in many cases is based on technological advances made subsequent to the initial fiber deployment). For these reasons, they conclude that “once a fiber cable has been laid on a route, the costs of increasing its transmission capacity are relatively small, so extra minutes of demand result in very little incremental costs. We note that this analysis suggests, at a minimum, that the incremental cost of adding capacity is significantly less—and likely orders of magnitude less—than the forward looking average cost of capacity, as estimated under TELRIC.

252. AT&T submitted evidence that attempts to estimate the incremental cost of a modern

⁶⁵⁹ Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 3–4.

⁶⁶⁰ We note that NuVox disputes some of Sprint Nextel’s assumptions. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Brad Mutschelknaus & John J. Heitmann, Counsel to NuVox, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 and WC Docket No. 04-36 (filed Oct. 27, 2008) (NuVox Oct. 27 *Ex Parte* Letter). There is insufficient information in the two *ex parte* submissions for us to resolve this dispute. Carriers remain free to raise issues for consideration in the course of state proceedings.

⁶⁶¹ Richard N. Clarke et al., *Economic Benefits from Reform of Intercarrier Compensation (ICF Economists)*, attached to ICF ICC FNPRM Reply, Errata, App. A.

⁶⁶² *ICF Economists* at 22.

⁶⁶³ *ICF Economists* at 20–21.

⁶⁶⁴ *ICF Economists* at 21.

softswitch.⁶⁶⁵ AT&T maintains that, to estimate the incremental cost of a softswitch, it is necessary to estimate two parameters: the total investment associated with a softswitch, and the percentage of this investment that is traffic-sensitive.⁶⁶⁶ Using what it claims are “conservative” estimates, AT&T first compares the estimated investment cost per line of a Class 5 circuit switch with the estimated investment cost per line of a modern softswitch and finds that the investment cost per-line of a softswitch is significantly lower.⁶⁶⁷ Although it estimates that the investment cost of a Class 5 switch is approximately \$100 per line, it finds that the likely investment cost of a softswitch is between \$34 and \$80 per line.⁶⁶⁸ AT&T then considers the likely percentage of the investment costs per line that are traffic-sensitive, and concludes that, depending on the particular softswitch, the traffic-sensitive costs are likely to be between zero and 20 percent of the total investment cost of the switch.⁶⁶⁹ Using the higher estimate of 20 percent traffic-sensitive costs, and assuming that each line carries an average of 1400 minutes a month, AT&T derives a traffic sensitive incremental cost per minute of between \$0.00010 and \$0.00024.⁶⁷⁰ For the other softswitch that AT&T considers, however, the traffic-sensitive incremental costs of termination would be zero. Although we do not necessarily accept the precise estimates contained in AT&T’s *ex parte* letter, we note that its analysis suggests that the incremental traffic-sensitive costs of modern softswitches are likely to be significantly lower than those of circuit switches and possibly zero, both because the investment cost per line is lower and because the percentage of traffic-sensitive costs to total costs is lower for modern softswitches.

253. Windstream Communications, Inc. and NuVox subsequently filed *ex parte* letters criticizing AT&T’s analysis of the traffic sensitive costs of a softswitch,⁶⁷¹ and AT&T filed a response.⁶⁷² Essentially, both Windstream and NuVox criticize specific elements of AT&T’s analysis. In addition, Windstream argues that it would be grossly inefficient for a rural carrier to immediately replace circuit switching equipment with softswitch technology, while NuVox contends that even a forward-looking network design would not consist entirely of soft switches. Significantly, NuVox criticizes AT&T for failing to apply the TELRIC methodology, and NuVox recalculates AT&T’s estimates using TELRIC. Because we expressly reject use of the TELRIC methodology for purposes of setting reciprocal compensation rates, we conclude that many of the NuVox challenges are moot. To the extent that NuVox and Windstream are challenging cost assumptions that may be applied by states pursuant to our new additional costs methodology, such issues may be raised for consideration by the state commission during

⁶⁶⁵ Letter from Henry Hultquist, Vice President-Regulatory Affairs, AT&T Services, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 05-337, 96-45, 99-68, 07-135 (filed Oct. 4, 2008) (AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁶⁶⁶ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁶⁶⁷ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3.

⁶⁶⁸ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2–3.

⁶⁶⁹ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3–4.

⁶⁷⁰ AT&T Oct. 4, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 4.

⁶⁷¹ Letter from Eric N. Einhorn, Vice President, Federal Government Affairs, Windstream Communications, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-122, 07-135, 08-152 (filed Oct. 27, 2008) (Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from John J. Heitmann, Counsel for NuVox, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 24, 2008) (NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

⁶⁷² See Letter from Henry Hultquist, Vice President Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 99-68, 01-92 and WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135 (Oct. 28, 2008) (AT&T’s response appears specific to the NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter).

the cost proceeding to establish the uniform reciprocal compensation rate. We feel compelled, however, to point out a few of the most critical mistakes and misconceptions contained in the Windstream and NuVox ex parte letters.

254. First, Windstream argues that it is somehow inappropriate to consider the additional costs of softswitches in setting termination rates because it would be economically infeasible for an incumbent LEC to replace all its existing circuit switches with softswitches.⁶⁷³ This argument fundamentally misconstrues the purpose of a forward-looking cost methodology. The adoption of a forward-looking cost standard does not imply in any way that existing carriers should replace fully functional plant and equipment simply because a more recent vintage of replacement equipment is available. Forward-looking costs are simply a measure of the economic value of future investments, and in a competitive marketplace, these values should determine the appropriate investment decisions regarding replacement of existing plant. More importantly, these values should be used as an appropriate guide in setting efficient prices for the utilization of existing plant and equipment. Second, although both Windstream and NuVox raise objections to AT&T's cost analysis, neither they nor AT&T actually attempt to estimate the incremental cost of call termination. For example, both Windstream and NuVox argue that AT&T's estimates of the cost of investment in forward-looking softswitch technologies are flawed because of the assumptions made about the number of lines served per switch.⁶⁷⁴ Although this may be a valid issue, as it relates to the extent to which softswitch technologies are scalable for deployment in wire centers with different numbers of final customers, the dispute does not really address the issue of the incremental cost of call termination. Third, NuVox claims that the absence of line cards in softswitches is evidence that all switch costs are traffic sensitive.⁶⁷⁵ This analysis ignores the potentially large fixed costs associated with a softswitch that are not related to line ports. Since softswitches resemble small computers, the appropriate analogy for estimating incremental cost would be the cost of additional memory cards, which could be inserted into the CPU. Fourth, NuVox maintains that both common costs to the firm as a whole and land and building costs associated with switching equipment should be included in any traffic sensitive cost computed for purposes of reciprocal compensation.⁶⁷⁶ As explained above, we conclude that common costs should no longer be included in calculating the incremental cost of call termination.

255. Another approach to estimating the incremental cost of call termination is to examine the technology of next generation networks in which voice calls are carried on the same network platform as data and video services delivered to the same customer. Telecommunications carriers are currently deploying such networks at a rapid pace, although the transition to the new technology is far from complete. Nevertheless, most experts believe that IP technologies will be used to deliver the predominant share of voice and data traffic within a few years. Packet technologies, and the resulting commingling of voice and data traffic, make possible a dramatic reduction in the cost of originating and terminating voice traffic in the network. In addition, although the costs of circuit based switching technologies are difficult to quantify using public data sources, the Internet itself provides a variety of sources which can be used to provide at least a rough estimate of the costs associated with a next generation network.

256. Consider the case of a single customer who subscribes to a next generation network offering a full range of voice, video and data services. Suppose that this customer makes exactly one voice call lasting five minutes during each hour of the busy period (which we will unrealistically assume

⁶⁷³ See Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁶⁷⁴ See Windstream Oct. 27, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2-3; NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 8-9.

⁶⁷⁵ See NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 14-15.

⁶⁷⁶ See NuVox Oct. 24, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 18 & n.40.

to last for 16 hours every day of the month). High quality (ISDN level) voice service requires a channel capacity of 64 kbps. Ignoring the possibility of signal compression, and making a conservative allowance for packet header overhead,⁶⁷⁷ we assume that the single call per hour requires a network capacity of 100 kbps. This capacity requirement translates to 12,800 bytes per second, or 0.0000128 Gigabytes to be available for the duration of the call.⁶⁷⁸ Publicly available estimates of the cost of serving residential customers on a broadband network range from \$0.1 Gigabytes per month to \$0.5 Gigabytes per month.⁶⁷⁹ These estimates include the cost of the servers, routers and fiber links necessary to provide service to the residential customer, but do not include the substantial cost of the local broadband loop.⁶⁸⁰ The hypothetical consumer described above places a demand of 0.000512 Gigabytes per month, and using the upper limit on the estimated cost, we estimate a monthly incremental cost to the consumer of delivering this level of voice service at 0.0256 cents per month.⁶⁸¹ Under these conservative assumptions the cost, on a per-minute basis, would be 0.00001 cents per minute.⁶⁸² Even if the cost estimates used above are wrong by several orders of magnitude, it is clear that the cost of voice traffic on a broadband network is vanishingly small.⁶⁸³ Although we are not directing the states to consider the incremental cost of terminating voice telecommunications on such next generation networks,⁶⁸⁴ we find that, as carriers move to an all IP broadband world, the incremental costs of terminating voice calls should drop dramatically.

d. Reconsideration of Additional Costs Standard

⁶⁷⁷ See, e.g., VoIP-Info.org, Bandwidth Consumption, <http://www.voip-info.org/wiki-Bandwidth+consumption> (last visited Oct. 25, 2008); Westbay, Voice over IP Bandwidth, <http://www.erlang.com/bandwidth.html> (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (investigating bandwidth requirements for the transmission of voice over an IP based network).

⁶⁷⁸ In this analysis, we ignore the additional economies that can result because multiple packet streams for voice traffic can be transmitted simultaneously over the same channel capacity.

⁶⁷⁹ The lower estimate is contained in the Wikipedia entry “Broadband Internet Access,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broadband_Internet_access (last visited Oct. 11, 2008). The higher estimate is contained in the trade publication Telephony Online, “OFC: BellSouth Chief Architect warns of HD VOD costs,” March 7, 2006, http://telephonyonline.com/iptv/news/BellSouth_VOD_costs_030706 (last visited Oct. 11, 2008). Both estimates are also reported in David Clark, A Simple Cost Model for Broadband Access: What Will Video Cost?, Presentation at the Telecommunications Policy Research Conference (Sept. 28, 2008), available at <http://tprcweb.com/files/Cost%20analysis%20TPRC.pdf>.

⁶⁸⁰ The cost of the local loop is clearly a common cost that is shared by all of the voice, video, and data services consumed by the subscriber and should not be included under any reasonable definition of incremental cost.

⁶⁸¹ Broadband Internet service is typically priced on the basis of capacity—either the maximum instantaneous upload and download speed or, as in this example, total monthly traffic. A rigorous application of true incremental cost pricing would require measuring each customer’s contribution to system costs, which primarily consists of the delays or packet losses imposed on other users. For this purpose, minutes of use are largely irrelevant.

⁶⁸² These estimated costs do not include the costs of billing, advertising, or other customer care expenses. As with the case of the local loop, we believe that such costs should not be included in any measure of long run incremental cost of call termination.

⁶⁸³ It is very unlikely that the cost estimates are significantly low. Telecommunications carriers continue to upgrade their networks to provide precisely the range of video and data services that the articles in a previous footnote were concerned with. Indeed, the BellSouth estimate was given with concern that such services would not be viable unless that estimate of cost could be reduced in the near future. Very similar arguments were made exactly 20 years ago in ROBERT M. PEPPER, THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: INTEGRATED BROADBAND NETWORKS, REGULATORY POLICY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE (FCC, OPP Working Paper No. 24, Nov. 1988), available at http://www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/OPP/working_papers/oppwp24.pdf.

⁶⁸⁴ See *infra* section V.C.1.

257. We adopt a new “additional costs” methodology using the traditional economic definition of the incremental cost of a service produced by a multiproduct firm, rather than continuing to rely on the TELRIC methodology.⁶⁸⁵ The Supreme Court has made clear that an “initial agency interpretation is not instantly carved in stone. On the contrary, the agency . . . must consider varying interpretations and the wisdom of its policy on a continuing basis,” for example in response to changed factual circumstance, or a change in administrations.”⁶⁸⁶ Consistent with this, the Commission, in its 2005 *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, solicited comment on whether the Commission should reinterpret “additional costs” to mean “incremental cost” in light of the need to reform intercarrier compensation due to market distortions.⁶⁸⁷ In response, several commenters supported such a proposal noting that the additional incremental cost of terminating traffic is de minimis.⁶⁸⁸ Based on the evidence highlighted above and for the reasons set forth below, we revise our interpretation of the “additional costs” language in section 252(d)(2) to mean “incremental costs” as traditionally defined. We believe that this conclusion is supported by the economic theory discussed above, and represents a more appropriate interpretation of the “additional costs” standard than the TELRIC methodology.⁶⁸⁹

258. As an initial matter, the Commission plainly has the authority to revise its interpretation of “additional costs.”⁶⁹⁰ Indeed, the Supreme Court has recognized that the phrase “additional costs” is ambiguous.⁶⁹¹ Words like additional cost “give ratesetting commissions broad methodological

⁶⁸⁵ We find it preferable to shift entirely to an approach based on the traditional economic definition of incremental cost, rather than trying to achieve the same result through extensive revisions to the TELRIC methodology as some commenters suggest. *See, e.g.*, Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 50–54 (calling for a more precise definition of TELRIC for purposes of reciprocal compensation).

⁶⁸⁶ *Brand X*, 545 U.S. at 981 (quoting *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Nat’l Res. Def. Council (Chevron)*, 467 U.S. 837, 863–64 (1984) and citing *Motor Vehicle Mfrs. Ass’n of United States, Inc. v. State Farm Mut. Automobile Ins. Co. (State Farm)*, 463 U.S. 29, 59 (1983) (Rehnquist, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)).

⁶⁸⁷ *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4719, para. 71.

⁶⁸⁸ *See, e.g.*, CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 16 (“Because a call does not impose significant incremental costs on either the calling party’s or called party’s network, there is no justification for allowing the terminating network to impose any charge on the non-terminating network.”); Frontier *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7 (“However, there is virtually NO additional incremental cost of sending a minute-of-use across [dedicated hardware interfaces].”); Western Wireless *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 16 (“Independent Wireless Carriers urge the Commission to confine its analysis of ‘additional cost’ only to the incremental traffic-sensitive switching and transport costs actually incurred by the parties exchanging traffic for purposes of intercarrier compensation.”).

⁶⁸⁹ We reaffirm that the TELRIC methodology is appropriate for setting interconnection and network element rates pursuant to section 252(d)(1), where Congress directed the Commission to consider a “reasonable profit.”

⁶⁹⁰ The Supreme Court affirmed the Commission’s authority to apply a cost methodology for the states to implement. *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378. *See also id.* at 378 n.6 (“[T]he question in these cases is not whether the Federal Government has taken the regulation of local telecommunications competition away from the States. With regard to the matters addressed by the 1996 Act, it unquestionably has.”); 47 U.S.C. § 201(b); *United Telegraph Workers, AFL-CIO v. FCC*, 436 F.2d 920, 923 (D.C. Cir. 1970) (citations and quotations omitted) (finding that section 201(b) authorizes the Commission to “prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act”).

⁶⁹¹ *See Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 499–501 (“[W]ithout any better indication of meaning than the unadorned term, the word ‘cost’ in section 252(d)(1), as in accounting generally, is ‘a chameleon,’ a ‘virtually meaningless’ term”) (citations omitted).

leeway,”⁶⁹² and courts owe “substantial deference to the interpretation the Commission accords them.”⁶⁹³ The Commission, consistent with its obligation to “consider varying interpretations and the wisdom of its policy on a continuing basis” now revises its definition of “additional costs.”⁶⁹⁴

259. Revising our interpretation of “additional costs” to follow the traditional economic definition of the incremental cost of a service is supported by the Commission’s interpretation of the term “additional costs” in section 224 of the Act. Section 224, which addresses the pricing of pole attachments, is the only other place in the Act that uses the term “additional costs.” The Commission consistently has found that the term “additional costs” in section 224 means incremental cost,⁶⁹⁵ and that the legislative history for section 224 makes clear that Congress intended such a result.⁶⁹⁶ Interpreting the term “additional costs” as used in two parts of the Act in the same manner is consistent with the “presumption that identical words used in different parts of the same act are intended to have the same meaning.”⁶⁹⁷

260. In contrast, the statutory pricing standard for reciprocal compensation (“additional costs”) is not the same as the statutory pricing standard for UNEs (“cost” plus “a reasonable profit”).⁶⁹⁸ Even though the two statutory provisions may, as the Commission found previously, be “similar,” our subsequent experience indicates that TELRIC is not consistent with the “additional costs” standard. First, as discussed above, evidence indicates that reciprocal compensation rates based on TELRIC methodology were “excessive.”⁶⁹⁹ If reciprocal compensation rates truly reflected the incremental “additional costs,” regulatory arbitrage should not occur because a carrier would not make a profit by recovering its incremental cost.⁷⁰⁰

⁶⁹² See *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 499–501 (quoting *AT&T Corp. v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 423 (Breyer, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)).

⁶⁹³ *Capital Network System, Inc. v. FCC*, 28 F.3d 201, 204 (D.C. Cir. 1994).

⁶⁹⁴ *Brand X*, 545 U.S. at 981 (quoting *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 863–64 and citing *State Farm*, 463 U.S. at 59 (Rehnquist, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part)).

⁶⁹⁵ See, e.g., *Adoption Of Rules For The Regulation Of Cable Television Pole Attachments*, CC Docket No. 78-144, Memorandum and Opinion and Second Report and Order, 72 FCC 2d 59, 62, para. 8 (1979); *Adoption Of Rules For The Regulation Of Cable Television Pole Attachments*, CC Docket No. 78-144, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 68 FCC 2d 3, 15, App. (1978) (*Cable Television Pole Attachment NPRM*).

⁶⁹⁶ *Cable Television Pole Attachment NPRM*, CC Docket No. 78-144, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 68 FCC 2d at 15, App. (“Additional costs’ are generally equivalent to what is referred to as incremental cost, and the proportional part of ‘Operating expenses and actual capital costs’ are generally equivalent to fully allocated costs.” (quoting S. Rep. No. 95-580 at 19–21 (1977))).

⁶⁹⁷ See, e.g., *Atlantic Cleaners & Dyers, Inc. v. United States*, 286 U.S. 427, 433 (1932).

⁶⁹⁸ Compare 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(1) with 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2).

⁶⁹⁹ See, e.g., *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4694, 4697–98, 4717, 4719, paras. 16, 23–24, 66, 71–72; *Intercarrier Compensation NPRM*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9616-18, paras. 11–18; *ISP Remand Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9161–62, paras. 18–20.

⁷⁰⁰ For the same reasons, we reject suggestions that TELRIC should be used to set a unified rate for intercarrier compensation. See, e.g., Ohio PUC *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 20 (“[T]he Ohio Commission recommends the use of the TELRIC standard for setting intercarrier compensation rates.”); Pac West et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 9 (“The ‘additional cost’ standard should continue to be tied to TELRIC”); Time Warner Telecom et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 1–2 (“[A] central component of reform must be the requirement that, to the extent possible, each carrier charge a single, cost-based rate for the exchange of all types of traffic. . . . [T]he Commission arguably has the authority to mandate that states use a cost-based methodology, in particular TELRIC, as the basis for setting all

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261. Second, TELRIC includes the cost of the “total element” and, as a result, measures the long run incremental average cost of the switch including common costs and overhead, not just the additional costs of using the function to terminate another carrier’s traffic. In other words, TELRIC measures the *average* cost of providing a function, which is not necessarily the same as the *additional* costs of providing that function. Because of this, we expect that the TELRIC methodology would continue to produce reciprocal compensation rates above the true “additional costs” of terminating such traffic, in light of evidence that the cost of terminating traffic today is low⁷⁰¹ and is decreasing even further as carriers transition to softswitches⁷⁰² and ultimately pure packet switches. Consistent with our change in methodology, we also disavow our finding in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* that “only that portion of the forward-looking, economic cost of end-office switching that is recovered on a usage-sensitive basis constitutes an “additional costs” to be recovered through termination charges.”⁷⁰³ In particular, as explained above, we specifically exclude common costs and overhead allocations from the calculation of what constitutes “additional costs” under our new pricing methodology.

262. We thus end our reliance on the TELRIC methodology for setting reciprocal compensation rates, and instead require that such rates be set pursuant to our new incremental cost methodology.⁷⁰⁴ In our Implementation section below, we provide specific guidance to the states

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intercarrier termination rates.”); Integra *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 3 (“Integra urges the Commission to . . . [u]nify access and reciprocal compensation rates at TELRIC based levels on a company-by-company basis.”); KMC and Xspedius *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 3 (“[T]he Commission should support tariffed-based intercarrier compensation arrangements that: (i) set rates no higher than the comparable TELRIC (or similar cost-based) rates.”); XO *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 11 (“[T]he only appropriate intercarrier compensation regime must include TELRIC-based rates.”).

⁷⁰¹ The national average of TELRIC rates for transport and termination of calls was \$0.00212 in 2004, which likely overstates the actual incremental costs because, as noted above, TELRIC includes common and overhead costs and examines the average cost of the function, not the additional cost of terminating traffic. Letter from Richard M. Rindler, Counsel for the Cost-Based Intercarrier Compensation Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3 (filed Sept. 2, 2004) (CBICC Sept. 9 *Ex Parte* Letter); *see also* Sprint Nextel Sept. 26, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

⁷⁰² *See* T-Mobile *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 29–30.

⁷⁰³ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057.

⁷⁰⁴ A number of parties advocate for or against Commission adoption of bill-and-keep for intercarrier compensation. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Jonathan Askin, Counsel for FeatureGroup IP, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3–4 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Letter from Paul W. Garnett, Assistant Vice President of Regulatory Affairs, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Corr *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 8; Cox *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 8–9; ICF *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 26, 30; Western Wireless et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 6–8. *But see, e.g.*, Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel for PAETEC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 10 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (“Mandatory Bill-and-Keep Is Not A Viable or Fair Solution”); Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus and Genevieve Morelli, Counsel for Cavalier Telephone et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (“[T]he adoption of mandatory bill-and-keep arrangements is extremely ill advised as a policy matter.”); BellSouth *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 9 (“[A] plan to transition rates ultimately to bill-and-keep would not promote economic efficiency or preserve universal service, nor is bill-and-keep competitively neutral.”); CCG Consulting Inc. (CCG) *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7 (“[A]ccess rates should not be reduced to zero through implementation of a Bill and Keep mechanism.”); CenturyTel *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 4 (“. . . CenturyTel unequivocally opposes replacing intercarrier compensation with a “bill and keep” regime.”); CCAP *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 11 (“The CCAP urges the Commission to avoid implementation of a bill and keep regime”); Frontier *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 6 (arguing that bill and keep is inappropriate because it does not account for asymmetric traffic patterns); SBA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7 (arguing that bill-and-keep is inappropriate between rural and larger LECs due to various

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regarding how to apply this new methodology. We note that this Commission takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that rates for carriers are just, reasonable, and not confiscatory. In this order, we have set in motion mechanisms to help ensure that the financial viability of carriers will not be undermined. We feel confident that these mechanisms, in combination with the other avenues available for carriers to offset declines in access revenues, will be sufficient to achieve this result.⁷⁰⁵

263. Moreover our decision to adopt a unified intercarrier compensation methodology is in no way arbitrary or adopted with any confiscatory purpose. In fact, the determinations made in this order reveal just the contrary, our decision to raise the cap on SLCs, our referral to the Federal-State Joint Board on Separations (Separations Joint Board) of the issue of whether to allow additional increases in SLC caps in Part V.C below, and our acknowledgment of the ability of a carrier to establish entitlement to supplemental universal service to help ensure that carriers can maintain their financial integrity.⁷⁰⁶ Although in most cases the rates for intrastate and interstate terminating access will drop substantially, that alone is not the test for whether a taking has occurred; rather, a primary consideration for takings claims is whether the rates ultimately adopted will produce a reasonable return sufficient to enable a company to maintain its financial integrity.⁷⁰⁷

C. Implementation

264. In this section, we detail certain implementation items. First, we provide guidance to states with regard to their implementation responsibilities for the intercarrier compensation regime we adopt today. Importantly, this includes setting reciprocal compensation rates using the new incremental cost pricing methodology. We also provide guidelines for the states' application of the modification and suspension provisions of section 251(f)(2) of the Act. We explain the need to require symmetrical compensation arrangements without any exceptions under section 252(d)(2)(A)(ii) of the Act. And we discuss the effect of our intercarrier compensation reforms on existing interconnection and commercial agreements. Finally, we address the extent to which reduced revenue from carrier-to-carrier charges may

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asymmetries). We believe the reforms we adopt here are preferable to a pure bill-and-keep requirement and more appropriately balance the interests of consumers and carriers at this time. The approach we adopt in this order avoids the need to resolve disputes in the record regarding bill-and-keep in various circumstances because it allows parties to advocate for such an approach before state commissions and parties may negotiate such arrangements.

⁷⁰⁵ Some carriers have suggested that our changes in ratemaking methodology will necessarily produce confiscatory rates and constitute a taking. *See, e.g.*, NTCA, Interim Universal Service & Intercarrier Compensation Reform Proposal (NTCA Interim Proposal) at 19–22, *attached to* Letter from Daniel Mitchell, Vice President, Legal & Industry, NTCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 (filed Oct. 6, 2008) (NTCA Oct. 6, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (contending that the Commission's current access regime, not to mention any reductions in access rates, threatens rate-of-return carriers with unconstitutional takings). *See also* Cincinnati Bell *ICC FNPRM* 11–12 (“The elimination of interstate switched access charges without an opportunity to earn the revenue in another fashion could be confiscatory”); GVNW Consulting *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 9 (“The existing system of cost recovery consisting of three equally important components of access charges, universal service support, and local rates is the only approach available to the Commission that will enable it to avoid valid claims of confiscation.”). This argument lacks merit. Faced with a similar challenge to the TELRIC methodology previously adopted by the Commission, the Supreme Court stated unequivocally that “this Court has never considered a taking challenge on a ratesetting methodology without being presented with specific rate orders alleged to be confiscatory” *Verizon v. FCC*, 535 U.S. at 524 (citations omitted).

⁷⁰⁶ *See FPC v. Hope Natural Gas Co.*, 320 U.S. 591, 605 (1944) (“Rates which enable the company to operate successfully, to maintain its financial integrity, to attract capital, and to compensate its investors for the risks assumed certainly cannot be condemned as invalid, even though they might produce only a meager return”).

⁷⁰⁷ *FPC v. Hope Natural Gas Co.*, 320 U.S. at 605.

be replaced through end-user charges or new universal service support, where needed.

1. Direction to the States

265. We set forth the timeline for states to implement our comprehensive reform and adopt an interim, uniform reciprocal compensation rate along with a transition plan in section [III.B.2] above. In this section, we set forth additional parameters for states to follow in implementing the reforms adopted in this order.

a. Setting Final Reciprocal Compensation Rates Based on Incremental Cost

266. Under our new methodology for setting final reciprocal compensation rates, states will need to set prices according to a forward-looking economic cost study or computer cost model using the Faulhaber principles to identify the traffic-sensitive incremental cost of transport and termination of traffic.⁷⁰⁸ First, states will need to evaluate a forward-looking economic cost analysis of a stand-alone network that performs all functions of a modern telecommunications network, including transport and termination of other carriers' traffic. Second, states will need to evaluate a forward looking economic cost analysis of a stand-alone network that performs all the same functions except for the transport and termination of other carriers' traffic. Third, states must compare the costs of these two networks. The difference between the costs of the two networks is the additional costs of termination of traffic subject to the "additional costs" standard we adopt in this order.⁷⁰⁹

267. We offer further guidance regarding specific aspects of these cost studies. First, these cost studies must use the least cost, most efficient network technology. We find that the least cost, most efficient switch today is a softswitch.⁷¹⁰ We further find that the least cost, most efficient technology for transport is fiber optic cable.⁷¹¹ We observe that, when carriers deploy fiber, they typically deploy capacity significantly in excess of current needs.⁷¹²

268. Second, consistent with the traditional economic definition of the incremental cost of a service,⁷¹³ the cost studies must exclude all common costs, including overhead costs. Third, all non-

⁷⁰⁸ We recognize that the incremental cost of terminating traffic may include certain non-traffic-sensitive costs, such as the cost of a trunk port. Consistent with cost-causation principles, however, such non-traffic-sensitive costs may not be recovered through per-minute charges, but must rather be recovered through flat-rated monthly charges associated with interconnection trunks.

⁷⁰⁹ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷¹⁰ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷¹¹ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷¹² See, e.g., *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service; Forward-Looking Mechanism for High Cost Support for Non-Rural LECs*, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 97-160, Tenth Report and Order, 14 FCC Rcd 20156, 20237, para. 186 (1999) (subsequent history and citation omitted) ("As we explained in the *Inputs Further Notice*, in determining appropriate cable sizes, network engineers include a certain amount of spare capacity to accommodate administrative functions, such as testing and repair, and some expected amount of growth."); *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17166, para. 312 n.919 (citing evidence that "the first carrier to lay fiber to a particular location will lay significantly more than it will need because the incremental cost of burying additional fibers is negligible").

⁷¹³ See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

traffic-sensitive costs must be excluded from the cost studies.⁷¹⁴ Cost studies using the TELRIC methodology do not meet these requirements, given the differences between TELRIC and the traditional economic methodology for determining the incremental cost of a service discussed above.⁷¹⁵ Available evidence suggests that the incremental costs of terminating traffic, as determined using this methodology, are likely to be extremely close to zero.

269. We also require each state to set a single, uniform rate for all carriers in that state through their pricing proceedings. We find this approach warranted for several reasons. First, softswitches are easily scalable, and thus the incremental cost of termination does not vary with the number of lines the switch serves. Second, because carriers tend to deploy significant excess capacity when deploying fiber, the incremental cost of adding traffic is likely to approach, or equal, zero. Third, we find that setting a single uniform rate for all incumbent LECs and interconnecting carriers in a state simplifies the regulatory process, minimizes arbitrage that could arise, and reduces the likelihood that unidentifiable traffic would remain a problem. Finally, setting rates based on the costs of the current, least cost, most efficient technology creates incentives for carriers with less efficient networks to migrate more quickly to those more efficient technologies.

270. Following the transition, once carriers are charging the final uniform reciprocal compensation rate, we establish the following default rules regarding the network “edge.”⁷¹⁶ These default rules would not require changes to physical points of interconnection, but would simply define functions governed by a uniform terminating rate.⁷¹⁷

- For every call, the calling party service provider (e.g., the calling party’s LEC for a local call or the calling party’s IXC for a long distance call) is responsible for the transmission and routing of the call to the network edge of the called party service provider.
- The calling party service provider may fulfill its responsibility for the transmission and routing of

⁷¹⁴ We thus go beyond the requirement in the *Local Competition First Report and Order* that only required states to exclude the cost of line ports, *see* 11 FCC Rcd at 16025, para. 1057, and mandate that *all* non-traffic sensitive costs be excluded.

⁷¹⁵ *See, e.g., supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷¹⁶ *See* Letter from Hank Hultquist, AT&T Services, Inc., and Donna Epps, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 14, 2008) (AT&T and Verizon Oct. 14, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (providing seven default rules); Letter from John N. Rose, President, OPASTCO, and Kelly Worthington, Executive Vice President, WTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket No. 05-337, Attach. at 2 (filed Oct. 29, 2008) (Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter) (discussing a “rural transport rule” for rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs). We reject PAETEC’s assertion that the Commission lacked notice to adopt such rules. *See* Letter from Jonathan S. Frankel and Michael A. Romano, Counsel for PAETEC, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92 at 2-3 (Oct. 28, 2008) (PAETEC Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter). The Commission expressly sought comment on this issue in the *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*. *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4687, 4702-03, 4712-13, 4727-30, paras. 4, 34, 40-44, 54, 91-97.

⁷¹⁷ Thus, the default “edge” rule we adopt today does not alter any obligations of incumbent LECs’ to interconnect at any technically feasible point, nor does the rule alter carriers’ ability to request interconnection. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Verizon, to Chairman Kevin J. Martin, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-112 at 5 (filed Oct. 5, 2008). *See also, e.g.,* PAETEC Oct. 28, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 5-6 (expressing concern that the adoption of rules regarding a network “edge” not alter existing rules and obligations regarding physical interconnection). Moreover, the “edge” rules we adopt, which will apply at the end of the transition period, are merely a default, and carriers are free to negotiate alternative arrangements.

a call to the called party service provider network edge via its own facilities and services, the facilities and service of another entity (including the called party's service provider), or any combination.

- The calling party service provider is also responsible for the payment of the uniform terminating rate to the called party service provider. The called party service provider is responsible for performing all network functions to deliver traffic from the network edge to the called party, including dedicated transport, common transport, tandem switching, end office switching, and SS7 messaging.
- The reciprocal compensation regime of section 251(b)(5) will apply to traffic from the called party service provider network edge to the called party.
- The called party service provider's network edge is the location of its end office, MSC, point of presence, or trunking media gateway, which PSTN routing conventions (e.g., NPAC or LERG) associate with the called party telephone number unless that location subtends a tandem switched owned or controlled by the called party service provider, in which case that tandem is the network edge for that call. A service provider that utilizes a tandem as its edge may require, upon reasonable request consistent with standard industry network interconnection principles, that calling party service providers groom their traffic onto segregated trunk groups.
- The called party service provider must either permit interconnection at its edge for purposes of exchanging traffic with the calling party service provider or provide transport at no charge to that edge from a location in the same LATA where it does permit such interconnection.
- The calling party service provider may at its sole discretion choose whether to interconnect directly or indirectly with the called party service provider.
- Notwithstanding the forgoing, for local and extended area service (EAS) calls made by a rural rate-of-return incumbent LEC's customer to a non-rural carrier's customer, the rural rate-of-return incumbent LEC will be responsible for transport to a non-rural terminating carrier's point of presence (POP) when it is located within the rural rate-of-return incumbent LEC's service area. When the non-rural terminating carrier's POP is located outside the rural rate-of-return incumbent LEC's service area, the rural rate-of-return incumbent LEC's transport and provisioning obligation stops at its meet point and the non-rural terminating carrier is responsible for the remaining transport to its POP.

b. Symmetry

271. We conclude that final uniform reciprocal compensation rates should be symmetrical.⁷¹⁸ In contrast to the approach taken in the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, we require, for the reasons described below, symmetry in all cases once the final uniform reciprocal compensation rates become effective.

⁷¹⁸ "Symmetrical compensation arrangements are those in which the rate paid by an incumbent LEC to another telecommunications carrier for transport and termination of traffic originated by the incumbent LEC is the same as the rate the incumbent LEC charges to transport and terminate traffic originated by the other telecommunications carrier." *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16031-32, para. 1069.

272. *Background.* In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission concluded that charges for reciprocal compensation were to be presumptively symmetrical and that it was “reasonable to adopt the incumbent LEC’s transport and termination prices as a presumptive proxy for other telecommunications carriers’ additional costs of transport and termination.”⁷¹⁹ The Commission observed that “[b]oth the incumbent LEC and the interconnecting carriers usually will be providing service in the same geographic area, so the forward-looking economic costs should be similar in most cases.”⁷²⁰ Moreover, by using the incumbent LEC’s costs of transport and termination, the Commission found that symmetry would provide an incentive for interconnected carriers to minimize costs because if the interconnected carrier could reduce its costs below the costs of the incumbent LEC, then it could realize additional termination revenue.⁷²¹ Symmetrical compensation also provided the incumbent LECs an incentive to minimize costs. The Commission further found that symmetry reduced incumbent LECs’ bargaining strength because asymmetrical rates could have allowed incumbent LECs to negotiate high charges for traffic terminating on their networks and low charges for traffic originating on their networks, citing as an example incumbent LECs’ treatment of CMRS providers.⁷²² A presumption of symmetric rates was administratively efficient and did not require a competing carrier to conduct a forward-looking cost study to enter the market, lowering the cost of entry and thus increasing competition.⁷²³

273. The Commission, however, carved out an exception to the presumption of symmetry. In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission permitted interconnecting carriers to rebut the presumption of symmetry by submitting a forward-looking cost study to show that their costs of termination were higher than the incumbent LEC’s.⁷²⁴ If the interconnecting carrier established that “the costs of efficiently configured and operated systems [were] not symmetrical,” the state commission could adopt a “different compensation rate” for the interconnecting carrier.⁷²⁵

274. *Discussion.* We now require symmetric rates and conclude that the exception that

⁷¹⁹ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1085. The Commission provided the following findings supporting its conclusion: (1) “using the incumbent LEC’s forward-looking costs for transport and termination of traffic as a proxy for the costs incurred by interconnected carriers satisfies the requirements of section 252(d)(2)” and “is consistent with section 252(d)(2)(B)(ii)”; (2) “[i]f both parties are incumbent LECs, . . . the larger LEC’s forward-looking costs should be used to establish the symmetrical rate for transport and termination”; (3) “larger LECs are generally in a better position to conduct a forward-looking economic cost study”; (4) “imposing symmetrical rates based on the incumbent LEC’s additional forward-looking costs will not substantially reduce carriers’ incentives to minimize those costs”; and (5) “states may establish transport and termination rates in the arbitration process that vary according to whether the traffic is routed through a tandem switch or directly to the end-office switch.” *Id.* at 16040–42, paras. 1085–86, 1090.

⁷²⁰ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1085.

⁷²¹ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1086 (“A symmetric compensation rule gives the competing carriers correct incentives to minimize its own costs of termination because its termination revenues do not vary directly with changes in its own costs.”).

⁷²² See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16041, para. 1087 (noting that incumbent LECs have used their greater bargaining power to negotiate asymmetrical rates with CMRS providers and to charge CMRS providers origination, as well as termination, charges).

⁷²³ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16041–42, para. 1088.

⁷²⁴ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16042, para. 1089.

⁷²⁵ See *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16042, para. 1089.

permitted asymmetric rates under certain circumstances is no longer warranted.⁷²⁶ We note that there is scant evidence of any competitive LECs seeking to establish their own, higher, costs during the last 12 years, let alone being successful in doing so.⁷²⁷ We conclude that asymmetric rates could undermine the comprehensive reform we adopt by permitting different termination rates for traffic in the same geographic area, which could open the door for continued regulatory arbitrage and thwart the intended public interest benefits associated with reforming the patchwork of existing intercarrier compensation payments.

275. As noted above, symmetrical rates promote efficiency. Symmetry will encourage interconnecting carriers to deploy more efficient technology to reduce their costs. Notably, the Commission of the European Communities (European Communities) has also found that divergent regulatory treatment between different technology termination rates, as this rebuttable presumption exception allows, creates distortions among markets.⁷²⁸ In the context of fixed versus mobile telephony, the European Communities recognized that some European countries have allowed smaller CMRS carriers to charge higher termination rates to compensate for these carriers' lack of economies of scale.⁷²⁹ The European Communities concluded that these higher termination rates for mobile technology led to higher retail rates for customers and lower usage of this technology.⁷³⁰ As the European experience shows, allowing the present exception to the symmetry rule could encourage higher termination rates, and asymmetric termination rates—particularly if such termination rates were high for one carrier—could reduce consumer welfare and lead to higher prices.

276. We conclude that requiring symmetrical compensation arrangements without any exceptions is proper under section 252(d)(2)(A)(ii) of the Act.⁷³¹ We also confirm that this mandatory

⁷²⁶ We note that the rates that will apply under our transition plan, discussed *supra* Part V.B.2, will not necessarily be symmetric. For example, we do not permit CMRS providers to assess access charges during the transition. *See supra* para. 197; 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2). Our symmetry rules thus apply outside the transition framework, i.e., for carriers exchanging traffic at the final, uniform reciprocal compensation rate, or for carriers that have received a suspension or modification of our intercarrier compensation requirements pursuant to 251(f)(2).

⁷²⁷ Indeed, we are only aware of one case where a competitive LEC attempted to rebut the presumption and, in that case, the state commission found that the competitive LEC had failed to do so. *See* Petition of Sprint Spectrum L.P. d/b/a Sprint PCS, Pursuant to Section 252(b) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, for Arbitration to Establish an Intercarrier Agreement with Verizon New York Inc., Case 01-C-0767, Arbitration Order, 2002 WL 31505732 (N.Y. P.S.C. 2002) (holding that Sprint did not rebut the presumption that its costs were higher than the incumbent LEC's).

⁷²⁸ *See* THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, DRAFT COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION ON THE REGULATORY TREATMENT OF FIXED AND MOBILE TERMINATION RATES IN THE EU 3, para. 3 (2008), *available at* http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/ecom/doc/library/public_consult/termination_rates/termination.pdf (last visited Oct. 24, 2008) (EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES).

⁷²⁹ *See* EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES at 2, para. 2.

⁷³⁰ *See* EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES at 3, para. 3.

⁷³¹ This section requires that, in setting rates under interconnection agreements, states must ensure that reciprocal compensation charges are a “reasonable approximation of the additional costs of terminating such calls.” *See* 47 U.S.C. § 252(d)(2)(A)(ii). In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission found that the incumbent LEC's costs were a reasonable proxy for other carriers' costs. 11 FCC Rcd at 16040, para. 1085. We reaffirm that finding, especially given that our pricing methodology focuses on the costs of the least cost, most efficient network technology. Moreover, per the express terms of the Act, the “additional costs” standard applies only to the costs of the incumbent LEC, not the competitive LEC. This interpretation of the Act promotes efficiency and therefore bolsters competition, consistent with the goals of the Act. *See* 1996 Act, Preamble (declaring the purpose of the Act to be “to promote competition and reduce regulation in order to secure lower prices and higher

(continued....)

symmetry requirement applies without regard to whether traffic exchanged by the interconnected carriers is balanced or not. Given the substantial benefits of symmetrical rates as described above, the likelihood that allowing asymmetrical rates would give carriers an incentive to find ways to arbitrage the higher rates, and the minimal costs associated with terminating calls,⁷³² we find that an exception to symmetrical rates where traffic is out of balance is not warranted.

c. Modifications and Suspensions under Section 251(f)(2)

277. In light of the importance of bringing uniformity and symmetry to intercarrier compensation, eliminating opportunities for regulatory arbitrage, and providing regulatory certainty to carriers in making investment plans, we find it appropriate to adopt guidelines regarding the application of section 251(f)(2). Section 251(f)(2) of the Act gives state commissions the ability to suspend or modify our intercarrier compensation rules implementing section 251(b) and (c) under certain conditions. Specifically, section 251(f)(2) of the Act permits a “local exchange carrier with fewer than 2 percent of the Nation’s subscriber lines installed in the aggregate nationwide” to “petition a State commission for a suspension or modification of the application of a requirement or requirements of [section 251] (b) or (c).”⁷³³ The state commission shall grant such petition “to the extent that, and for such duration as, the State commission determines that such suspension or modification (A) is necessary (i) to avoid a significant adverse economic impact on users of telecommunications services generally; (ii) to avoid imposing a requirement that is unduly economically burdensome; or (iii) to avoid imposing a requirement that is technically infeasible; and (B) is consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”⁷³⁴ In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission “decline[d] . . . to adopt national rules or guidelines” regarding the specific implementation of section 251(f), but explained that the Commission “may offer guidance on these issues at a later date, if we believe it is necessary and appropriate.”⁷³⁵ The Supreme Court subsequently confirmed that the Commission has the authority to interpret section 251(f).⁷³⁶ The only existing Commission guideline regarding section 251(f)(2) provides that the burden of proof is on the LEC seeking suspension or modification of particular requirements.⁷³⁷

278. As an initial matter, we conclude that any suspension or modification granted pursuant to (continued from previous page) _____ quality services for American telecommunications consumers and encourage the rapid deployment of new telecommunications technologies”).

⁷³² See *supra* section V.B.4.c.

⁷³³ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2).

⁷³⁴ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2).

⁷³⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16118, para. 1263; 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2).

⁷³⁶ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385.

⁷³⁷ See 47 C.F.R. § 51.405(b). In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission held that, in petitions under section 251(f)(2), “a LEC must offer evidence that application of those requirements would be likely to cause undue economic burdens beyond the economic burdens typically associated with efficient competitive entry.” 11 FCC Rcd at 16118, para. 1262. The Commission also placed the burden of proof on the carrier seeking the relief under section 251(f)(2). *Id.* at 16118, para. 1263. Although the Supreme Court ultimately upheld the Commission’s authority to interpret section 251(f), see *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385, the Eighth Circuit subsequently vacated the Commission’s interpretation of “undue economic burden,” finding that the Act requires a state to look at the entire economic burden not just the additional burden of complying with sections 251(b) or 251(c). See *Iowa Utils. II*, 219 F.3d at 759–62. The Eighth Circuit also found that the Commission erred in placing the burden of proof on the rural LEC when a requesting carrier seeks to remove the section 251(f)(1) exemption from section 251(c). The Eighth Circuit therefore vacated sections 51.405(a), (c), and (d) of our rules, *id.* at 762, but did not disturb the allocation of burden of proof under section 251(f)(2) as set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 51.405(b).

section 251(f)(2) must be for a limited “duration” and cannot be indefinite. This interpretation follows directly from the express language of section 251(f)(2). Specifically, section 251(f)(2) provides that the state should grant a suspension or modification “to the extent that, *and for such duration as*, the State commission determines that such suspension or modification”⁷³⁸ satisfies the statutory test. Congress thus expected that the conditions warranting suspension or modification of a requirement would not be permanent, and it permitted the states to continue such modifications or suspensions only for a particular “duration,” rather than remaining in place indefinitely. In contrast, Congress adopted the opposite approach in section 251(f)(1), where it provided a default exemption for “rural telephone companies” from section 251(c) that continues indefinitely “until” certain statutory criteria are met.⁷³⁹ Accordingly, we conclude that the LEC requesting the suspension or modification under section 251(f)(2) has the burden of demonstrating the appropriate duration of any suspension or modification. To the extent that a state grants a suspension or modification for a particular duration, the Commission encourages the state to impose a timeline or other requirements on the LEC to ensure that it is taking concrete steps to enable it to comply with the relevant requirements once the suspension or modification ends.⁷⁴⁰ If a state finds that a LEC is not taking such steps necessary to ensure compliance on a date certain, we find that such a determination would be sufficient for the state immediately to revoke the suspension or modification as no longer satisfying the “public interest” criteria.

279. We also offer guidance regarding the substantive standards that state commissions must apply when evaluating requests pursuant to section 251(f)(2) for a suspension or modification of section 251(b) or (c). The first prong of section 251(f)(2)(A) directs state commissions to determine whether the LEC establishes that absence of the requested suspension or modification would cause a “*significant* adverse economic impact on users of telecommunications services generally.”⁷⁴¹ The term “significant” is ambiguous. According to Webster’s Dictionary, “significant” means “having or likely to have influence or effect; of a noticeably or measurably large amount.”⁷⁴² We find this to be a reasonable definition, and conclude that for an “adverse economic impact” to be “significant” requires that such harm be “measurably large.” Moreover, the state commission must evaluate the net impact “on users of telecommunications services *generally*.”⁷⁴³ We conclude that state commissions must consider users of telecommunications services more broadly, rather than focusing narrowly on impacts on isolated groups of users, such as customers of the LEC requesting the suspension or modification. Further, state commissions must weigh the overall impact on such users, including not only any adverse impacts on particular users, but whether there are other associated benefits of the regulatory requirements to telecommunications users. For example, the reduction in intercarrier compensation payments might lead some carriers to increase some rates, but also should reduce long distance rates, stimulate additional competition in local markets, consistent with the goals of the 1996 Act, and provide additional benefits to end users. We direct states to consider the totality of the circumstances in evaluating the impact on telecommunications users.

⁷³⁸ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2) (emphasis added).

⁷³⁹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(1).

⁷⁴⁰ Moreover, if, in the future, we have evidence that states are granting arbitrarily long suspensions/modifications to requesting LECs, the Commission will consider imposing a limit on the number of years that a suspension/modification is appropriate.

⁷⁴¹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(i) (emphasis added).

⁷⁴² WEBSTER’S NINTH NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY 1096 (1991).

⁷⁴³ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(i) (emphasis added).

280. The second prong of section 251(f)(2)(A) requires a state commission to determine whether the LEC has demonstrated that the requested suspension or modification is necessary to “avoid imposing a requirement that is unduly economically burdensome.”⁷⁴⁴ The Eighth Circuit has interpreted the phrase “unduly economically burdensome” to require a state to examine “the full economic burden on the ILEC.”⁷⁴⁵ Consistent with this interpretation, and our interpretation of section 251(f)(2)(A)(i) above, we conclude that states must evaluate the totality of the circumstances in evaluating the net burden. For example, in evaluating the impact of section 251(b)(5) as we interpret it today, states cannot simply look at the LEC’s loss of intercarrier compensation revenues. Rather, the state must consider the full economic impact on the LEC of all the comprehensive reforms we adopt, including the ability of carriers to recover revenues by raising other rates, including the federal SLC, the potential economic savings due to reduced billing costs, fewer disputes and litigation regarding the classification of traffic, and the possibility that a carrier may receive universal service support if its financial integrity is threatened.

281. The third prong under section 251(f)(2)(A) requires a state commission to determine whether the LEC has demonstrated that compliance with section 251(b) or (c) may be “technically infeasible.”⁷⁴⁶ We do not believe that any carrier will be able to establish that implementation of our intercarrier compensation reforms is “technically infeasible,” considering that carriers generally are exchanging and billing for traffic today, and our rules adopted in this order should merely simplify this process. Thus, we recommend that state commissions scrutinize rigorously any claims of technical infeasibility, particularly if the LEC is paying and/or receiving intercarrier compensation today.

282. Even if a state finds that a LEC satisfies the requirements for a temporary suspension or modification under section 251(f)(2)(A), section 251(f)(2)(B) provides that a state commission cannot grant a petition for suspension or modification unless it also finds that granting the requested petition is “consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity.”⁷⁴⁷ In light of the compelling need to adopt comprehensive reform of existing intercarrier compensation regimes as described above,⁷⁴⁸ the Commission urges states to use caution and consider carefully the ramifications of granting any suspension or modification, particularly regarding petitions seeking relief from section 251(b)(5). Indeed, any suspension or modification that continues to treat traffic under different rate structures opens the door for continued regulatory arbitrage and disputes. Such action would undermine the tremendous public interest benefit associated with treating all traffic the same.

283. The Act is silent on what occurs if a state grants a suspension or modification of the section 251(b) or (c) obligations. We find that this silence creates ambiguities and could lead to inconsistent results following a modification or suspension under section 251(f)(2). We are concerned that a suspension or modification of section 251(b)(5) could result in exactly the kind of disparate treatment that we intend to correct with our actions today. Pursuant to our authority under section 201(b), as well as our authority to interpret section 251(f),⁷⁴⁹ we therefore adopt rules specifically addressing

⁷⁴⁴ See 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(ii).

⁷⁴⁵ *Iowa Utils. II*, 219 F.3d at 761. The Commission initially interpreted undue economic burden to mean the “undue economic burden beyond the economic burden that is typically associated with efficient competitive entry.” 47 C.F.R. § 51.405(d). The Eighth Circuit vacated this reading of the statute. See *Iowa Utils. II*, 219 F.3d at 760–61.

⁷⁴⁶ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(A)(iii).

⁷⁴⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2)(B).

⁷⁴⁸ See *supra* section V.A.3.

⁷⁴⁹ *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385.

certain of the implications of a suspension or modification of our intercarrier compensation rules.⁷⁵⁰

284. First, to minimize inconsistency and the possibility that the reforms we adopt today could be undermined, we extend our symmetry requirement for reciprocal compensation rates at the end of the transition period described in Part V.B to any suspension or modification of our section 251(b)(5) reciprocal compensation rules and requirements. If a LEC receives a suspension or modification of our reciprocal compensation pricing methodology, for example, all other LECs and CMRS providers that exchange traffic with the LEC receiving the suspension or modification will likewise be entitled to charge that LEC those same rates that the LEC charges them for the duration of such suspension or modification. We conclude that this symmetry requirement is in the public interest and will reduce disputes, arbitrage, and transaction costs. Indeed, a contrary result that would permit different terminating rates in the same geographic area would not be in the public interest and likely would lead to the same disputes we have today. If a state attempts to avoid this symmetry requirement by granting a LEC a suspension or modification of any section 251(b)(5) reciprocal compensation obligation and the state fails to require symmetric rates, we will invoke our authority under sections 201 and 332 of the Act to ensure that all carriers exchanging traffic with that LEC pay the same rate for terminating all traffic.

285. Second, if a state grants any suspension or modification that is more than 1 year in duration, we require the state to take a fresh look to determine whether such suspension/modification continues to satisfy the statutory test in light of possible changes in circumstances. To this end, 90 days before the 1-year anniversary of the grant of the suspension or modification, the LEC must file a petition demonstrating that the suspension or modification continues to satisfy the statutory criteria. In the intervening time, for example, a state may have rebalanced rates, the LEC may have increased its end-user charges, or other relevant changes may have occurred. Those actions may have obviated the need for the suspension or modification or, at a minimum, could result in the need for changes to the terms and duration of the suspension or modification. In such a review, the LEC continues to have the burden of demonstrating that the section 251(f)(2) criteria remain satisfied. We conclude that states should act upon such a fresh look within the 180 days for new petitions set forth in section 251(f)(2).⁷⁵¹

d. Existing Agreements

286. Below we discuss the effect of our intercarrier compensation reforms on certain types of existing agreements.

287. *Interconnection agreements.* With respect to interconnection agreements, we do not disturb the processes established by section 252 of the Act. As discussed above, the intercarrier compensation reforms we adopt will necessitate that states implement our new reciprocal compensation methodology. We expect that incumbent LECs and competing carriers will implement the reciprocal

⁷⁵⁰ Section 201(b) authorizes the Commission to “prescribe such rules and regulations as may be necessary in the public interest to carry out the provisions of this Act.” 47 U.S.C. § 201(b); *see also* 47 U.S.C. § 154(i) (“The Commission may perform any and all acts, make such rules and regulations, and issue such orders, not inconsistent with this Act, as may be necessary in the execution of its functions.”). “[T]he grant in § 201(b) means what it says: The FCC has rulemaking authority to carry out the ‘provisions of this Act.’” *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 378. As the Supreme Court has confirmed, this grant of authority necessarily includes section 251(f). *AT&T v. Iowa Utils. Bd.*, 525 U.S. at 385 (holding that the Commission has “jurisdiction to promulgate rules . . . regarding rural exemptions”); *see also id.* at 378 n.6 (“[T]he question in these cases is not whether the Federal Government has taken the regulation of local telecommunications competition away from the States. With regard to the matters addressed by the 1996 Act, it unquestionably has.”).

⁷⁵¹ 47 U.S.C. § 251(f)(2) (“The State commission shall act upon any petition filed under this paragraph within 180 days after receiving such petition.”).

compensation changes as directed by section 252 of the Act.⁷⁵² We make clear that our actions today constitute a change in law, and we recognize that interconnection agreements may contain change of law provisions that allow for renegotiation and/or may contain some mechanism to resolve disputes about new agreement language implementing new rules.⁷⁵³ Verizon raises a concern regarding the impact on contracts in “evergreen” status, which Verizon describes as “contracts that have reached the end of their terms but remain in effect pending entry into new contracts.”⁷⁵⁴ Given that the comprehensive reforms today are necessary to eliminate arbitrage and reduce disputes, we believe it is appropriate for carriers to take a “fresh look” at their interconnection agreements in “evergreen” status, including agreements that lack a change-of-law provision, and follow the section 252 process of negotiation and arbitration. We also note that, pursuant to section 251(a)(1), carriers remain free to negotiate alternative arrangements.⁷⁵⁵

288. *Commercial arrangements.* As discussed above, the intercarrier compensation reforms will require carriers to make certain changes to their tariffs relating to carrier-to-carrier charges, and potentially also SLCs. We do not, however, abrogate existing contracts or otherwise allow for a “fresh look” in light of our reforms.⁷⁵⁶ As the Commission has recognized, for example, early termination provisions can be mutually beneficial by giving providers greater assurance of cost recovery, and giving customers (whether wholesale or end-users) discounted and stable prices over the relevant term.⁷⁵⁷ Indeed, allowing for a fresh look could result in a windfall for customers that entered long-term arrangements, in exchange for lower prices, as compared to other customers that avoided early termination fees by electing shorter contract periods at higher prices.⁷⁵⁸ Rather than adopt a rule that

⁷⁵² See 47 U.S.C. § 252.

⁷⁵³ See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17404, para. 700. Although section 252(a)(1) and section 252(b)(1) refer to requests that are made to incumbent LECs, we have interpreted that in the interconnection agreement context to mean that either the incumbent or the competitive LEC may make such a request, consistent with the parties’ duty to negotiate in good faith pursuant to section 251(c)(1). See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17405, para. 703 n.2087; see also 47 U.S.C. §§ 251(c)(1), 252(a)(1), (b)(1). We believe that this adequately addresses concerns about existing interconnection agreements that do not include express change of law provisions.

⁷⁵⁴ See, e.g., Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5–6 (urging that any new intercarrier compensation regime displace such contracts). By the same token, we decline to insulate existing interconnection agreements from the section 252 processes to the extent that some commenters propose that they remain in effect. See, e.g., Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 04-36, 06-122, 05-195, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, 99-68, Attach. at 13 (filed Oct. 7, 2008) (proposing that the Commission “order that those prior arrangements should at least presumptively remain in force after the implementation of a new, unified . . . rate regime”).

⁷⁵⁵ 47 U.S.C. § 251(a)(1).

⁷⁵⁶ Several commenters request that the Commission give them a fresh look at existing contracts. See, e.g., Letter from Richard R. Cameron and Teresa D. Baer, Counsel for Global Crossing, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 08-152; CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45 at 2 (filed Sept. 18, 2008) (asking that the Commission “provide an 18-month window within which carriers can reconfigure their interconnection facilities without incurring reconfiguration charges or early termination liabilities under existing transport contracts”); Ad Hoc *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 22–24 (arguing that customers should be allowed to opt out of existing contracts); Earthlink *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 7 (arguing that end users should have the opportunity to negotiate different terms and, if renegotiation is not possible, be permitted to terminate existing contracts without liability).

⁷⁵⁷ See, e.g., *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17400, 17402–03, paras. 692, 697–99; see also, e.g., AT&T *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 17–19 (arguing against giving end users a fresh look at existing contracts). To the extent that there is evidence that particular termination penalties are inappropriate, the Commission can resolve such a matter through an enforcement proceeding. See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17403, para. 698.

⁷⁵⁸ See *Triennial Review Order*, 18 FCC Rcd at 17403, para. 699.

these commercial arrangements must be reopened, we will leave such issues to any change-of-law provisions in these commercial arrangements, or to commercial negotiations among the parties.⁷⁵⁹

2. Revenue Recovery Opportunities

289. In the preceding sections of this order, we adopt fundamental changes to the existing intercarrier compensation regimes. These reforms are designed to unify and simplify these mechanisms, consistent with the framework Congress adopted in the 1996 Act. This new approach will result in overall reductions in interstate and intrastate intercarrier compensation rates.⁷⁶⁰ In this section, we address the extent to which revenue reductions from carrier-to-carrier charges may be replaced through end-user charges and new universal service support. In prior intercarrier compensation reforms, the Commission largely replaced reductions in intercarrier compensation revenues through a combination of increased end-user charges and new universal service funding.⁷⁶¹ Our actions here carefully balance the need to ensure reasonable revenue recovery by carriers against the potential adverse impact on consumers of increased end-user charges, and the pressure placed on the universal service program to the extent that new subsidies are made available.

290. As an initial matter, we increase the caps on interstate SLCs, and we permit incumbent LECs to increase their SLCs up to the new caps to recover lost interstate and intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues. We also enlist the aid of the Separations Joint Board to evaluate the need for further increases in interstate end-user charges to recover any net loss in interstate and intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues, and to evaluate the conditions under which carriers may seek additional universal service funding. To limit the increase in the total universal service fund, we establish certain preconditions that carriers must satisfy before they can receive additional universal service funding to compensate for lost intercarrier compensation revenues.

a. End-User Charges

291. In this section, we consider whether revenue reductions from reformed carrier-to-carrier charges should be replaced to any extent by increases in end-user charges, as the Commission has done in some prior intercarrier compensation reform proceedings.⁷⁶² The Commission has acknowledged that “[t]he concept that users of the local telephone network should be responsible for the costs they actually cause is sound from a public policy perspective and rings of fundamental fairness,” and also helps ensure “that ratepayers will be able to make rational choices in their use of telephone service.”⁷⁶³ Importantly, however, the Commission also has maintained “safeguards that ensure that the rates consumers pay . . .

⁷⁵⁹ This situation is thus different than cases where the Commission found that certain contract provisions might adversely affect competition or where end-user customers would be denied the benefits of new Commission policy absent a fresh look opportunity. See, e.g., *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 16044, para. 1094; *Expanded Interconnection with Local Telephone Company Facilities*, CC Docket No. 91-141, Second Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, 8 FCC Rcd 7341, 7350, para. 21 (1993) (allowing a fresh look at agreements in “situations where excessive termination liabilities would affect competition for a significant period of time”); *Competition in the Interstate Interexchange Marketplace*, CC Docket No. 90-132, Report and Order, 6 FCC Rcd 5880, 5907, para. 151 (1991) (giving customers of AT&T 90 days to terminate their contracts without penalty to let them “tak[e] advantage of 800 number portability when it arrives”).

⁷⁶⁰ See *supra* paras. 186–268.

⁷⁶¹ See *supra* paras. 159–185.

⁷⁶² See, e.g., *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d 682; *Access Charge Reform Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 15982; *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962; *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd 19613.

⁷⁶³ *First Reconsideration of 1983 Access Charge Order*, 97 FCC 2d at 686, para. 7.

remain well within a zone of reasonableness.”⁷⁶⁴ To permit carriers to recover at least part of their lost intercarrier compensation revenues, we raise the caps on interstate SLCs as described below, which we find to be within the “zone of reasonableness” and which should not have a significant adverse effect on telephone penetration. We also enlist the help of the Separations Joint Board to consider the need, if any, for further increases in end-user charges and certain other revenue recovery issues.

292. The record reveals a wide variety of proposals for modifying interstate end-user charges in response to reductions in intercarrier compensation rates. The majority of these proposals advocate increasing the caps on the interstate SLCs. The interstate SLC is a flat-rated charge that recovers the interstate portion of local loop costs from an end user. Under our current rules governing incumbent LECs, SLCs are subject to a cap that varies based upon whether the line is: (a) a primary residential or single-line business line; (b) a non-primary residential line; or (c) a multi-line business or Centrex line.⁷⁶⁵ Some parties propose specific increases in SLC caps to offset a portion of the revenues lost through mandated reductions in intercarrier compensation—including both reductions in interstate and intrastate revenues.⁷⁶⁶ Other parties contend that most or all of a carrier’s replacement of lost intercarrier compensation revenues should come from increased SLCs.⁷⁶⁷ On the other hand, some consumer groups assert that no increase in SLC caps is warranted in response to reductions in intercarrier compensation rates.⁷⁶⁸

(i) Current Availability of End-User Charges for Revenue Recovery

293. As an initial matter, we permit incumbent LECs to increase their SLCs up to new caps to

⁷⁶⁴ *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 12976, para. 33; *see also, e.g., 1983 Access Charge Order*, 93 FCC 2d at 243, para. 4 (finding that a “transitional plan is necessary” in part because “[i]mmediate recovery of high fixed costs through flat end user charges might cause a significant number of local exchange service subscribers to cancel local exchange service despite the existence of a Universal Service Fund” and “[s]uch a result would not be consistent with the goals of the Communications Act”).

⁷⁶⁵ For price cap and rate-of-return carriers, the current SLC cap for residential and single-line business lines is \$6.50, 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(n)(1)(ii)(C), 69.152(d)(1)(ii)(D), and the current SLC cap for multi-line business and Centrex lines is \$9.20, 47 C.F.R. §§ 69.104(o)(1)(i); 69.152(k)(1)(i). Price cap carriers currently also have a SLC cap of \$7.00 for non-primary residential lines. 47 C.F.R. § 69.152(e)(1)(i).

⁷⁶⁶ *See, e.g., ICF ICC FNPRM Comments*, App. C at C-7; NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 7; Letter from Curt Stamp, President, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 2–3 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 6–7; Letter from Mary L. Henze, Executive Director—Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92; WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 06-112, 99-68, 07-135, Attach. at 2 (filed Oct. 9, 2008).

⁷⁶⁷ *See, e.g., Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President of Government Affairs, Sprint, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 5 (filed Oct. 7, 2008); Letter from Kathleen O’Brien Ham et al., Federal Regulatory Affairs, T-Mobile USA, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 8 (filed Oct. 3, 2008); Cox ICC FNPRM Comments at 5–6; Eschelon ICC FNPRM Comments at 12.*

⁷⁶⁸ *See Letter from Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. 2 at 22 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); Letter from David C. Bergmann, Assistant Consumer’s Counsel Chair, NASUCA Telecommunications Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Dockets Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 06-122, 05-337, 05-195, 04-36, 03-109, 02-60, CC Dockets Nos. 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 99-68, 96-262, 96-45, 80-286 at 10 (filed Sept. 30, 2008); Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 4 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).*

recover reductions in interstate intercarrier compensation revenues. In particular, we increase the SLC cap for residential and single-line business lines from \$6.50 to \$8.00, the non-primary residential line SLC cap from \$7.00 to \$8.50, and the multi-line business SLC cap from \$9.20 to \$11.50. We believe that these modest increases in the SLC caps continue to “ensure that the rates consumers pay for the SLC remain well within a zone of reasonableness.”⁷⁶⁹ Moreover, we believe that these SLC cap increases also address commenters’ concerns about the need for some end-user recovery in light of lost intercarrier compensation revenues. Although some commenters argue for more substantial increases in the SLC caps, we note that there is evidence that incumbent LECs charge rates below even the existing caps in a number of instances. For example, the primary residential and single-line business SLC cap is \$6.50, but the national average SLC for those lines is \$5.93 based on recent Commission data.⁷⁷⁰ Similarly, the non-primary residential line SLC cap is \$7.00, but the national average SLC for those lines is \$5.81.⁷⁷¹ Further, the multi-line business and Centrex line SLC cap is \$9.20, but the national average SLC for those lines is \$6.30—nearly \$3.00 below the cap.⁷⁷² We therefore find it reasonable in the first instance to raise the interstate SLC cap and to allow carriers whose current SLCs are below the new caps to increase those SLCs to recover revenues lost from interstate and intrastate access charge reductions.⁷⁷³

294. To the extent that an incumbent LEC increases its SLCs to recover reductions in its interstate intercarrier compensation revenues and any of its SLCs are still below the relevant caps, we allow those carriers to raise their SLCs further, up to the caps, to recover any net loss in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues, at least on an interim basis.⁷⁷⁴ As a prerequisite for incumbent LECs to increase their SLCs in this manner, we require that the LEC’s state retail rates and any intrastate SLC be set at the maximum level permitted under state regulations.⁷⁷⁵ This will ensure that revenues from interstate end-user charges will not be used to recover intrastate revenue requirements until the carrier has fully availed itself of all available intrastate revenue opportunities under existing law. We also mandate that any increase in interstate SLC revenues that are intended to recover lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues be used by the state in ratemaking to reduce costs or revenue requirements to be recovered in the intrastate jurisdiction.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁶⁹ *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 12976, para. 33. We note that section 54.403 of the Commission’s rules provides for Tier 1 lifeline support to cover the tariffed SLCs established by rate-of-return and price cap carriers pursuant to sections 69.104 and 69.152 of the Commission’s rules. 47 C.F.R. § 54.403.

⁷⁷⁰ 2008 TRENDS IN TELEPHONE SERVICE, tbl. 1.1 (providing national weighted average SLCs for price cap carriers and all LECs in the NECA pool as of June 30, 2008).

⁷⁷¹ 2008 TRENDS IN TELEPHONE SERVICE, tbl. 1.1.

⁷⁷² 2008 TRENDS IN TELEPHONE SERVICE, tbl. 1.1

⁷⁷³ Should a carrier agree to (or tariff) intercarrier charges below those that would be required by the reforms adopted in this order, the difference between the charges it sets and the maximum charges it is allowed to set may not be recovered through increased SLCs, nor may such carriers seek to obtain supplemental universal service support, as described in Part V.C.2, based on that difference.

⁷⁷⁴ As discussed below, we are referring to the Joint Board, among other things, the question of whether, and to what extent, net reductions in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues should be offset by revenues from interstate end-user charges. See *infra* paras. 303–310.

⁷⁷⁵ To the extent that a carrier’s state retail rates have been deregulated, that carrier may not increase its SLCs to recover any net loss in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues.

⁷⁷⁶ Cf. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Ninth Report and Order and Eighteenth Order on Reconsideration, 14 FCC Rcd 20432, 20486–87, para. 106 (1999) (*Universal Service Ninth*

(continued....)

295. We find that we have authority to allow recovery of intrastate revenue requirements in this manner. For one, the legacy separations regime does not preclude this action. The Commission historically has provided federal funds to cover at least a portion of costs assigned to the intrastate jurisdiction.⁷⁷⁷ Although those decisions relied on the Commission's universal service authority pursuant to section 254, we find that we have authority under section 251(g) to allow recovery of intrastate revenue requirements through interstate SLC rates. Section 251(g) empowers the Commission to subject traffic previously encompassed by section 251(g) to the reciprocal compensation regime of section 251(b)(5), including providing for an orderly transition. Allowing incumbent LECs the option to recover certain lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues through increases in the interstate SLC, subject to the new caps, furthers such a transition. In particular, this option helps mitigate any need incumbent LECs might have to seek increases in state rates due to decreases in intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues during the initial stages of the transition, pending the Separations Joint Board referral and subsequent Commission action. We also acknowledge that interstate SLC charges are governed by sections 201 and 202 of the Act, and that "the just and reasonable rates required by Sections 201 and 202 . . . must ordinarily be cost-based, absent a clear explanation of the Commission's reasons for a departure from cost-based ratemaking."⁷⁷⁸ In the past, the Commission has, in fact, adopted regulatory approaches that deviated from cost-based ratemaking.⁷⁷⁹ We find such an approach warranted here to help mitigate regulatory burdens during the transition, as described above.

296. In sum, we adopt increased SLC caps to allow incumbent LECs to recover some or all of their net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues resulting from rate reductions pursuant to this order. In particular, to recover those lost revenues, we permit incumbent LECs to increase each of their SLCs up to the new caps.

297. With respect to non-incumbent LECs, we note that most interstate rates of such providers are not subject to *ex ante* regulation by the Commission. Thus, we allow those carriers to recover any net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues in any lawful manner.⁷⁸⁰

(ii) Joint Board Referral of Possible Changes to End-User Charges

298. We enlist the aid of the Separations Joint Board to evaluate the need for any additional increases in interstate end-user rates for carriers to recover any net loss in interstate and/or intrastate

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Report and Order) (specifying that "hold-harmless" universal service support "should continue to operate through the jurisdictional separations process to reduce book costs to be recovered in the intrastate jurisdiction.").

⁷⁷⁷ See, e.g., *Universal Service Ninth Report and Order*, 14 FCC Rcd 20432 (providing high-cost universal service support for intrastate costs).

⁷⁷⁸ *Access Charge Reform Second Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 16619–20, para. 44 (citing *Competitive Telecomms. Ass'n v. FCC*, 87 F.3d 522, 529 (D.C. Cir. 1996)).

⁷⁷⁹ See, e.g., *LEC Price Cap Order*, 5 FCC Rcd 6786 (adopting price cap regulation, under which rates are not tied directly to cost); *Pricing Flexibility Order*, 14 FCC Rcd 14221, 14307, para. 168 (once price cap carriers are granted pricing flexibility, they lose the option of a low end adjustment, which would permit incumbent LECs earning rates of return less than 10.25% in a given year to increase their price cap indices to a level that would enable them to earn 10.25%.); *MCI Telecomms. Corp. v. US WEST Commc'ns, Inc.*, File Nos. E-97-08, E-97-20 through 24, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 9328, 9334, para. 14 (2000) (finding that incumbent LECs' non-cost-based PICC did not violate section 201(b) given the Commission's prior establishment of a safe harbor).

⁷⁸⁰ Cf. *Telephone Number Portability*, CC Docket No. 95-116, Third Report and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 11701, 11725–26, 11773–80, paras. 39, 135–49 (1998) (carriers other than incumbent LECs permitted to recover such costs in any lawful manner).

intercarrier compensation revenues as a result of the reform measures we adopt today. There are a range of widely divergent proposals in the record regarding the need for additional changes to the SLC caps adopted above as part of comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform. We believe that the information and analysis developed by the Separations Joint Board will be extremely valuable in evaluating these issues.

299. Our decision to seek input from the Separations Joint Board is consistent with section 410 of the Act. Section 410(c) of the Act requires the Commission to refer to the Separations Joint Board any changes to the separations rules being considered through a rulemaking proceeding. Although no changes to the separations rules are at issue here, section 410(c) also authorizes the Commission to refer matters “relating to common carrier communications of joint Federal-State concern to a Federal-State Joint Board.”⁷⁸¹ We believe that recommendations from a Joint Board regarding these issues are important to striking the right balance among the various policy goals at stake, relating to traffic that historically has been regulated, in part, by both federal and state jurisdictions. Moreover, the issue of using revenues from interstate end-user charges to recover intrastate revenue requirements is sufficiently related to the underlying separations requirements themselves that we believe the Separations Joint Board possesses highly relevant expertise to provide recommendations on these issues.⁷⁸²

300. As described in greater detail below, we refer to the Separations Joint Board certain specific issues regarding possible increases in interstate end-user charges: (i) whether SLC caps should be increased by a fixed amount to recover any net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues; (ii) whether a “flexible” SLC cap should be used in conjunction with an overall benchmark or threshold; or (iii) some combination of those options.

301. *Quantifying Any Increase in End-User Charges.* We refer to the Separations Joint Board several possible approaches for establishing any additional permissible increases in interstate end-user charges, to the extent that any are warranted. First, the Separations Joint Board could directly recommend particular further increases in the SLC caps. Parties here have proposed various levels of SLC cap increases, and different ways to distribute those increases across the different SLC caps. For example, the ICF proposal would result in all SLC caps being increased to \$10.00 by the end of a transition period.⁷⁸³ Under the Missoula Plan’s initial proposal, SLC cap increases vary for the three “tracks” or categories of carriers defined in the plan.⁷⁸⁴ ITTA proposes a \$2.25 increase in each SLC cap by the end of a transition period, subject to a benchmark consisting of SLCs, retail rates, and certain other charges.⁷⁸⁵ Other parties, such as CTIA, contend that recovery of lost intercarrier compensation revenues by incumbent LECs

⁷⁸¹ 47 U.S.C. § 410(c).

⁷⁸² The Commission has referred non-separations issues to the Separations Joint Board previously. *See, e.g., MTS and WATS Market Structure and Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket Nos. 78-72, 80-286, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 49 Fed. Reg. 18318, 18318, para. 1 (1984) (referring to a Separations Joint Board issues including: (1) the subscriber line charge for residential and single-line business customers; (2) the transition mechanism for implementing subscriber line charges for these customers; (3) an exemption from the subscriber line charge or other assistance for low income households; and (4) additional assistance for small telephone companies.); *MTS and WATS Market Structure and Amendment of Part 67 of the Commission's Rules*, CC Docket Nos. 78-72, 80-286, Recommended Decision, 49 Fed. Reg. 48325, 48327, para. 9 n.20 (1984) (noting that “[s]ince these issues do not involve the allocation of costs between the jurisdictions, preparation of a Joint Board recommendation is not mandatory.”).

⁷⁸³ ICF ICC FNPRM Comments, App. C at C-7.

⁷⁸⁴ NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2 at 7.

⁷⁸⁵ ITTA Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2–3.

should come solely from end-user charges.⁷⁸⁶ In contrast, Free Press, NASUCA, and Ad Hoc propose that SLC caps not be increased at all.⁷⁸⁷

302. Second, the Separations Joint Board could recommend a “flexible” SLC cap that would vary depending upon a carrier’s other end-user rates and an overall benchmark or threshold. For example, under a recent Verizon proposal, the ‘default’ SLC caps all would increase to \$10.00 by the end of a transition period.⁷⁸⁸ However, to the extent that a carrier’s relevant end-user rates still are below a proposed benchmark, that carrier’s SLC cap would increase as much as needed to reach the benchmark.⁷⁸⁹ Thus, the Separations Joint Board could determine a particular benchmark or threshold and allow the SLC cap to vary for each carrier, depending upon how much “headroom” that carrier has under the benchmark, in light of the carrier’s other rates. To the extent that the Separations Joint Board recommends this approach, it should specify which carrier rates should be included in the relevant benchmark or threshold.

303. Third, the Separations Joint Board could recommend some combination of the first and second options.

304. In making recommendations on these issues, the Separations Joint Board will consider the extent to which any recommended increases in interstate end-user charges should be used to offset lost intrastate intercarrier compensation, to the extent that decreases in interstate intercarrier compensation revenues already have been recovered. Most comprehensive reform proposals in the record assume that SLC cap increases will be used to offset at least some intrastate revenues.⁷⁹⁰ Logically, however, another alternative is for any increases in the SLC caps to be used only to recover reductions in interstate intercarrier compensation revenues, and to leave it to each state to address lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues as appropriate under state law.

305. *Timing.* We direct the Separations Joint Board to issue its recommended decision not later than one year from the effective date of this order. In light of that timetable, we limit the Separations Joint Board to consideration of specific issues we refer in this order.

b. Universal Service Support

(i) Policy Approach

306. We recognize that the actions we take to reform intercarrier compensation will result in reduced revenues for many carriers. As discussed above, carriers have the opportunity to replace certain

⁷⁸⁶ CTIA Oct. 2, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 10. *See also, e.g.*, Letter from Norina Moy, Director, Government Affairs, Sprint, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 04-36, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Aug. 7, 2008).

⁷⁸⁷ Letter from Ben Scott, Policy Director, Free Press, Washington Office, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. 2 at 22 (filed Sept. 19, 2008); NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 10; Letter from James S. Blaszak, Counsel for Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, Attach. at 4 (filed Oct. 14, 2008).

⁷⁸⁸ Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6–7.

⁷⁸⁹ Verizon Sept. 12, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter.

⁷⁹⁰ To the extent that interstate end-user charges are used to offset any lost intrastate intercarrier compensation revenues, we mandate that the states take account of those revenues in their state ratemaking by reducing the intrastate costs or revenue requirement to be recovered through intrastate rates.

of those lost revenues through end-user charges.⁷⁹¹ We also acknowledge that, in the past, the Commission has sometimes provided new universal service support to replace reductions in intercarrier compensation revenues.⁷⁹² As the Fifth Circuit has recognized, however, “[b]ecause universal service is funded by a general pool subsidized by all telecommunications providers—and thus indirectly by customers - excess subsidization in some cases may detract from universal service by causing rates unnecessarily to rise, thereby pricing some consumers out of the market.”⁷⁹³ Thus, excessive universal service subsidization could, perversely, cause undesirable increases in consumers’ bills.

307. We note that many companies—in particular price cap carriers—consistently are paying dividends and are using the same supported network to provide both regulated services and non-regulated services. Throughout the course of our comprehensive reform proceedings, commenters have identified this as a concern to be weighed carefully when evaluating the need for universal service support. For example, following the 2005 intercarrier compensation Further Notice, CTIA contended that some rural incumbent LECs already “are overcompensated by universal service support” based on evidence that their “stocks generate returns, measured by market-to-book ratios, far in excess of, and exhibit significantly lower risk premiums than, the supposedly more secure RBOCs.”⁷⁹⁴ Commenters continue to express concern that existing universal service subsidies too often lead simply to “high overhead, sumptuous earnings, [and] rich dividends.”⁷⁹⁵ For example, recent news reports indicate that CenturyTel and Embarq still “remain highly profitable – operating margins for both are 27 percent” notwithstanding any competition they face.⁷⁹⁶ Parties have argued that there continues to be evidence that “[i]nvestors place a higher value on RLEC earnings than on other ILEC earnings. In today’s market, the larger ILECs, which do not generate much of their revenues from federal subsidies, are valued much less highly per dollar of profit.”⁷⁹⁷ While there are “various factors in play” this suggests that “[m]illions of dollars in extra wealth end up in the hands of private investors” by “transferring income from telephone users to phone company stockholders.”⁷⁹⁸ Indeed, commenters note that “some carriers owned by co-ops pay their

⁷⁹¹ In this order, we do not decide the maximum amount that incumbent LECs ultimately may charge customers in the form of interstate end-user charges. As discussed above, that will depend upon further Commission action based on recommendations from the Joint Board.

⁷⁹² See, e.g., *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd 12962; *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd 19613; see also *MAG Second FNPRM*, 19 FCC Rcd 4122.

⁷⁹³ *Alenco*, 201 F.3d at 620.

⁷⁹⁴ CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 37 citing Western Wireless Reply, CC Docket No. 96-45, Attach. at 2–5 (filed Dec. 14, 2004) (attaching Economics and Technology, Inc., *Reforming Universal Service Funding for Rural ILECs: An Idea Whose Time Has Come*).

⁷⁹⁵ Thomas W. Hazlett, “*Universal Service Telephone Subsidies: What Does \$7 Billion Buy? (Universal Service Telephone Subsidies)*” at 33, attached to Core Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments, Tab B (quotation omitted).

⁷⁹⁶ *A Fair Copper*, FINANCIAL TIMES, Oct. 28, 2008, at 16.

⁷⁹⁷ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 34.

⁷⁹⁸ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 34, 70. See also Julie Tanner, General Counsel, Chinook Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 08-10, Attach. 1 at 7 (filed Feb. 22, 2008) (arguing that incumbent LECs receiving universal service support “send a comfortable return on investment to investors (and rural cooperative members) with no accountability”); NTCH, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 08-10 at 8 (filed Feb. 22, 2008) (“The object of the [universal service] subsidy is not to prop up high cost legacy companies and technologies or assure their profitability, nor to add to the profits of wireless carriers.”).

members annual dividends that exceed their members' local phone charges."⁷⁹⁹ In light of these concerns and the mandates of section 254, we agree with commenters that it is not appropriate to require all universal service contributors to pay into the fund so that these carriers can continue to pay dividends.⁸⁰⁰

308. Thus, rather than guaranteeing revenue neutrality, as some commenters propose,⁸⁰¹ we take steps here to ensure that any new universal service subsidies are targeted carefully to situations where they are most crucially needed. In particular, far from the regulated monopolies of years past, significant marketplace developments have resulted in additional revenue opportunities for carriers. As NASUCA observes, "[i]ntercarrier compensation, SLCs and the USF are but three of the numerous spigots from which dollars flow to fill up the telephone companies' revenue buckets."⁸⁰² "By way of illustration," NASUCA points out that "using their common local loop platform, carriers are now generating billions of dollars in digital subscriber line ("DSL") revenues that they did not generate five or ten years ago."⁸⁰³ Indeed, Time Warner Telecom has pointed to evidence that, for some carriers, "revenue derived from the ILECs' advanced services more than doubles the revenue from switched access services."⁸⁰⁴ Thus, Free Press observes that "the unregulated revenue streams of rate-of-return and price cap Local Exchange Carriers serving in high-cost areas" are the "500 pound gorilla in the room," and it contends that "these revenues" should be "considered in the discussions of 'need' for the purposes of

⁷⁹⁹ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 70.

⁸⁰⁰ *See, e.g., GCI Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 68 ("Even if excessive support does not lead to unaffordable increases in rates for non-subsidized subscribers, requiring those customers to pay more than is necessary in order to excessively subsidize rates for other [services] (or worse yet, to finance high dividend payments to owners of rural ILECs) is not consistent with maintaining just and reasonable rates."); Time Warner Telecom *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 10 (noting that "RBOCs are already realizing substantial profits from [network] investments, easily compensating for any loss in access payments that they may face" and that "a high [universal service] contribution level may approach the point at which the USF charges imposed upon end-users actually threaten the goal of universal service").

⁸⁰¹ *See, e.g., CenturyTel* Sept. 19, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 5 (arguing that revenue neutrality should be a fundamental goal of comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from Stuart Polikoff, Director of Government Relations, OPASTCO, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 05-337, 06-122, Attach. at 3 (filed Sept. 16, 2008) (arguing that, if the Commission does not adopt the Missoula Plan, it should establish a mechanism for "rural RoR ILECs that allows for full recovery of the revenues lost as a result of the change in intrastate access rates and structure, on a revenue neutral basis."). *See also* Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 21 (arguing that decreases in intercarrier compensation rate levels should be offset from the USF or another revenue replacement mechanism).

⁸⁰² NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸⁰³ Comments of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates to Refresh the Record, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 02-6, 01-92, 00-256, 96-262, 99-68, 80-256, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 07-135, 06-122, 05-195, 03-109, 02-60 at 6 (filed July 7, 2008) (NASUCA July 7, 2008 Supp. Comments). *See also id.* at 10 ("Adding insult to injury, there is no consideration in the Missoula Plan of the additional revenues that ILECs gain from serving new broadband lines which are outside of the current ICC system. In other words, ILECs are losing lines and MOU as consumers drop traditional landlines and add broadband lines to access the Internet. However, the revenue gains from broadband line additions are totally out of the picture as far as the Missoula Plan is concerned.").

⁸⁰⁴ Time Warner Telecom *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 10 ("According to AT&T, the revenue derived from the ILECs' advanced services more than doubles the revenue from switched access services. As AT&T stated in its Annual Report, '[w]e have found that when customers add broadband to a basic package, they are 40 percent less likely to switch to another provider, and average revenue per customer jumps nearly 120 percent.' It would make little sense for the ratepayers to subsidize the ILECs' already profitable business decisions.").

universal service.”⁸⁰⁵ We agree that such “new and growing source[s] of revenues should mitigate the impact of intercarrier compensation reform for rural and other carriers.”⁸⁰⁶

309. We are concerned that universal service support be targeted to those companies whose reduced intercarrier compensation revenues truly are needed to continue providing quality service at affordable rates, and that it should not simply enable the company to pay bigger dividends to shareholders or pad a company’s bottom line. We find that, because of their different regulatory treatment, price cap incumbent LECs and rate-of-return incumbent LECs should be treated differently. For price cap carriers, we adopt the proposal of various commenters to consider all a company’s costs and revenues—both regulated and non-regulated—before providing new universal service support.⁸⁰⁷ Thus, price cap incumbent LEC seeking universal service funding to replace lost intercarrier compensation revenues must make such a showing to the Commission when petitioning for such support.

310. We also agree with proposals that carriers fully avail themselves of existing opportunities for end-user recovery before collecting new universal service subsidies.⁸⁰⁸ To the extent that regulators have determined that rates at a particular level are reasonable, we find it appropriate for carriers to charge those rates in the first instance, rather than pricing below those levels in order to foist recovery of the additional revenues on universal service contributors. Consequently, as additional preconditions for receiving new universal service support, a price cap carrier must show that its federal SLC, state SLC (if any), and state retail local service rates are at the maximum levels permitted under existing applicable law.⁸⁰⁹

311. In conjunction, we conclude that the conditions we adopt as prerequisites for obtaining new universal service support adequately target that support to carriers with a genuine need without unduly burdening consumers with excessive new universal service contribution burdens.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁵ Free Press Oct. 13, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6. *See also id.* at 6–7 (“While we’d like the Commission to consider a carrier’s entire revenue stream before allowing increased USF support to offset lost access revenues” to the extent that there is such support it “should be confined to rate-of-return carriers only.”).

⁸⁰⁶ NASUCA July 7, 2008 Supp. Comments at 6. Indeed, there is some indication that carriers may be earning excessive returns even with respect to their regulated services. *See, e.g.*, GCI *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 66–67 (asserting that ACS of Anchorage has regularly earned returns in excess of an 11.25% rate of return on its regulated interstate switched access services, including 32.12% for 1997–98, 30.26% for 1999–2000; 35.29% for 2001–02; and 15.01% for 2003–04).

⁸⁰⁷ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Mary C. Albert, Assistant General Counsel, COMPTTEL, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 05-337, 04-36 at 1 (filed Oct. 2, 2008); NASUCA July 7, 2008 Supp. Comments at 32–34; Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President of Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 7, 2008).

⁸⁰⁸ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 04-36 at 1–2 (filed Oct. 2, 2008); Letter from Robert W. Quinn, Jr., Senior Vice President—Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Kevin Martin, Chairman, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 07-135, 05-337 at 5–7 (filed July 17, 2008); Letter from Anthony M. Alessi, Senior Counsel, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 96-45, WC Docket No. 05-337 at 3–5 (filed May 23, 2008); Cox *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 12–13.

⁸⁰⁹ Although we do not adopt a particular revenue benchmark here, as some commenters propose, the Joint Board may well recommend such an approach. Thus, depending upon the Joint Board’s proposal, and the Commission’s subsequent action, maximum federal SLCs and/or state retail local rates might be determined, in part, by such a benchmark.

⁸¹⁰ For these same reasons, should a carrier agree to (or tariff) intercarrier charges below those that would be

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312. We recognize that interstate rate-of-return carriers present a special situation, because under our rules they must be provided an opportunity to earn the rate of return established by our orders.⁸¹¹ As a result, we find it inappropriate to impose the same conditions before interstate rate-of-return carriers can recover universal service support.⁸¹²

(ii) Legal Authority

313. Consistent with our mandate to “ensure that universal service is available at rates that are just, reasonable, and affordable,” we establish a new supplement to IAS and ICLS universal service funding mechanism.⁸¹³ As we did recently in two other Commission orders that reformed interstate switched access charges, we include here additional universal service funding to keep retail rates affordable while ensuring that maintaining affordable rates does not unduly threaten the financial viability of rate-regulated incumbent LECs.⁸¹⁴ Our decision to establish a new funding mechanism is also consistent with our general authority under section 4(i) of the Act because it furthers our universal service objectives.⁸¹⁵ Mindful of our obligation to ensure that these new subsidies are made available only where essential, however we make new universal service subsidies available subject to specific conditions that will target the support to only those carriers whose circumstances merit it.

(iii) Access to Universal Service Support

314. As discussed below, we limit access to universal service support to incumbent LECs that meet certain preconditions. As an initial matter, we find that limiting such support to incumbent LECs is consistent with their position in the marketplace and the resulting regulatory constraints on their pricing behavior. In a series of orders in the Competitive Carrier proceeding, the Commission distinguished two kinds of carriers—those with individual market power (dominant carriers) and those without market

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required by the reforms adopted in this order, that carrier may not seek to obtain supplemental universal service support based on the difference between the charges it sets and the maximum charges it is allowed to set.

⁸¹¹ See, e.g., Free Press Oct. 13, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6–7 (noting that, to the extent that there is universal service support to address any net loss in intercarrier compensation revenues, it “should be confined to rate-of-return carriers only.”). But see, e.g., GCI Missoula Phantom Traffic Comments at 66–67 (asserting that ACS of Anchorage has regularly earned returns in excess of an 11.25 percent rate of return on its regulated interstate switched access services).

⁸¹² See, e.g., Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2 (requesting, among other things, that the Commission ensure that “[s]upplemental interstate common line support (ICLS) (i.e., “the restructure mechanism”) is automatically available for carriers that are currently under RoR regulation in the interstate jurisdiction without any other conditions applying”).

⁸¹³ 47 U.S.C. § 254(i) (requiring that “[t]he Commission and the States should ensure that universal service is available at rates that are just, reasonable, and affordable.”); see also 47 U.S.C. §254(b)(1) (stating that “[q]uality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates”).

⁸¹⁴ See, e.g., *CALLS Order*, 15 FCC Rcd at 12971, para. 24; *MAG Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 19669–70, para. 132.

⁸¹⁵ Section 4(i) provides that the Commission may “perform any and all acts, make such rules and regulations, and issue such orders, not inconsistent with this chapter, as may be necessary in the execution of its functions.” 47 U.S.C. § 154(i). Prior to the enactment of section 254 (as part of the 1996 Act), sections 1 and 4(i) provided authority for the Commission’s adoption of a universal service fund. See *Rural Telephone Coalition v. FCC*, 838 F.2d 1307 (D.C. Cir. 1988). See also *New England Telephone and Telegraph Co. v. FCC*, 826 F.2d 1101, 1107 (D.C. Cir. 1987) (describing section 4(i) as a “wide-ranging source of authority”), *cert. denied*, 490 U.S. 1039 (1989).

power (non-dominant carriers).⁸¹⁶ The Commission found it appropriate to continue to subject dominant carriers to full regulation under Title II of the Communications Act.⁸¹⁷ Incumbent LECs are dominant carriers in their provision of switched access services and, as a result, are subject to rate regulation.⁸¹⁸ This rate regulation comes in two forms—regulation of intercarrier charges and regulation of end user charges. The Commission regulates interstate end-user charges of incumbent LECs, while the states generally regulate those carriers' intrastate end-user rates. Unlike incumbent LECs, competitive carriers (e.g., such as competitive LECs, CMRS providers, and non-dominant IXCs) lack market power and are considered non-dominant. As a result, their end-user charges are not subject to comparable rate regulation by the Commission and the states.⁸¹⁹

315. Because incumbent LECs, as a result of their classification as dominant carriers, have had their end-user charges regulated (both in terms of rate levels and rate structures), they have less flexibility than other carriers to recover decreased intercarrier revenues through end-user charges. As a result, they are less likely to be able to recover reductions in intercarrier compensation revenues resulting from the actions we take today. Accordingly, we conclude that access to universal service support should be limited to incumbent LECs that meet the necessary preconditions. For this reason, we disagree with parties that advocate making funding available to all carriers, both incumbent and competitive⁸²⁰ or to all

⁸¹⁶ *Policy and Rules Concerning Rates for Competitive Common Carrier Services and Facilities Authorizations Therefor*, CC Docket No. 79-252, Notice of Inquiry and Proposed Rulemaking, 77 FCC 2d 308 (1979); First Report and Order, 85 FCC 2d 1 (1980) (*Competitive Carrier First Report and Order*); Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 84 FCC 2d 445 (1981); Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 82-187, 47 Fed. Reg. 17308 (1982); Second Report and Order, 91 FCC 2d 59 (1982) (*Competitive Carrier Second Report and Order*); Order on Reconsideration, 93 FCC 2d 54 (1983); Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 48 Fed. Reg. 28292 (1983); Third Report and Order, 48 Fed. Reg. 46791 (1983); Fourth Report and Order, 95 FCC 2d 554 (1983) (*Competitive Carrier Fourth Report and Order*), vacated, *AT&T v. FCC*, 978 F.2d 727 (D.C. Cir. 1992), Fifth Report and Order, 98 FCC 2d 1191 (1984) (*Competitive Carrier Fifth Report and Order*); Sixth Report and Order, 99 FCC 2d 1020 (1985), vacated, *MCI Telecomms. Corp. v. FCC*, 765 F.2d 1186 (D.C. Cir. 1985) (*Competitive Carrier Sixth Report and Order*), *aff'd*, *MCI v. AT&T*, 512 U.S. 218 (1994) (collectively, the *Competitive Carrier* proceeding); see 47 C.F.R. § 61.3(q), (y).

⁸¹⁷ *Competitive Carrier First Report and Order*, 85 FCC 2d at 10–11, para. 26.

⁸¹⁸ See Section 272(f)(1) *Sunset of the BOC Separate Affiliate and Related Requirements; 2000 Biennial Regulatory Review Separate Affiliate Requirements of Section 64.1903 of the Commission's Rules*, WC Docket No. 02-112; CC Docket No. 00-175, Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 22 FCC Rcd 16440, 16484, para. 90 (2007).

⁸¹⁹ For instance, the Commission has declined to regulate the SLCs of competitive LECs. See *Cost Review Proceeding for Residential and Single-Line Business Subscriber Line Charge (SLC) Caps; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, Order, 17 FCC Rcd 10868, 10870 n.8 (2002) (subsequent history omitted); see also *CLEC Access Charge Order*, 16 FCC Rcd at 9955, para. 81 (stating that competitive LECs competing with CALLS incumbent LECs are free to build into their end-user rates a component equivalent to the incumbent LEC's SLC).

⁸²⁰ See, e.g., T-Mobile Oct. 3, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 9 & n.14 (arguing that “any ICC replacement mechanism be fully portable to competitive carriers in order to fulfill the principles of competitive and technological neutrality.”). Sprint argues that a fund that compensates only incumbent LECs (and not competitive LECs, wireless carriers, and IXCs) for lost access revenues is “blatantly anti-competitive.” Letter from Anna M. Gomez, Vice President of Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel Corp., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45; WC Docket No. 04-36 at 4 (filed Oct. 1, 2008). Many CMRS carriers maintain that any replacement mechanism must be fully portable to competitive carriers in order to fulfill the principles of competitive and technological neutrality. See, e.g., Leap *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 18; Allied National *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 10; CTIA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 37; SouthernLINC *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 9; RCA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 4; US Cellular

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carriers that currently receive access charge revenues.⁸²¹ As discussed above, competitive carrier end-user charges are not subject to rate regulation, and those carriers have the opportunity to recover lost access revenue through any legally permissible means.⁸²² We also reject an approach that would limit funding to rural rate-of-return carriers.⁸²³ Incumbent LECs subject to price cap regulation also are subject to regulatory constraints on end-user charges, and we therefore decline to categorically deny universal service funding to particular types of incumbent LECs.⁸²⁴

316. *Supplemental IAS for price cap carriers.* Consistent with the policy approach discussed above, we further find it necessary to establish certain requirements that an incumbent LEC must satisfy to receive the new universal service subsidies. Before seeking universal service funding, interstate price cap incumbent LECs must first demonstrate that their end-user charges are at the maximum allowable rate levels. Thus, price cap incumbent LECs must show that they are charging the maximum interstate SLCs permitted under applicable law, and they must make the same showing with respect to any intrastate SLCs. In addition, price cap incumbent LECs must demonstrate that their retail local rates are at the maximum allowable amount based on applicable state regulation. Price cap incumbent LECs operating in

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ICC FNPRM Comments at 4; T-Mobile *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 26; Dobson and American *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 10.

⁸²¹ See, e.g., ICF *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 32–33 (stating that any funding should be temporary and limited to those that lose access revenue because of intercarrier compensation reform); USTA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 40 (arguing that funding should not compensate wireless carriers and that it should not be portable); CCAP *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 14 (stating that funding “should not be portable to competitive eligible telecommunications carriers.”); Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President of Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, Attach. at 7 (filed Oct. 12, 2008) (asserting that funding should compensate only LECs that have lost revenues because of intercarrier compensation reform); Letter from Curt Stamp, President, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, Docket Nos. 01-92, 04-36, 96-45, 05-337, Attach. at 9 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (arguing that the Commission should “limit duplicative networks” by prohibiting wireless carriers and other carriers that do not receive access compensation from benefiting from the fund); Letter from Alex J. Harris, Vice President—Regulatory, Frontier, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 16, 18 (filed May 11, 2005) (proposing that the funding be confined to incumbent LECs in rural study areas but available to all carriers that lost access revenues in non-rural study areas); see also Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel to XO Communications, Kelley Drye & Warren LLP, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket No. 06-122, Attach. at 4 (filed Oct. 3, 2008) (contending that revenue replacement funding should either be “competitively neutral” or limited to only rate-of-return carriers).

⁸²² Some competitive LECs claim that, in practice, they have little opportunity to recover their costs because the incumbent LEC, whose prices are regulated, effectively sets a ceiling on the prices they charge. See, e.g., COMPTTEL *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 7. Although we acknowledge that, in a homogeneous goods market with a single price, such an argument might be plausible, we do not find such assumptions apply in modern telecommunications markets. In particular, with modern telecommunications technology, carriers are offering an expanding number of new services and marketing them through a variety of bundled service offerings. As a result, telecommunications services are becoming much more of a differentiated product, and competitors have greater opportunity to offer niche services. In light of these developments, we find unpersuasive arguments that competitors are effectively price regulated and thus do not have an opportunity to recover lost access revenues.

⁸²³ See, e.g., NCTA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 11 (arguing that funding should be limited to “non-Tier 1 rural carrier[s]”); NTCA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 56 (asserting that funding “should be targeted at rural ILECs exclusively”); Comments of the Rural Alliance, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 4 (filed Jun. 27, 2008) (stating that the fund should only compensate rural rate-of-return carriers that lose access revenues).

⁸²⁴ For these same reasons, should a carrier agree to (or tariff) intercarrier charges below those that would be required by the reforms adopted in this order, that carrier may not seek to obtain supplemental universal service support based on the difference between the charges it sets and the maximum charges it is allowed to set.

states where retail rates are deregulated are not entitled to the new universal service funding adopted here. In this case, these price cap incumbent LECs will be similarly situated to competitive carriers, because without regulation, they have the opportunity to recover lost access revenues due to intercarrier compensation reform through increased end-user charges.

317. In addition, a price cap incumbent LEC may qualify for universal service funding if it can demonstrate that, as a result of reduced and reformed intercarrier charges, and after accounting for increased end-user charges, it is still unable to earn a “normal profit.” In the *Local Competition First Report and Order*, the Commission discussed the concept of normal profit and defined it as the “total revenue required to cover all the costs of a firm, including its opportunity costs.”⁸²⁵

318. As described above, many companies—in particular, price cap carriers—consistently are paying dividends and are using the same supported network to provide both regulated services and non-regulated services.⁸²⁶ We do not find it appropriate to require all universal service contributors to pay into the fund to provide for “high overhead, sumptuous earnings, [and] rich dividends” on the part of these carriers.⁸²⁷ Indeed, as discussed above,⁸²⁸ “[i]ntercarrier compensation, SLCs and the USF are but three of the numerous spigots from which dollars flow to fill up the telephone companies’ revenue buckets”⁸²⁹ in addition to other nonregulated services that use “their common local loop platform.”⁸³⁰ Therefore, in determining whether this criterion is met, the Commission will evaluate the total costs and total revenues of the company as a whole, including those from both regulated and non-regulated sources.⁸³¹ While this is a more stringent showing than that required of rate-of-return carriers, we find such differences warranted by the different rate regulation frameworks. In light of our reforms, we find it appropriate, upon request, to allow price cap carriers to make a one-way election of rate-of-return regulation.⁸³²

⁸²⁵ *Local Competition First Report and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd at 15854, para. 699.

⁸²⁶ *See supra* para. 312.

⁸²⁷ *Universal Service Telephone Subsidies* at 33.

⁸²⁸ As discussed below, Lifeline customers are exempt from contribution assessments. *See infra* para. 137.

⁸²⁹ NASUCA Sept. 30, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸³⁰ NASUCA July 7, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸³¹ The non-regulated costs and revenues to be included in this calculation are those associated with non-regulated activities involving the common or joint use of assets or resources in the provision of both regulated and non-regulated products and services.

⁸³² Pursuant to section 61.41(d) of the Commission’s rules, once a carrier is subject to price cap regulation, it may not “withdraw from such regulation.” 47 C.F.R. § 61.41(d); *see also* 47 C.F.R. § 61.41(b), (c) (requiring conversion from rate-of-return to price cap regulation under certain circumstances). Under section 1.3 of the Commission’s rules, however, “any provision of the Commission’s rules may be waived by the Commission . . . if good cause therefore is shown.” 47 C.F.R. § 1.3. As interpreted by the courts, this requires that a petitioner demonstrate that “special circumstances warrant a deviation from the general rule and that such a deviation will serve the public interest.” *Northeast Cellular Telephone Co. v. FCC*, 897 F.2d 1164 (D.C. Cir. 1990) (citing *WAIT Radio v. FCC*, 418 F.2d 1153, 1158 (D.C. Cir. 1969)). In other circumstances in the past, the Commission has found good cause to waive section 61.41(d) and other related provisions of the Commission’s rules to enable operations subject to price cap regulation to convert to rate-of-return regulation. *See, e.g., ALLTEL Corp. Petition for Waiver of Section 61.41 of the Commission’s Rules and Application for Transfer of Control*, CCB/CPD No. 99-1, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 14 FCC Rcd. 14191 (1999); *CenturyTel of Northwest Arkansas, LLC et al., Joint Petition for Waiver of Definition of “Study Area” Contained in the Part 36 Appendix-Glossary of the Commission’s Rules, Petition for Waiver of Sections 61.41(c) and 69.3(g)(2) of the Commission’s Rules*, CC Docket No. 96-45, Memorandum

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319. We recognize that the conditions by which we would make universal service funding available may not ensure that all carriers recover all reduced intercarrier compensation revenues that result from the reforms we adopt here. We reject the assertion by some carriers that any revenue replacement mechanism adopted by the Commission in the context of intercarrier compensation reform must ensure absolute revenue neutrality.⁸³³ We agree with commenters who maintain that the Commission has no legal obligation to ensure that carriers recover every dollar in access revenues lost as a result of reform, absent a showing of a taking.⁸³⁴ We conclude that certain increased end-user charges and narrowly targeted supplemental IAS universal service support will provide a reasonable opportunity to recover revenues lost as a result of our intercarrier compensation reform, and to earn a reasonable profit. Whether a particular price cap incumbent LEC is entitled to any revenue recovery, however, will be considered on a case-by-case basis based on the criteria outlined here.

320. *Supplemental ICLS for rate-of-return carriers.* As discussed above, we recognize that interstate rate-of-return carriers present a special situation, because under our rules they must be provided an opportunity to earn their regulated rate of return. In this regard, we adopt the proposal of OPASTCO/WTA, which we find strikes the proper balance regarding supplemental ICLS support. Thus, the only precondition to an incumbent LEC receiving supplemental ICLS support is that the incumbent LEC is under rate-of-return regulation in the interstate jurisdiction.⁸³⁵

321. In addition, we adopt the OPASTCO/WTA proposal that supplemental ICLS consist of two components. The first component compensates rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs for all of the revenues lost as a result of the mandated reductions in intercarrier compensation rates that are not otherwise recoverable through increases in SLCs.⁸³⁶ The second component is available only to those rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs that have committed to the five-year broadband build-out requirement.⁸³⁷ This component is intended to ensure that those rural rate-of-return incumbent LECs continue to have an opportunity to earn their authorized interstate rate of return, subject to a cap. This component will provide compensation for unrecoverable revenue losses attributable to losses in access lines and interstate and intrastate minutes of use, using 2008 as a base year. The second component remains in effect for the first five years of the transition and is capped at \$100 million in year one, \$200 million in year two, \$300 million in year three, \$400 million in year four, and \$500 million in year five. Prior to year five, the Commission shall conduct a proceeding to determine if modifications are required.

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Opinion and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 25437 (Acc. Pol. Div. 2000); *ALLTEL Service Corporation, Petition for Waiver of Section 61.41 of the Commission's Rules*, Order, 8 FCC Rcd 7054 (Com. Car. Bur. 1993) (granting waiver of sections 61.41(c), (d) of the Commission's rules). Likewise, as noted above, we find it appropriate, upon request, to allow price cap carriers to make a one-way election of rate-of-return regulation.

⁸³³ See *supra* para. 313.

⁸³⁴ See, e.g., Ad Hoc ICC FNPRM Reply at 10–11 (arguing that the Commission has no legal obligation to allow revenue neutrality); CTIA ICC FNPRM Comments at 46; Nextel ICC FNPRM Comments at 20; T-Mobile ICC FNPRM Comments at 13 (intercarrier compensation was not intended to guarantee an ILEC revenue stream or preserve low local rates for a given industry segment, doing so would perpetuate inefficiencies); NASUCA ICC FNPRM Reply at 34–38 (arguing that the Commission is not required to provide for revenue neutrality and that revenue neutrality deviates from the Commission's past policy).

⁸³⁵ Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2.

⁸³⁶ Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2. This support will remain available at least through the ten year transition period adopted in this order.

⁸³⁷ See *supra* Part II.B.3 (describing broadband build-out requirement). See also Corrected OPASTCO/WTA Oct. 29, 2008 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. at 2.

Overall, we find that this approach to supplemental ICLS properly addresses the needs of rural rate-of-return carriers, and their right to an opportunity to recover their authorized rate of return.

D. Measures to Ensure Proper Billing

1. Introduction

322. As explained in Part V.A., the current disparity of rates under existing intercarrier compensation mechanisms presents service providers⁸³⁸ with the opportunity and the incentive to misidentify or otherwise conceal the source of traffic to avoid or reduce payments to other service providers. In this Part, we amend our rules to help ensure the ability of service providers to receive the appropriate compensation for traffic terminated on their networks.⁸³⁹ More importantly, we believe that the comprehensive compensation reforms we adopt today should significantly reduce service providers' incentives to mislabel traffic or otherwise to try to avoid their financial obligations.⁸⁴⁰ Nonetheless, we balance a desire to facilitate resolution of billing disputes with a reluctance to regulate in areas where industry resolution has, in many cases, proven effective. We find that the requirements we adopt here will facilitate the transfer of information to terminating service providers, and improve their ability to identify providers from whom they receive traffic, without imposing burdensome costs. In the event that traffic does not contain the information required by our rules, or the provider delivering the traffic does not otherwise provide the required call information, for example by providing an industry-standard billing record, to the provider receiving it, we allow the terminating service provider to charge its highest terminating rate to the service provider delivering the traffic. To the extent that a provider acting simply as an intermediate provider (such as a transit provider) becomes subject to a charge under this provision, that intermediate provider can charge the rate it was charged to the provider that delivered the improperly labeled traffic to it. This will ensure that providers are paid for terminating traffic in those instances, and gives financial incentives for upstream providers in the call path to ensure that the traffic includes proper information in the first instance.

2. Background

323. Problems related to traffic arriving for termination with insufficient identification information arise from the technical systems and processes used to create, transfer, and gather intercarrier compensation billing information. To bill for termination of traffic, a terminating service provider must be able to identify the appropriate upstream service provider, and the location of the caller (or a proxy for the caller's location) in order to determine jurisdiction, which is necessary to determine the appropriate charge under existing intercarrier compensation rules.⁸⁴¹ Calls frequently traverse several networks to

⁸³⁸ We use the term "service providers" in this section to refer both to carriers that provide telecommunications services and to providers of services that originate calls on IP networks and terminate them on circuit switched networks.

⁸³⁹ Parties frequently use the term "phantom traffic" in describing this problem. We will not use that term in the regulations we adopt here because there is no consensus as to how it should be defined, nor is such a definition necessary for us to address the underlying issues faced by service providers in billing for traffic they receive.

⁸⁴⁰ Similarly, we believe that the transition to a uniform intercarrier compensation rate based on the additional costs methodology described above also will address the access stimulation concerns that have recently been raised. *See supra* para. 185. In the unlikely event that service providers persist in these activities, however, we note that the Commission has an open proceeding in which appropriate responses to such actions may be considered. *See generally Access Stimulation NPRM*, 22 FCC Rcd 17989.

⁸⁴¹ This order initiates a process of unifying terminating intercarrier compensation rates, thereby eliminating the rate distinctions between local and long distance calls. Although knowing the origination point of a call remains

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connect the calling and called parties. When the originating and terminating networks are not directly connected, as is the case when calls are delivered via tandem transit service, complications with transmitting and receiving billing information related to a call can arise.⁸⁴² Terminating service providers that are not directly connected to originating service providers receive information about calls sent to their networks for termination from two sources: Signaling System 7 (SS7) signaling streams⁸⁴³ and industry standard billing records,⁸⁴⁴ which typically are provided by the intermediate service provider connecting the terminating provider to the originating provider.⁸⁴⁵

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important, especially during the period of transition to a unified terminating rate, the origination point is less significant for the purpose of determining intercarrier compensation due.

⁸⁴² See, e.g., Letter from Patrick J. Donovan, Counsel for PacWest Telecomm, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3–4 (filed Oct. 14, 2005).

⁸⁴³ SS7 is an out-of-band signaling system that is separate from, but runs parallel to, the public switched telephone network (PSTN) and is used to set up call paths between calling and called parties. The following steps typically occur when SS7 sets up a call path for a wireline LEC to wireline LEC call originating and terminating on the PSTN. When a wireline LEC customer dials a call destined for an end user served by a different wireline LEC, the calling party's LEC determines, based on the dialed digits, that it cannot terminate the call. The SS7 call signaling system then begins the process of identifying a path that the call will take to reach the called party's network. SS7 identifies each service provider in the call path and provides each with the called party's telephone number and other information related to the call, including message type and nature of connection indicators, forward call indicators, calling party's category, and user service information if that information was correctly populated and not altered during the signaling process. See Letter from L. Charles Keller, Counsel for Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Sept. 13, 2005) (Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter). SS7 was designed to facilitate call routing and was not designed to provide billing information to terminating carriers. See Verizon, *Verizon's Proposed Regulatory Action to Address Phantom Traffic* at 5–7 (Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper), attached to Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Dec. 20, 2005). Technical content and format of SS7 signaling is governed by industry standards rather than by Commission rules, although Commission rules require carriers using SS7 to transmit calling party number (CPN) to subsequent carriers on interstate calls where it is technically feasible to do so. 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601.

⁸⁴⁴ Industry standard billing records are the other common source of information that terminating service providers not directly connected to originating service providers receive about calls sent to their networks for termination. Billing records are typically created by a tandem switch that receives a call for delivery to a terminating network via tandem transit service. Tandem switches create billing records by combining CPN or Charge Number (CN) information from the SS7 signaling stream with information identifying the originating service provider to provide terminating service providers with information necessary for billing. See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 5–7. The tandem switch creating the billing record identifies service providers from whom it receives traffic using the trunk group number (TGN) of the trunk on which a call arrives. See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 4; see also Letter from Glenn T. Reynolds, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, BellSouth, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, WC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 5 (filed Jan. 12, 2006) (BellSouth Jan. 12, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter). The tandem switch translates the TGN into one of two codes identifying the originating service provider: Carrier Identification Code (CIC) if the originating service provider is an IXC, or Operating Company Number (OCN) for non-IXC calls. The appropriate CIC or OCN is then added, by the tandem switch, if it is equipped to record such information, to the billing record for the call, which is then forwarded to the terminating service provider. See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 5–7; see also Verizon *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 16. Service providers delivering billing records typically use the Exchange Message Interface (EMI) format created and maintained by the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions Ordering and Billing Forum (ATIS/OBF), an industry standards setting group. See ATIS Exchange Message Interface 22 Revision 2, ATIS Document number 0406000-02200 (July 2005).

⁸⁴⁵ See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 5–7.

324. One significant source of billing problems is traffic routed through an intermediate provider that does not include calling party number (CPN) or other information identifying the calling party.⁸⁴⁶ In addition, commenters describe several examples of other situations where traffic arrives for termination with insufficient information to identify the originating service provider.⁸⁴⁷ Another source of disputes occurs when terminating service providers find differences when attempting to reconcile SS7 data they record and billing records they receive.⁸⁴⁸ Such a reconciliation process will likely be inexact, because SS7 streams were not designed to provide billing information.⁸⁴⁹ Similarly, at least one commenter asserts that “problems arise” when terminating service providers “second guess tandem traffic reports and generate their own billing statements for carriers with whom they are indirectly interconnected.”⁸⁵⁰ In addition to unidentifiable traffic caused by unintended network routing circumstances, as described above, several commenters allege that they receive traffic in which the billing information intentionally has been altered or stripped before the call reaches the terminating service provider.⁸⁵¹ Indeed, numerous parties have described experiencing problems of the sort described above.⁸⁵² Several proposals suggesting how the Commission should address this problem have been filed in the record in this proceeding in recent years.⁸⁵³ Recently, the United States Telecom Association

⁸⁴⁶ The Commission recognized that the ability of service providers to identify the provider to bill appropriate intercarrier compensation payments depends, in part, on billing records generated by intermediate service providers. Thus, the Commission sought comment on whether current rules and industry standards create billing records that are sufficiently detailed to permit determinations of the appropriate compensation due. *See Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4743, para. 133.

⁸⁴⁷ For example, when a call bound for a number that has been ported to a different service provider is delivered without the responsible service provider performing a local number portability (LNP) query, the call may be delivered to the wrong end office and then may be re-routed to a tandem switch for delivery to the correct end office. *See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper* at 18–19. According to Verizon, neither the end office that re-routes the call nor the tandem switch receiving the rerouted call are able to route the call over an access trunk; the call must be sent over a local interconnection trunk. *See id.* In this scenario, the terminating carrier may have difficulty billing the appropriate charges to the IXC that sent the call.

⁸⁴⁸ *See* Letter from Stephen T. Perkins, General Counsel, Cavalier Telephone, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 1 (filed Sept. 29, 2005). *See also* Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 10 (filed Oct. 21, 2005).

⁸⁴⁹ *See* Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President—Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. at 5 (filed Aug. 1, 2005); Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

⁸⁵⁰ Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter at 3.

⁸⁵¹ *See, e.g.,* Balhoff and Rowe *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 10; California Small LECs *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 9; ITCI *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 7; Montana Independent Telecommunications Systems (MITS) et al. *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 14, 20; MITS et al. *ICC FNPRM* Reply at 23–24, 33; NECA *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 16; Rural Alliance *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 108; SureWest *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 7; TDS *ICC FNPRM* Comments at 10; BellSouth Jan. 11, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter at 6.

⁸⁵² *See, e.g.,* Letter from Glenn T. Reynolds, Vice President, Policy, USTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Feb. 12, 2008) (USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal). *See Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, NECA Petition for Interim Order (filed Jan. 22, 2008) (NECA Petition).

⁸⁵³ *See, e.g.,* NARUC Task Force July 24, 2006 *Ex Parte* Letter, Attach. 2; Letter from Supporters of the Missoula Plan to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Nov. 6, 2006) (Missoula Plan Supporters Nov. 6 *Ex Parte* Letter or Missoula Plan Call Signaling Proposal); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal

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(USTelecom) filed a proposal that appears to enjoy the broadest industry support of any filed to date.⁸⁵⁴ For reasons detailed below, we agree that traffic that lacks sufficient information to enable proper billing of intercarrier compensation charges is a problem. Consequently, we take steps to address the problem and help ensure proper functioning of the intercarrier compensation system.⁸⁵⁵

3. Discussion

325. We amend our rules as described below to facilitate the transfer of necessary information to terminating service providers, particularly in cases where traffic is delivered through indirect interconnection arrangements. These new requirements will assist in determining the appropriate service provider to bill for any call. We note that these new requirements generally reflect standard industry practice, as recommended by several commenters.⁸⁵⁶ We also amend our rules to establish payment obligations for service providers that send traffic that lacks the information required by our amended call signaling rules to intermediate or terminating service providers or that does not otherwise provide the required call information to the recipient. Incorporating these practices into our rules will facilitate resolution of billing disputes, will provide incentives to help prevent manipulation or deletion of information from signaling streams, and will provide incentives for service providers to ensure that traffic traversing their networks is properly labeled and identifiable, in compliance with the rules we adopt in this order.⁸⁵⁷

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Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Apr. 4, 2006); Letter from Jeffrey S. Lanning, Associate General Counsel, USTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Mar. 30, 2006) (MCC/USTA Proposal); Letter from Karen Brinkmann, Attorney for the MidSize Carrier Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Mar. 31, 2006) (supporting MCC/USTA Proposal).

⁸⁵⁴ See USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal; see also Letter from Melissa E. Newman, Vice President—Federal Regulatory, Qwest, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Sept. 24, 2008); Letter from Curt Stamp, President, ITTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2, filed Sept. 19, 2008); Letter from Eric Einhorn, Vice president, Federal Government Affairs, Windstream, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 et al. (filed Sept. 24, 2008); Comments of Windstream, CC Docket Nos. 99-68, 01-92, 96-45, WC Docket Nos. 08-152, 07-135, 04-36, 06-122, 05-337 at 16 (filed Aug. 21, 2008); Letter from Gregory J. Vogt, Counsel for CenturyTel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Aug. 6, 2008); Letter from Henry Hultquist, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed July 17, 2008).

⁸⁵⁵ The rules we adopt herein reflect the Commission’s determinations regarding how to address call signaling problems as they relate to unidentified and unbillable traffic. Therefore, we disagree with commenters requesting that we adopt alternative proposals such as the NECA petition or the Missoula Plan Call Signaling Proposal. See, e.g., Letter from Robert F. Aldrich, Counsel to the American Public Communications Council, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 (filed Oct. 21, 2008).

⁸⁵⁶ See, e.g., Letter from Paul Garnett, Director, Regulatory Policy, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 3 (filed Jan. 3, 2006); Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory Advocacy, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Mar. 30, 2006).

⁸⁵⁷ The rules we amend in this order were adopted in a 1995 order addressing Caller ID services. See *Rules and Policies Regarding Calling Number Identification Service – Caller ID*, CC Docket No. 91-281, Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration, Second Report and Order and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 10 FCC Rcd 11700, 11728, para. 79 (1995) (*Caller ID Order*). In the *Caller ID Order*, the Commission found, inter alia, that the CPN based services to which the rules adopted apply are “jurisdictionally mixed” and the Commission therefore preempted an inconsistent state statute. *Id.* at 11722–23, paras. 62, 85. For these same reasons, to the extent the amendments we make to our call signaling rules in this order conflict with any current or future state statutes, those statutes are preempted. See *id.* at 11728–34, paras. 78–95.

a. Signaling Information

326. We agree with the USTelecom Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal concerning the importance of call signaling obligations.⁸⁵⁸ CPN is a critical component of call signaling information. When CPN is populated in the SS7 stream by an originating service provider and passed, unaltered, along a call path to a terminating service provider, the terminating provider can use the CPN information to help determine the applicable intercarrier compensation.

327. We agree with commenters⁸⁵⁹ that assert that the best way to ensure that complete and accurate information about a call gets to the terminating service provider for that call is to require providers to populate, and to prohibit them from stripping or altering, CPN information in the SS7 call signaling stream.⁸⁶⁰ In an environment where numerous service providers may be involved in the completion of a call, this SS7 signaling information must be passed, unaltered, from one to the next in a call path until it reaches the terminating service provider. We therefore modify our rules to prohibit stripping or altering information in the SS7 call signaling stream. We do not, however, make any changes to the designation of particular fields as mandatory or optional, nor do we otherwise intend to change industry standards that govern the population of the SS7 signaling stream.⁸⁶¹

328. The record also makes clear that we must expand the scope of our existing rule regarding passing CPN,⁸⁶² which currently applies only to service providers using SS7 and only to interstate traffic. We therefore extend these requirements to all traffic originating or terminating on the PSTN, including jurisdictionally intrastate traffic.⁸⁶³ We also amend our rules to require service providers using MF signaling to pass CPN information, or the charge number (CN) if it differs from the CPN, in the Multi Frequency Automatic Number Identification (MF ANI) field.⁸⁶⁴ This rule change will ensure that

⁸⁵⁸ See USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal.

⁸⁵⁹ See, e.g., USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal; NECA Petition.

⁸⁶⁰ Because we agree that requiring population of CPN is the best way to ensure that complete and accurate information about a call gets to the terminating service provider for that call, we disagree with proposals to exclude certain types of traffic from this requirement. See, e.g., Letter from Jim Kohlenberger, Executive Director, The VON Coalition, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket 04-36 at 6 (filed Oct. 28, 2008). We note that parties are free to contract with third parties to ensure that these requirements are met. Cf., e.g., *LNP Order*, 22 FCC Rcd 19531 (holding that, where interconnected VoIP providers rely on other carriers for access to numbers, both parties must take the steps needed to comply with the number porting obligations established in that order); *Interconnected VoIP 911 Order*, 20 FCC Rcd 10245 (finding that interconnected VoIP providers might elect to comply with their 911 obligations in part by relying on services provided by third parties).

⁸⁶¹ We take a cautious approach in considering any new or revised signaling requirements. SS7 was designed to facilitate call setup and routing, and action we take here is not intended to interfere with the ability of calls to reach their intended recipient. As Verizon Wireless explains, certain SS7 fields are considered mandatory, while others (including CPN, CN, and JIP) are considered optional. See Verizon Wireless Sept. 13, 2005 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2. The distinction is significant, because a call will not be completed if a mandatory field has not been populated. See Letter from Thomas Goode, Associate General Counsel, ATIS, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92, Attach. (filed Feb. 10, 2006). Although CPN is considered optional in the industry standard, our rules, before and after amendment pursuant to this order, require service providers to pass CPN in specified circumstances. See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601.

⁸⁶² See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601.

⁸⁶³ See *supra* note 862.

⁸⁶⁴ See Missoula Plan at 56; Letter from Brad E. Mutschelknaus, Counsel for XO, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 11-12 (filed Feb. 14, 2006).

information identifying the calling party is included in call signaling information for all calls.

329. In addition, we agree with commenters who suggest that our call signaling rules should address CN as well as CPN.⁸⁶⁵ Verizon states that, in accordance with industry practice, the CN parameter is not populated in the SS7 stream when it is the same as CPN, but that when the CN parameter is populated, CN is included in billing records in place of CPN.⁸⁶⁶ We therefore clarify that populating a CN field with information other than the charge number to be billed for the call, consistent with industry standards, falls within this prohibition. This clarification is not intended to disrupt standard industry practice with regard to using CN in the signaling stream and in billing records. But, we also clarify that the prohibition on altering or stripping signaling information applies to CN as well as CPN. The prohibition on altering or stripping SS7, MF ANI, or CN signaling information obligates intermediate service providers to pass, unaltered, whatever signaling information they receive.

330. The call signaling rules we adopt in this order will help ensure that signaling information is passed completely and accurately to terminating service providers. These rules are not intended to affect existing agreements between service providers regarding how to “jurisdictionalize” traffic when traditional call identifying parameters are missing, as long as such agreements are not inconsistent with the rules adopted in this order.

331. We find that some very limited exceptions to these new rules are needed. We agree with Verizon, for example, that a limited exception is needed in situations where industry standards permit, or even require, some alteration in signaling information by an intermediate service provider.⁸⁶⁷ As noted above, we do not intend to change standard industry practice with respect to the content of the signaling stream. Service providers that follow standard industry practice in this way will not be considered in violation of the prohibition on altering signaling information. We also note that the exemptions from our existing call signaling requirements described in section 64.1601(d) remain necessary for their limited purposes, and will continue to apply.⁸⁶⁸

b. Financial Responsibilities

332. We also impose financial responsibilities that will work in step with our amended signaling rules to give service providers financial incentives to ensure that they, and the providers whose traffic they carry, comply with the signaling obligations. We find that these requirements will significantly reduce any existing incentives to avoid compliance by substantially eliminating any financial benefits of noncompliance.

333. We agree with commenters who propose that we permit service providers that terminate traffic lacking sufficient information to bill the service provider that delivered the traffic to the terminating provider.⁸⁶⁹ In particular, we require that a service provider, e.g., transit provider, delivering

⁸⁶⁵ See, e.g., NECA Petition; Letter from Cheryl A. Tritt, Counsel for T-Mobile USA, Inc. to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 6 (filed Feb. 2, 2006); Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 8–10.

⁸⁶⁶ See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 8.

⁸⁶⁷ See Verizon Phantom Traffic White Paper at 9–10. For example, Verizon states that on a call to a party that has forwarded its number, the called party’s service provider will replace the caller’s CN with the called party’s CN before sending the call to the forward location.

⁸⁶⁸ 47 C.F.R. § 64.1601(d).

⁸⁶⁹ See, e.g., EPG Proposal at 2 (“All messages that are not properly labeled would be billed at the highest prevailing intercarrier compensation rate to the interconnecting carrier delivering the traffic.”); ARIC Plan at 55; CenturyTel ICC FNRPM Comments at 6; Hickory ICC FNRPM Comments at 2; JSI ICC FNRPM Comments at 4–6; Colorado Telecom Ass’n et al. ICC FNRPM Reply at 13, TDS Telecom ICC FNRPM Reply 14, JSI Missoula Phantom Traffic

(continued....)

traffic that lacks any of the signaling information required by our rules as amended herein, or that does not otherwise provide the required call information, for example by providing an industry standard billing record, to the recipient, must pay the terminating service provider's highest termination rate in effect at the time the traffic is delivered to the terminating service provider.⁸⁷⁰ By making intermediate service providers financially responsible in these circumstances, we ensure that service providers are compensated for terminating traffic.

334. We also permit those intermediate service providers, in turn, to pass along the termination charges to the provider that delivered the applicable traffic to them, in addition to any otherwise-applicable charge for their services. We agree with commenters that the providers delivering traffic are in a better position than the terminating service provider “to know which carriers are routing improperly or incompletely identified traffic”⁸⁷¹ and to recover the termination charges from them. Moreover, by permitting intermediate service providers to pass along those charges on top of their otherwise-applicable rates, we create disincentives for service providers who might otherwise originate, or act as a “pass through” for mislabeled or unidentifiable traffic.

335. We are unpersuaded by the objections to imposing such financial obligations on intermediate service providers.⁸⁷² For example, one objection is based on the assumption that transit providers will be the only intermediate service providers subject to such liability, and will be unable to pass along those charges.⁸⁷³ The financial responsibility under this order for traffic that lacks sufficient billing information is not limited to transit service providers, however. Rather, any service provider that passes traffic lacking sufficient billing information becomes responsible for intercarrier payments to the receiving provider. Additionally, we expressly permit service providers subject to this charge to pass it along to the service provider that delivered the applicable traffic to them.

336. Another commenter objects to any proposal that “gives . . . [ILECs] the authority to impose new rates based on their own interpretation of the sufficiency of data received or interpretation of jurisdictional parameters.”⁸⁷⁴ Under our amended rules, service providers will not be able to impose rates

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Comments at 4–6; RICA *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 2–3; TexalTel *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 7–8; Cavalier *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Comments at 2–3; PAPUC *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 8.

⁸⁷⁰ We agree with commenters who note that intermediate service providers that provide, to subsequent service providers in a call path, information sufficient to identify the provider that delivered the traffic to the intermediate provider should not be responsible for terminating intercarrier payments for that traffic. *See, e.g.*, Letter from Susanne A. Guyer, Senior Vice President – Federal Regulatory Affairs, Verizon, to Chairman Kevin Martin et al., FCC, CC Docket Nos. 96-45, 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); Letter from Mark D. Schneider, Counsel, Neutral Tandem, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008); Letter from Tamar E. Finn, Counsel, Zayo Group, LLC, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-68 at 2 (filed Oct. 28, 2008).

⁸⁷¹ ARIC Plan at 55.

⁸⁷² *See, e.g.*, Letter from Donna Epps, Vice President, Federal Regulatory, Verizon, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed July 7, 2007); Letter from Charles W. McKee, Director—Government Affairs, Federal Regulatory, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Apr. 20, 2007) (Sprint Nextel April 20, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter); Letter from Charon Phillips, Director—Government Affairs, Federal Regulatory, Verizon Wireless, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Mar. 13, 2007).

⁸⁷³ *See, e.g.*, Verizon *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 5–6.

⁸⁷⁴ *See* Sprint Nextel April 20, 2007 *Ex Parte* Letter at 2.

based on their own interpretation of the sufficiency of data received. Instead, our amended rules set the standard for what information must be included and passed.

337. We also disagree with commenters who suggest that imposing liability on intermediate service providers implies that the problem is the result of transiting service providers altering call detail information.⁸⁷⁵ The financial obligations we impose on intermediate service providers are triggered by passing traffic that does not comply with the call signaling rules, regardless of whether the traffic was originated or altered by the passing service provider. Accordingly, any service provider, not just a provider who stripped or altered traffic signaling, who is not taking steps to ensure that traffic carried on their network is properly labeled and identifiable could be held responsible for payment by the provider to whom it delivered traffic.

338. In addition to call signaling, the USTelecom Feb. 12, 2008 proposal seeks Commission action related to routing traffic, local number portability queries, and providing incumbent LECs with certain rights with regard to the section 251 and 252 negotiation and arbitration processes.⁸⁷⁶ Although a broad cross section of the industry supports the USTelecom Feb. 12, 2008 proposal in its entirety, several commenters objected to the section 251 and 252 negotiation and arbitration provisions.⁸⁷⁷ In light of the lack of consensus on some of these issues and the changes to the intercarrier compensation system adopted in this order we are not persuaded that the other specific actions sought in the USTelecom Feb 12, 2008 proposal are necessary at this time.⁸⁷⁸

VI. FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING

A. Universal Service

339. In the above order, we adopted a five year plan for phasing out current competitive ETC support. Here we seek comment on an appropriate universal service mechanism (or mechanisms) focused on the deployment and maintenance of advanced mobile wireless services in high-cost and rural areas.

340. With respect to contribution methodology, as we explain above, an assessment methodology based solely on telephone numbers would not require certain business services to equitably contribute to the universal service fund.⁸⁷⁹ We, therefore, determine that universal service contributions for business services will be based on connections as opposed to numbers. We seek comment on how best to implement a connection-based mechanism for business services, and whether that mechanism

⁸⁷⁵ See Missoula Plan Supporters *Missoula Phantom Traffic* Reply at 11–12.

⁸⁷⁶ See USTA Feb. 12, 2008 Proposal.

⁸⁷⁷ See, e.g., Letter from Brad Mutschelknaus, Counsel to Broadview Networks et al. to Kevin J. Martin et al., FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Oct. 22, 2008); Letter from Henry T. Kelly, Counsel to Peerless Networks to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket Nos. 01-92 et al. (filed Sept. 16, 2008); Letter from Charles W. McKee, Director—Government Affairs, Sprint Nextel, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Apr. 16, 2008); Letter from Thomas Cohen, Edward A. Yorkgitis, Jr., Counsel for NuVox Communications et al., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Mar. 11, 2008); Letter from Daniel L. Brenner, Senior Vice President, Law and Regulatory Policy, NCTA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Feb. 29, 2008); Letter from Paul Garnett, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 at 2 (filed Feb. 25, 2008).

⁸⁷⁸ The USTA Feb 12, 2008 Proposal also sought certain enforcement commitments related to our call signaling rules. In this regard, USTA's proposal did not seek anything beyond the ordinary course of business. As with any of our rules, the Commission is committed to resolving complaints expeditiously and will not hesitate to initiate enforcement proceedings against rule violators.

⁸⁷⁹ See *supra* para. 130.

should be based solely on connections or on a combination of Assessable Numbers and connections.

341. We also seek comment on expanding our NRUF data collection to all providers who are required to contribute to the universal service fund based on Assessable Numbers. At present, our NRUF reporting rules require “reporting carriers” to file reports. A “reporting carrier” is defined as “a telecommunications carrier that receives numbering resources from the NANPA, a Pooling Administrator or another telecommunications carrier.”⁸⁸⁰ “Reporting carriers” file reports regarding six categories of numbers, the descriptions of some of which refer to “telecommunications carriers” or “telecommunications services.”⁸⁸¹ We seek comment on whether we should amend our rules to require all providers who assign numbers or otherwise make numbers available to end users to file NRUF reports. Would such an expansion assist the Commission and the fund administrator with monitoring and enforcing universal service contribution requirements? What modifications would the Commission need to make to its rules to effectuate this kind of policy change?

B. Intercarrier Compensation Further Notice

342. In this Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Further Notice) we seek comment on certain additional issues not resolved in our accompanying order.

343. *Originating Access.* In this order, we conclude that retention of originating access charges would be inconsistent with our new regulatory approach to intercarrier compensation.⁸⁸² Accordingly, we find that originating charges for all telecommunications traffic subject to our comprehensive intercarrier compensation framework must be eliminated by the conclusion of the transition to the new regime. We seek comment on issues relating to the transition for the elimination of originating access.

344. *Transit Traffic.* Transiting occurs when two carriers that are not directly interconnected exchange traffic by routing the traffic through an intermediary carrier’s network.⁸⁸³ We request comment on whether the reforms we adopt today necessitate the adoption of any rules or guidelines governing transit service.

345. *Universal Service Rules Applicable to Rate-of-Return Carriers.* In this order, we conclude that under certain circumstances, rate-of-return carriers will be able to receive universal service support to recover net reduced revenues from intercarrier compensation as a result of reforms adopted in this order that they do not otherwise recover through SLC increases or other revenue increases. We seek comment on what rule changes are necessary to allow rate-of-return carriers to receive universal service support in this manner.

346. *Parts 51, 54, 61, and 69.* Part 51 of the Commission’s rules contain requirements applicable to interconnection, including reciprocal compensation.⁸⁸⁴ Part 54 of the Commission’s rules

⁸⁸⁰ 47 C.F.R. § 52.12(f)(2).

⁸⁸¹ E.g., 47 C.F.R. § 52.12(e)(i) (“*Administrative numbers* are numbers used by telecommunications carriers”); *id.* § 52.12(e)(v) (“*Intermediate numbers* are numbers that are made available . . . for the purpose of providing telecommunications service”).

⁸⁸² See *supra* para. 229.

⁸⁸³ *Intercarrier Compensation FNPRM*, 20 FCC Rcd at 4737–38, para. 120. Typically, the intermediary carrier is an incumbent LEC and the transited traffic is routed from the originating carrier through the incumbent LEC’s tandem switch to the terminating carrier. The intermediary (transiting) carrier then charges a fee for use of its facilities. See *id.* We note that carriers have various agreements governing the provision of transit traffic. See *id.*

⁸⁸⁴ See 47 C.F.R. Part 51.

describe universal service programs and administration.⁸⁸⁵ Part 61 of the Commission's rules prescribes the framework for the initial establishment of and subsequent revisions to tariff publications.⁸⁸⁶ Part 69 of the rules governs the Commission's access charge regulations for interstate or foreign access services.⁸⁸⁷ We solicit comment on the need to revise the rules set forth in Parts 51, 54, 61 and/or 69, or any other rules, as a result of the reforms we adopt today.

VII. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

A. *Ex Parte* Presentations

347. The rulemaking this Further Notice initiates shall be treated as a "permit-but-disclose" proceeding in accordance with the Commission's *ex parte* rules.⁸⁸⁸ Persons making oral *ex parte* presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentations must contain summaries of the substance of the presentations and not merely a listing of the subjects discussed. More than a one or two sentence description of the views and arguments presented generally is required.⁸⁸⁹ Other requirements pertaining to oral and written presentations are set forth in section 1.1206(b) of the Commission's rules.⁸⁹⁰

B. Comment Filing Procedures

348. Pursuant to sections 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules,⁸⁹¹ interested parties may file comments and reply comments regarding the Further Notice on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this document. **All filings related to the intercarrier compensation Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking should refer to CC Docket No. 01-92. All filings related to the universal service contributions Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking should refer to WC Docket No. 06-122.** Comments may be filed using: (1) the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS), (2) the Federal Government's e-Rulemaking Portal, or (3) by filing paper copies. *See* Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings, 63 FR 24121 (1998).

349. **Electronic Filers:** Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the ECFS: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/> or the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Filers should follow the instructions provided on the website for submitting comments.

350. ECFS filers must transmit one electronic copy of the comments for CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-200, or WC Docket No. 06-122, respectively. In completing the transmittal screen, filers should include their full name, U.S. Postal Service mailing address, and the applicable docket number. Parties may also submit an electronic comment by Internet e-mail. To get filing instructions, filers should send an e-mail to ecfs@fcc.gov, and include the following words in the body of the message, "get form." A sample form and directions will be sent in response.

351. **Paper Filers:** Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and four copies of each filing. Filings can be sent by hand or messenger delivery, by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail (although we continue to experience delays in receiving

⁸⁸⁵ *See* 47 C.F.R. Part 54.

⁸⁸⁶ *See* 47 C.F.R. Part 61.

⁸⁸⁷ *See* 47 C.F.R. Part 69.

⁸⁸⁸ 47 C.F.R. § 1.200 *et seq.*

⁸⁸⁹ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206(b)(2).

⁸⁹⁰ 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206(b).

⁸⁹¹ 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.415, 1.419.

U.S. Postal Service mail). All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Marlene H. Dortch, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554.

352. The Commission's contractor will receive hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary at 236 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E., Suite 110, Washington, D.C. 20002. The filing hours at this location are 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. All hand deliveries must be held together with rubber bands or fasteners. Any envelopes must be disposed of before entering the building.

353. Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9300 East Hampton Drive, Capitol Heights, MD 20743.

354. U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail should be addressed to 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington D.C. 20554.

355. Parties should send a copy of their filings in CC Docket No. 01-92 to Victoria Goldberg, Pricing Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A266, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

356. Parties should send a copy of their filings in WC Docket No. 06-122 to Jennifer McKee, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A423, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

357. Parties should send a copy of their filings in WC Docket No. 99-200 to Marilyn Jones, Competition Policy Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Room 5-A423, 445 12th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20554, or by e-mail to cpdcopies@fcc.gov. Parties shall also serve one copy with the Commission's copy contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc. (BCPI), Portals II, 445 12th Street, S.W., Room CY-B402, Washington, D.C. 20554, (202) 488-5300, or via e-mail to fcc@bcpiweb.com.

358. Documents in CC Docket Nos. 01-92, 99-200, and WC Docket No. 06-122 will be available for public inspection and copying during business hours at the FCC Reference Information Center, Portals II, 445 12th Street S.W., Room CY-A257, Washington, D.C. 20554. The documents may also be purchased from BCPI, telephone (202) 488-5300, facsimile (202) 488-5563, TTY (202) 488-5562, e-mail fcc@bcpiweb.com.

C. Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

359. As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980,⁸⁹² the Commission has prepared an Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on small entities of the policies and rules addressed in this document. The IRFA is set forth in Appendix [____]. Written public comments are requested on this IRFA. Comments must be identified as responses to the IRFA and must be filed by the deadlines for comments on the Notice provided on or before the dates indicated on the first page of this Notice.

⁸⁹² See 5 U.S.C. § 603.

D. Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

360. Pursuant to the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA),⁸⁹³ the Commission has prepared a Final Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (FRFA) for the Report and Order concerning the possible significant economic impact on small entities by the policies and actions considered in the Report and Order. The text of the FRFA is included in Appendix [____].

E. Paperwork Reduction Act

361. This document contains proposed new or modified information collection requirements. The Commission, as part of its continuing effort to reduce paperwork burdens, invites the general public and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to comment on the information collection requirements contained in this document, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13. In addition, pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107-198,⁸⁹⁴ we seek specific comment on how we might “further reduce the information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees.”

F. Accessible Formats

362. To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice) or 202-418-0432 (TTY). Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations for filing comments (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by e-mail: FCC504@fcc.gov; phone: 202-418-0530 or TTY: 202-418-0432.

G. Congressional Review Act

363. The Commission will include a copy of this Order on Remand and Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in a report to be sent to Congress and the Government Accountability Office pursuant to the Congressional Review Act. *See* 5 U.S.C. § 801(a)(1)(A).

VIII. ORDERING CLAUSES

364. Accordingly, IT IS ORDERED that, pursuant to Sections 1–4, 201–209, 214, 218-220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, and 503 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and Sections 601 and 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151–154, 157 nt, 201–209, 214, 218-220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, 503, and sections 1.1, 1.411–1.429, and 1.1200–1.1216 of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.1, 1.411–1.429, 1.1200–1.1216, the ORDER ON REMAND AND REPORT AND ORDER AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING ARE ADOPTED.

365. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Parts [____] of the Commission’s rules, 47 C.F.R. § [____] are AMENDED as set forth in Appendix A hereto.

366. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED, in light of the opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in *WorldCom v. FCC*, 288 F.3d 429 (D.C. Cir. 2002), we consider our obligations met from the writ of mandamus issued in *In re Core Communications, Inc. on Petition for Writ of Mandamus to the Federal Communications Commission*, D.C. Cir. No. 07-1446 (decided July 8, 2008).

⁸⁹³ *See* 5 U.S.C. § 603. The RFA, *see* U.S.C. § 601 *et seq.*, has been amended by the Contract with America Advancement Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-121, 110 Stat. 847 (1996) (“CWAAA”). Title II of the CWAAA is the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 (“Small Business Act”).

⁸⁹⁴ *See* 44 U.S.C. § 3506(c)(4).

367. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that this REPORT AND ORDER, ORDER ON REMAND, AND FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING shall become effective 30 days after publication of the text of a summary thereof in the Federal Register, pursuant to 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.4, 1.13, except for the information collections, which require approval by OMB under the PRA and which shall become effective after the Commission publishes a notice in the Federal Register announcing such approval and the relevant effective date(s).

368. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Commission's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, SHALL SEND a copy of this REPORT AND ORDER AND ORDER ON REMAND, including the Final Regulatory Flexibility Analyses and Final Regulatory Flexibility Certifications, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

369. IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Commission's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, SHALL SEND a copy of this FURTHER NOTICE OF PROPOSED RULEMAKING, including the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analyses and Initial Regulatory Flexibility Certifications, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary

APPENDIX D

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Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

October 24, 2008

Re: Notice of Written *Ex Parte* Presentation (WC Docket 05-337; CC Docket 96-45; WC Docket 06-122; CC Docket 01-92)

Dear Ms. Dortch,

Free Press submits this written *ex parte* filing to update the record on particular issues in the Commission's open dockets on Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime (CC Docket No. 01-92), and related Universal Service Fund (USF) dockets (WC Docket No. 05-337 and CC Docket No. 96-45).

In this *ex parte* we provide our analysis and recommendations on the draft ICC-USF reform proposal ("Draft Proposal") currently scheduled for a full Commission vote on November 4th. We first outline the Draft Proposal (as we understand it), then offer recommendations on how to modify and implement this plan in a manner that is fair, efficient, reasonable, and consumer friendly.

Ultimately, with our recommendations incorporated, we feel that the Commission can and should adopt both a Report and Order *and* a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking at the November 4th open meeting. We recommend that the Report and Order establish a solid framework for transitioning the ICC system to cost-based rates and establish a solid framework for incorporating broadband into the USF. The Further Notice should then deal with most of the implementation details of these frameworks (and do so in a three to six month comment cycle with three to six additional months to move to a final Order). While there is general consensus in the record that ICC rates should be lowered and that USF must be modernized, the implementation details that achieve these outcomes are what causes much of the dispute. A Report and Order with a solid transition framework and a Further Notice with firm tentative conclusions will move this debate beyond the current impasse while still addressing many of the concerns of the commenters who would rather the Commission delay this entire matter.

Bifurcation of Commission action on November 4th into these two items recognizes that even if every element of the policy were to be contained in a single Order, the administrative mechanisms needed to implement the Order and transition the regulatory regimes would take time and further input to devise and settle. An Order will delimit the start and end points of reform, establishes the first steps, and chart a clear path forward—while an FNPRM opens an opportunity for further deliberation on the means.

Our primary interest in these proceedings is to ensure consumers are treated fairly and not unduly burdened. We want to make certain that consumers, not just particular private companies, benefit from these reforms. With the appropriate changes made to the Draft Proposal, the Commission can usher in long-overdue reforms that are equitable, minimize consumer burden, increase efficiency, and bring affordable high-quality broadband to every region of the nation.

The Commission's Draft ICC-USF Reform Proposal

The draft ICC-USF reform proposal on circulation at the Commission is designed to achieve two important policy objectives: reforming the system of intercarrier compensation (albeit only on the terminating side) and modernizing the Universal Service Fund. Our understanding of the elements of the Draft Proposal is based on our conversations with the Chairman's office on October 17, 2008, and on various media reports and analyst statements.¹ Trying to glean the details of such a comprehensive proposal in this fashion is far from ideal. However, we recognize that most of the ideas on the table are present in the record in some form. Based on what we do know, the proposal needs further modifications in order to adequately achieve the policy objectives in a manner that is consistent with the public interest principles of the Communications Act.

ICC Reform Elements of the Commission's Draft Proposal

The Commission proposes a 10-year phase down of all terminating access rates to a unified reciprocal compensation rate within each state, set by state regulators. In the first two years of the 10-year path, intrastate rates are lowered to interstate levels. In the fifth year, the states will have set a rate that is close to reciprocal compensation levels (RC). By the end of the 10-year process, all rates within each state must be uniform, at a level of forward-looking reciprocal compensation.

This lowering of terminating access charges will result in a reduction in revenues for those companies who are current net recipients of access fees -- local exchange carriers (though we should note here that access minutes will likely continue to decline as the rates are phased down, an aspect we comment on in detail below). In order to "offset" this decline in revenue, the Commission proposes to raise the Federal Subscriber Line Charge (SLC) for primary residential and single-line businesses by \$1.50, to a total of \$8.00 per month. The multi-line business SLC will increase to \$11.50 per month. These increases will come as the Federal-State Joint Board is tasked with the determining an appropriate national rate benchmark, and deciding whether further SLC increases will be allowed.

Since there is a widely-held belief that above-cost access charges are an implicit subsidy for universal service, the Commission's Draft Proposal also offers a recovery mechanism for certain carriers operating in high-cost areas. Rate-of-Return (RoR) carriers operating in these areas will be able to access increased universal service support from the interstate common line support program (ICLS). The Commission estimates that this will amount to \$500 million in total additional funds over the entire first 5-year period, and will be approximately \$200 million to \$300 million in each year following. We do not know if this additional funding is capped, or remains uncapped like the current ICLS funds. We also do not know the details on how the amount of support for each carrier is calculated (i.e. whether or not it is based on forward-looking costs, or embedded costs as

¹ See Ex Parte communication of Free Press, WC Docket 05-337; CC Docket 96-45; WC Docket 06 122; CC Docket 01-92, October 20, 2008; see also e.g., Joelle Tessler, "FCC chair eyes fallow TV airwaves for broadband", *Associated Press*, October 15, 2008. Therefore, we alone are responsible for the characterization of the Commission's Draft Proposal in this *ex parte*, and make no claims as to the accuracy of our characterization, since we have never actually seen the circulated draft.

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currently calculated for ICLS). Under the Draft Proposal, price-cap (PC) regulated carriers will not be able to obtain any access recovery funds (ARF) unless they petition the Commission and show their costs. It is unclear to us whether this cost-showing process will rely solely on the regulated cost-structure of a carrier's business, or if it considers all revenue and costs (e.g. broadband, IPTV, directory services, etc...)

We understand the Draft Proposal will deal with the issue of phantom traffic by requiring that all providers identify their traffic, or face the possibility of being charged the highest possible access rate.

We also understand that voice-over-Internet-protocol (VoIP) traffic will be classified as an information service. This change in policy has substantial implications for the ability of VoIP providers to obtain reasonable interconnection arrangements with other carriers. This move would likely increase the level of uncertainty in the access charge regime precisely at a time when the Commission is seeking to provide certainty. By declaring VoIP an information service, the structure of Section 251 and the entire industrial interconnection regime is called into question. This is a very dangerous move, as there is no parallel regime under Title I to ensure competitive access. This element of the reform package *must* be reviewed in a Further Notice to prevent substantial unintended consequences.

USF Reform Elements of the Commission's Draft Proposal

The Commission's Draft Proposal aims to reform the Federal Universal Service Fund (USF) by making fundamental changes to the contribution methodology, and requiring the offering of broadband service as a condition for USF support.

First, the Commission proposes to move the contributions system away from reliance on interstate telecommunications revenues to a numbers-based assessment. As we understand it, there will be a flat \$1 per month fee assessed on all assigned telephone numbers, exempting pre-paid wireless numbers and Lifeline program numbers, but no exemption for additional "family-plan" numbers. According to NRUF, this amounts to nearly 617 million numbers.² At a \$1 per month per number, this equates to about \$7.4 billion per year, or approximately \$100 million short of the 2008 projected total size of the Fund. Because of this and likely future shortfalls, the Commission's Draft Proposal will place some revenue-based assessment on businesses. The Commission believes that under this methodology the consumer's USF burden will decrease from approximately 48 percent of the fund to 42 percent of the fund.

On the distributions side, the Commission's Draft Proposal will freeze High Cost Fund support at the current level for each study area. The Commission will eliminate the Identical Support Rule (see below). The Commission's proposal will require that all USF-supported providers offer broadband to 100 percent of customers in their service areas within 5-years, with broadband defined

² "Numbering Resource Utilization in the United States, NRUF data as of December 31, 2007", Industry Analysis and Technology Division, Wireline Competition Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, August 2008.

as a service capable of providing a 768 kilobit per second (kbps) or higher connection in one-direction. Carriers are obligated to cover at least 20 percent of their unserved territory in the first year, and an additional 20 percent in each of years 2-5 (leading to 100 percent at the end of year five).

If a carrier is unable to meet these obligations at the current level of study-area level support, then the study area is put up for a reverse auction, with the reserve price being the current level of support. Bidders who participate in the reverse auction will be first ranked by the speed of their proposed broadband service, then by the level of their bid (i.e. broadband speed is given priority over the bid price). If a winning bidder is a new entrant, they will not be under the same buildout timeline as the incumbent. We are uncertain as to the length in time between reverse auctions, or if there will be future auctions at all for a given study area.

If no entity bids to offer support, then the study area is declared unserved. We understand that in this situation, the current carrier of last resort (COLR) for an un-bid study area will maintain their current level of High Cost support and will not be under any broadband obligations for that study area.

The Commission's Draft Proposal also creates a \$300 per year Broadband Low-Income pilot project. We are uncertain as to how this program will be administered, but we believe it is intended to lower the cost of residential broadband for qualifying participants to the same price as lifeline-supported telephony service.

Finally, we understand that while the Commission's Draft Proposal eliminates the current Identical Support Rule, it does not envision a one-supported-provider per study area approach. The proposal caps the level of wireless CETC support at \$1.25 billion per year (the estimated current level), but requires all CETCs to file cost studies to determine if they qualify for support. Support will only be provided if a CETC's costs exceeds a national benchmark (we believe in the Draft Proposal this is established as the average cost per line benchmark of approximately 135 percent).³ We are uncertain as to the details of the process for a CETC to file cost information.

If in a given study area no wireless CETC agrees to make a cost-showing, then that study area undergoes a mobility reverse auction with the reserve price set at the lowest total amount of support given to a CETC in a particular study area.⁴ CETCs would still have the same broadband obligations as incumbents.

Ultimately, it is assumed that the total amount of money going to wireless CETCs will be reduced substantially, and these funds redirected to meet the increased obligations on ICLS due to the changes in ICC.

³ We are actually unsure if this was the benchmark (i.e. the *Ninth Order* benchmark) or if it was the 138 percent national urban rate benchmark established in the 2003 *Order on Remand*, or some other benchmark entirely.

⁴ We are uncertain about this particular aspect, since under the Identical Support Rule, per-line support is identical across CETCs in a given study area. However, it could be that since each ETC serves a different amount of customers, the reserve price to serve the entire area would be set at the least total amount of support among current CETCs (i.e. the amount going to the CETC with the fewest amount of customers), with the winner required to offer service to any requesting customer within the study area.

Free Press' Assessment of and Recommendations to Improve The Commission's Draft ICC-USF Reform Proposal

Below we offer our opinions on the Commission's Draft Proposal and recommendations for improving the plan in a manner that is consistent with the public interest principles of the Communications Act. We must stress that the recommendations we offer here are bound by the framework of the current Draft Proposal. That is, were we starting from scratch and working in a world free of path-dependency, we would likely offer a substantially different-looking package of reform policies. However, it is clear that idealism is not a luxury we can afford at this point. We are choosing to participate constructively in this process in an effort to minimize the burden that this reform package will place on consumers, and to ensure that these policy changes result in substantial long-term benefits for all consumers.

Improving the ICC Reform Elements of The Commission's Draft Proposal: Terminating Access Rates

At its core, the ICC reform elements of the Commission's Draft Proposal results in a very-low terminating access rate that is uniform among all carriers within a given state. We fully support the notion that the price of terminating a call should not differ based solely on the arbitrary regulatory classification of the carriers involved in the transaction, nor should it differ based on the calls geographic origin.

However, this does not mean that we should throw the cost-based principles of the Act out the window. If a proper forward-looking cost study demonstrates a real difference in call termination cost between certain exchanges, then a unified rate across all calls fails to adhere to the cost-based principles of Section 252 and is economically inefficient. However, it may be the case that the transaction costs associated with a varying (but cost-based) rate structure exceed the efficiency gains from having cost-based rates. It is plausible that a unified rate structure reduces transaction costs and discourages arbitrage opportunities at a level that outweighs the efficiency losses and equity concerns of a unified rate. This is a central question that must be addressed.

Thus, we recommend that the Commission establish a framework that drives terminating access rates lower, but relies on the states to decide the issue of where the final rates should land. Thus, working within the structure of the current Draft Proposal, state regulators would establish a process where rates would decline in years 1 and 2 to the current interstate level; in years 3, 4 and 5 they would decline further to a carrier-specific, cost-based reciprocal compensation rate. The states would then decide whether or not to move to a unified forward-looking reciprocal compensation rate across all carries over the following 5-year period. We envision that in the November 4th Report and Order, the Commission puts a firm rule on the years 1 and 2 process, and seeks input on the implementation for years 3-10.

This approach to shaping the path to lower rates should address many of the concerns of the non-RBOC carriers, who don't dispute the need for a lower rate, but are opposed to a uniform \$0.0007 rate.

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*Improving the ICC Reform Elements of
The Commission's Draft Proposal: Subscriber Line Charge Increases*

A central feature of the Commission's Draft Proposal is a \$1.50 increase in the Subscriber Line Charge (SLC), to a maximum of \$8.00 per primary residential line, and to \$11.50 for business lines. The Commission has the statutory authority to impose Subscriber Line Charges to recover the portion of loop costs placed in the interstate jurisdiction. Thus, in the Draft Proposal, we have increases in the SLC designed to offset reductions in all terminating access charges -- both inter- and intrastate.⁵

SLCs are appropriate if they do not result in an over-recovery of costs. However, we are concerned that the current SLCs charged by carriers already result in an over-recovery of costs on a substantial portion of lines, and any further increases -- while offsetting access charge reductions -- could result in an even greater level of over-recovery. When the Commission adopted the current \$6.50 SLC cap in the *CALLS Order*⁶ it ruled that a further cost review proceeding would have to be undertaken in order to determine if SLCs should rise above \$5.00. Specifically, the Commission stated that in this cost review proceeding it would "examine, forward-looking cost information associated with the provision of retail voice grade access to the public switched telephone network."⁷ When the review proceeding was concluded, it became apparent that very little verifiable actual forward-looking cost information had been submitted to the Commission.⁸ In the June 2002 *Order*, the Commission ruled that the \$6.50 cap was reasonable, despite the conclusion that approximately 82 percent of residential and single-line business price-cap lines had forward-looking costs below \$6.50.⁹

Therefore, we would prefer that the Commission revisit this issue in a comprehensive manner prior to implementing any SLC increases. However, we recognize the high likelihood of the Commission acting as it did in the *CALLS Order*, where it ordered an immediate SLC increase. If the

⁵ Because of this, the Commission must be explicit as to why this particular SLC increase is allowed under current law. See 47 U.S.C. §§ 4(i), 201-205; see also *National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners v. Federal Communications Commission*, 737 F.2d 1095, 1114 (D.C. Cir. 1984) (*NARUC v. FCC*).

⁶ *Access Charge Reform*, Sixth Report and Order in CC Docket Nos. 96-262 and 94-1, Report and Order in CC Docket No. 99-249, Eleventh Report and Order in CC Docket No. 96-45, 15 FCC Rcd 12962 (2000) (*CALLS Order*), *aff'd in part, rev'd in part, and remanded in part*, *Texas Office of Public Util. Counsel v. FCC*, 265 F.3d 313 (5th Cir. 2001), *cert. denied*, *Nat'l Ass'n of State Util. Consumer Advocates v. FCC*, 70 U.S.L.W. 3444 (U.S. Apr. 15, 2002).

⁷ *Ibid.* ¶ 83

⁸ In his dissenting statement, Commissioner Michael J. Copps stated, "[a] significant number of carriers, however, submitted summary data without disclosing the inputs used, cost models that were not transparent, or in some cases, models that have been rejected by the state commissions... The Commission then failed to conduct its own independent analysis of the cost data. By failing to undertake the thorough analysis of cost data that was promised in the access reform order, we are neglecting our obligation to consumers."

⁹ See footnote 82, *In the Matter of Cost Review Proceeding for Residential and Single-Line Business Subscriber Line Charge (SLC) Caps; Access Charge Reform; Price Cap Performance Review for Local Exchange Carriers*, CC Docket Nos. 96-262, 94-1, Order, FCC 02-161, rel. June 5, 2002.

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Commission is determined to act in this fashion, we have several recommendations that will mitigate consumer harm.

First, given that the Draft Proposal calls for a phase in of access rate reductions, there should be a commensurate phase in of SLC increases. There is absolutely no reason why LECs should be permitted on day one to charge a full \$1.50 in additional SLCs when they have not experienced *any* declines in access revenues. If the Commission is adamant that a \$1.50 SLC increase is appropriate while the Federal-State Joint Board (FSJB) considers the issue of a national rate benchmark, then the Commission needs to provide some justification of how this \$1.50 increase relates to reduced access charges, and phase in the SLC increase commensurate with the access charge decreases.

For example, in a recent *ex parte*, AT&T provides some estimates of the potential access shifts resulting from a move to a “recip comp proxy” to be \$2.3 billion per year.¹⁰ They also estimate that there are 81 million primary residential lines. Thus, under this scenario a SLC increase of \$1.50 results in an offset of \$1.46 billion annually from primary residential lines alone (we can also assume a substantial additional offset revenues from the increase in the multi-line business SLC from \$9.20 to \$11.50 -- perhaps as much as \$1.1 billion annually).¹¹ But the full force of the \$2.3 billion in annual access revenue reductions resulting from a decline to a “recip comp proxy” won’t even be felt for many years -- potentially 10 years.

Why then should SLCs increase now? Plainly, they shouldn’t. If they do, it should be very little while the access charges are phased down. Thus for example, if the phase down of access charges in year one results in a \$500 million annual access shift, then the SLC increase for primary residential and single-line businesses should be no more than 25 cents.¹²

Therefore we request that in addition to delegating to the FSJB the issue of determining a national rate benchmark and final SLC cap, that the Commission, in the forthcoming Report and Order and Further Notice, begin a cost-review proceeding to determine the proper level for SLCs, based on forward-looking cost models that are detailed and transparent (and available for public review under cover of confidentiality).

We also strongly recommend that the Commission determine the net access shift that will result from a reduction in access rates to interstate levels by the end of year two of the ICC transition plan. We then recommend the Commission calculate the appropriate temporary SLC increase (for these

¹⁰ *Ex Parte* communication of AT&T, Re: *Developing a Unified Inter-carrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92; *High-Cost Universal Service Support*, WC Docket No. 05-337; *Universal Service Contribution Mechanism*, WC Docket No. 06-122; *Inter-carrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, WC Docket 99-68; *Establishing Just and Reasonable Rates for Local Exchange Carriers*, WC Docket No. 07-135, October 20, 2008.

¹¹ The Commission estimates there were about 40 million multi-line business lines that companies reported as qualified to receive Subscriber Line Charges in 2006, and another 9.7 non-primary residential lines. See Table 1.3 in “Trends in Telephone Service”, Industry Analysis Division, August 2008.

¹² Here we assume 86 million SLC-qualified primary residential and single line business lines, 9 million non-primary residential lines, and 40 million multi-line business access lines. Based on the current ratios of the residential-to-multiline SLCs ($\$6.50/\$9.20 = 0.7$), the increase in the multi-line business SLC under this scenario would be about 40 cents per month.

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two years) based on this amount of access revenue shift (minus any imputed to vertically integrated LECs; see below) -- and that this SLC increase be itself phased in over the two year period. The Commission *must* approach the initial SLC increases in this fashion, for if it does not it is harming consumers by saddling them with plainly unjustifiable SLC increases. This method of parallel phase-in (access charges declining as SLC charges increase) represents a fair and reasonable way to ensure that the burden of regulatory change is shared and not borne disproportionately by ratepayers.

Our second recommendation is based upon the principle of fairness. We feel that the Commission must recognize the massive changes that have occurred in the telephony industry since it last undertook access charge reform in 2001. Since then, vertical integration between RBOCs, IXCs and wireless carriers has nearly reconstituted the former Ma Bell monopoly. Verizon and AT&T dominate the local exchange, long-distance and mobility markets. Their respective long-distance and wireless businesses will benefit substantially from the lowering of access charges. While it is true that the LEC side of their businesses will have declines in access revenues, it is a safe assumption (based on their eagerness for the Commission to lower access rates) that they stand to reap substantial net benefits from ICC reform.

Therefore we strongly urge the Commission to only allow a carrier to increase their SLCs if they can show their business experiences a net decline in revenues as a result of ICC reforms. Thus, wireline customers of AT&T and Verizon should not be subjected to SLC increases unless those carriers are able to demonstrate net access revenue declines as well as rates that are below the benchmark set by the FSJB. In the event of such a showing, the increases should proceed on the parallel phase-in method described above.

*Improving the ICC Reform Elements of
The Commission's Draft Proposal: Access Recovery from USF*

The other major feature of the Commission's Draft Proposal -- and most other ICC reform proposals -- is an Access Recovery Fund (ARF) for carriers who do not recover all of their revenue declines in increased SLCs. The reasoning here is that access charges contain an implicit universal service subsidy for high-cost carriers. However, there is no evidence whatsoever that the amount in ARF needed to "make a carrier whole" is in any way related to the amount of implicit USF support contained in access revenues. Therefore we are strongly opposed to any reform proposal that attempts to play a zero-sum-game.

The Commission must be guided by the Act. Universal service support should be explicit, and sufficient enough to ensure reasonably comparable rates. It should not be excessive. In this light, we remind the Commission of the wild range various parties attributed to the implicit USF component of price cap carrier interstate access charges in the CALLS proceeding. Some claimed the amount was as high as \$3.9 billion annually, while others claimed a low of \$250 million. The Commission ultimately settled on a value of \$650 million -- a number suggested by industry and not calculated by the Commission. This pool of Interstate Access Support (IAS) was due to be reevaluated after 5 years, with acknowledgement that the \$650 million amount might be excessive

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after that time.¹³ This never happened, despite the fact that interstate access minutes have declined some 40 percent since then, and despite the fact that technology costs have continued to decline.

The Commission's Draft Proposal would establish an ARF for rate of return carriers that would amount to a maximum of \$200 million to \$300 million per year. This pool of funds would be incorporated into the current program to offset reductions in interstate rates paid to rate-of-return carriers -- the Interstate Common Line Support program (ICLS). It is not clear to us what this \$300 million in increased ICLS ARF is based upon. If it is the total amount that rate-of-return carriers will need to be "made whole" after a SLC increase, then it is an inappropriate deviation from the cost-based and sufficiency principles of the Act.

Under the Commission's Draft Proposal, price-cap regulated carriers will not be able to access this pool of money without first making a cost-showing (though we're uncertain as to how this would actually be structured; e.g. would a carrier have to "open the books" on all revenue and cost streams, or merely on the regulated side of the business). We support this approach, and believe it should apply to all carriers, including rate-of-return carriers. However, we understand the concerns the Commission has in regards to triggering potential confiscation claims by rate-of-return regulated carriers (though we still feel a cost-showing is appropriate in all cases).

Because the increased ICLS ARF will not be made available to price-cap carriers, the Commission must be cognizant of how this will impact these businesses. A quick look at the bottom line net profit margins (NPM) and Return on Equity (RE) of several major mid-size price cap carriers (i.e. non-vertically integrated RBOCs) reveals that most of these companies are already fairing better than the average for this industry sector (which is approximately 9.6 percent NPM over the past 5-years and a 11.9 percent RE over that time). Take for example the carrier Windstream. Their 5-year average NPM is above 17 percent, nearly two times the industry sector average. Windstream's 5-year average Return on Equity is 50.2 percent, nearly five times the industry sector average. At the other extreme is a company like Fairpoint Communications, whose 5-year average NPM is 2.5 percent, with a 5-year average RE of 16 percent. Also worth noting is the fact that many of these carriers have long-distance business segments that stand to reap substantial access charge savings.

Since many of the price cap regulated companies earn returns far higher than the 11.25 percent for rate-of-return carriers, is it fair for USF funds to be awarded to these companies to offset revenue losses from reductions in above-cost access charges -- revenues that are in a natural free fall as a result of changing market conditions? Is it fair for these USF funds to be locked in and awarded in perpetuity despite the fact that the returns of many of these companies would still remain well above the industry sector average even in the absence of additional USF support?

These companies chose the path of price cap incentive regulation -- a path that has rewards and risks. Thus, merely requiring them to show a true need of additional explicit subsidies for the purposes of universal service seems reasonable. After all, price cap carriers are generally less reliant than rate-of-return carriers on access revenues and are also able to take advantage of

¹³ Supra note 6, at ¶203.

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economies of scale, unlike smaller RoR carriers.

However, we must avoid punishing the customers of these companies, and therefore must provide a “safety net” -- not necessarily in the form of access recovery funds, but in a one-time path back to rate-of-return regulation. Thus we propose the Commission establish a forbearance mechanism for distressed price cap companies to violate the “permanent choice rule” and return to rate-of-return status.¹⁴ However, to avoid the enriching that the permanent choice rule was originally established to prevent, the rate-of-return allowed for a carrier exercising this option should be substantially lower than 11.25 percent.

Ultimately, we recommend that any new access recovery funds be based on forward-looking cost estimates, even ARFs for rate-of-return carriers. The current ICLS funds available to rate-of-return carriers are based on embedded costs¹⁵, despite the fact that the Commission has previously concluded that “universal service support for all carriers should be based on the forward-looking economic cost of constructing and operating the network used to provide the supported services, rather than each carrier’s embedded costs”.¹⁶ When the Commission created the ICLS, it concluded that it was appropriate to base this support on embedded costs, but that this issue would be revisited in 5-years. Like the promise to revisit IAS, this never happened.

We also recommend that as a part of the Further Notice issued in this proceeding, the Commission seek input on the continued need for locking in “frozen” implicit access revenue subsidies even as access minutes are in rapid decline. We proffer that the current \$650 million in IAS (established in 2000) and the current \$1.5 billion in ICLS (established in 2001) are far in excess of actual need. The Further Notice should concur with this conclusion, and seek input on a phase down and eventual termination of these programs -- offset if needed with explicit broadband infrastructure support.

*Improving the USF Reform Elements of
The Commission’s Draft Proposal: Broadband*

The Commission’s Draft Proposal requires all USF-supported carriers to deploy broadband, at a minimum level of 768 kbps, to 100 percent of their service areas within a 5-year period. Carriers are required to cover their unserved areas at a rate of 20 percent per year over the 5-years. If the USF-supported carrier fails to meet this obligation, the area is put up for a reverse auction, with the

¹⁴ 47 CFR 69.3(i)(4).

¹⁵ Multi-Association Group (MAG) Plan for Regulation of Interstate Services of Non-Price Cap Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers and Interexchange Carriers, CC Docket No. 00-256, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket No. 96-45, Fifteenth Report and Order; Access Charge Reform for Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers Subject to Rate-of-Return Regulation, CC Docket No. 98-77, Report and Order, Prescribing the Authorized Rate of Return From Interstate Services of Local Exchange Carriers, CC Docket No. 98-166, Report and Order, 16 FCC Rcd 19613, FCC 01-304 (2001) (*MAG Order*); at ¶125.

¹⁶ *MAG Order* at ¶56 referencing Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, CC Docket No. 96-45, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 8776, 9164-65 (1997).

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reserve bid price set at the current study area per-line support level.

While we support modernizing the fund by incorporating broadband, we have serious concerns about the practical outcomes of this particular proposal.

First, we don't envision any non-rural carrier being able to meet their 100 percent obligation at the current level of support (which for most of these carriers consists of only minimal High-Cost Model (HCM) support and IAS support for geographically large study areas). We also don't envision other providers showing up to the reverse auction and meeting the reserve bid. This is simply because many of the non-rural study areas are geographically massive, such as the old Pac Bell study area which consists of 14 million access lines.

In these situations with no bidder, there is no improvement in broadband deployment from the status quo. This is what we call the "dead-end" scenario. Because carriers in such study areas face no penalties from failure to meet the 100 percent broadband deployment benchmark, they have no incentive to deploy based on the current level of support. Furthermore, even in study areas where a non-incumbent bidder wins the reverse auction, there's a high-likelihood that USF monies will be used to build or maintain broadband infrastructure in locations where other unsubsidized services already exist. This outcome would result in an unnecessary use of scarce resources.

The "dead-end" scenario is a very likely outcome. It is worth noting that no carrier has publicly stated that they will be able to meet the Draft Proposal's 100 percent benchmark at current support levels; and we should assume that this silence means that they cannot or will not.

If the Commission is determined to adopt a USF reform plan similar to that in the Draft Proposal, then we recommend the following changes.

First, the Commission should not use a specific speed benchmark of 768kbps. Instead, the standard should be service speeds and qualities (i.e. latencies) that are reasonably comparable to those available in that particular state.¹⁷ This standard should also be flexible for the small portion of homes that are defined as "extremely high cost" (see next item). We recommend this issue be addressed in the Further Notice.

Second, the Commission should recognize that a very small percent of homes might be prohibitively expensive to serve. In this instance, the cost of serving the last one percent of unserved homes could dwarf the other 99 percent. Thus we recommend the Commission establish a case-by-case forbearance process where these extremely high-cost homes can be served using alternative technologies such as fixed wireless or satellite. The Commission should seek input in the Further Notice as to what the cost-differential should be in order to qualify for forbearance. A reasonable value may be on the order of 5 to 10 times the current average per-line cost for a given study area.

¹⁷ The issue of latency is perhaps just as important as speeds. While some satellite broadband offerings may have speeds that exceed 768kbps, the latency of these services results in a user experience that is far different from those using low-latency technologies.

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Third, carriers should be required to offer buildout plans once a year for the 5-year period leading to 100 percent service deployment. If a carrier does not meet or does not plan to meet its obligations in any of the 5-years, then the auction process should commence immediately. Thus, if from day zero a carrier declares they cannot meet the buildout requirements, then the auction process should begin.

Fourth, in order to avoid the “dead-end” scenario describe above, if a study area is put up for reverse auction and receives no winning bidders, then the study area should be disaggregated. We recommend disaggregation into Census Block Groups (CBGs). Then, using the new Form 477 availability data (that we and others have urged the Commission to collect in a separate proceeding)¹⁸, the Commission should identify the CBGs within a particular study area that are not served by any broadband provider.

Once the served and unserved areas of a study area are identified, the Commission or a state Commission should then designate a current broadband provider in the served portions of the study area as the Carrier of Last Resort (COLR). If there is one or more USF-supported broadband providers and one or more unsubsidized broadband providers in these served portions of a study area, then the unsubsidized provider should be designated by the Commission or state Commission as the COLR, either based on authority under Section 214(e)(3) of the Act or by negotiation. This newly designated COLR will not be eligible for USF support absent a showing of need (and need will be based on the cost of providing broadband and voice-grade service at retail rate reasonably comparable to the statewide average).

The USF monies that were previously distributed to the COLR in these served portions of the study area will then be redirected to supporting broadband in the unserved portions of the study area. The unserved portions of a study area will be bid out in a request for proposal (RFP) process, with a general cost-guideline used instead of a reserve bid (i.e., support will not be bound by the current POTS per-line support amount, recognizing that these areas will require increased USF support).

The scheme proposed in the above paragraphs is a carrot-and-stick approach that we believe will provide substantial incentives for current USF-supported carriers to meet the original 100 percent buildout obligations in order to avoid a “dead-end” first round auction and subsequent potential loss of support. This proposal -- by recognizing that many rural areas already have unsubsidized cable broadband service -- efficiently targets resources in the areas where the current USF-supported COLR cannot meet the buildout requirements. It also increases the amount of USF support available in the truly unserved areas by redirecting support away from areas where it is not needed.

We strongly recommend the Commission adopt this disaggregation approach. While we recognize that some carriers may be worried about a net loss in USF support under this approach, we believe

¹⁸ See for example Comments of Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America, Free Press and Public Knowledge, In the Matter of *Deployment of Nationwide Broadband Data to Evaluate Reasonable and Timely Deployment of Advanced Services to All Americans, Improvement of Wireless Broadband Subscriberhip Data, and Development of Data on Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) Subscriberhip*, WC Docket No. 07-38, July 17, 2008.

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that most rural and non-rural carriers will actually see little net change as a result of a more precise targeting of USF support. If the Commission simply adopts the current Draft Proposal without making these modifications, the end result will be no meaningful increase in broadband deployment and continued misallocation of scarce USF resources.

*Improving the USF Reform Elements of
The Commission's Draft Proposal: Mobility*

The Commission's Draft Proposal caps support for mobile wireless CETCs at the current total level (\$1.25 billion annually), but eliminates the Identical Support Rule (ISR). This means that in order for a wireless CETC to continue to receive support, they must participate in a cost proceeding. We are uncertain if this requires a CETC to file part 32 accounting and part 64 allocation documentation, or if the Commission will create a new cost-showing mechanism. However a CETC makes a cost showing, support will not be available unless it substantially exceeds a national benchmark. If no CETC in a study area undergoes a cost showing, the Commission's Draft Proposal designates that area for a reverse mobility auction, with the reserve price set at the lowest total CETC support for that study area. CETCs are required to meet the same 100 percent broadband benchmarks as incumbent carriers.

As supporters of universal affordable communications technologies, we support the idea that rural consumers should have access to mobility services at reasonably comparable qualities and rates. However, the framework established in the 1996 Act does not appear to square with the realities of today's communications marketplace, where mobility services are not in direct competition with wireline services; but are instead complementary services. Under the structure of the Act, if the Commission is forced to make choices on how to allocate scarce resources, we feel that the Act's principles lead the Commission down a path of supporting robust advanced telecommunications infrastructure, which may or may not have a mobility component.

This is why we ultimately think Congress must directly address the issue of a separate mobility support structure. However, in the interim, as the Commission makes changes to the Universal Service Fund, it must ensure a basic level of universal mobile voice service. Thus we recommend that the Commission, during the first year interim transition period, determine the populated areas where no mobile voice service would be available absent USF support. The Commission should then target its mobility funds towards those areas. Thus, if an area is served by one or more unsubsidized mobility providers, then no USF support should be provided in that area (irrespective of a CETC cost-showing). In areas with only unsubsidized mobility providers, support for the lowest cost-carrier should be awarded. And in the areas where no provider currently exists, mobility funds should be targeted for voice-grade infrastructure investments.

While we understand the Commission's desire to fund mobile broadband services, we don't think the case has been made that this is a necessary and efficient use of scarce USF resources. This is ultimately a threshold question that Congress must answer.

Conclusion

If the Commission makes the necessary changes outlined above, we believe it should move forward and adopt a Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking at the November 4th open meeting. The question of which elements fall into which item remains open and to be determined by the commissioners. However, we favor a model in which the framework (starting points, end points, principles, and time-table) and initial steps appear in the Order, paired with an FNPRM that contains strong tentative conclusions for implementation and administration.

On the issue of ICC rate reform, the Commission should rule that access rates will be set on a path of reduction, and delegate the decisions about where final rates should land to the states. States should have the flexibility to decide whether the final cost-based reciprocal compensation rate should be uniform across all carriers, or if it is economically appropriate to have some level of variation. A path to an intermediate step of interstate rates over two years can be firmly established in the Order, and the details of the states' implementation process in the years after that can be examined in a Further Notice.

On the issue of SLC increases, we strongly urge the Commission to undergo a cost-review process before implementing any such increases. However, if it does rule that a SLC increase is appropriate while the FSJB decides the issue of a national benchmark, then the SLC increases must be commensurate with the declines in access charges. The Commission **must not** allow an across the board SLC increase of \$1.50 in the initial years of the access transition, because this (along with the proposed increase in the business SLC) would result in an immediate offset of the full value of the access shift -- a shift that will not occur for many years. Allowing the full SLC increases in the early years of the transition gives LECs additional revenues that have not yet been lost, and this is simply unacceptable.

If the Commission is intent on immediate changes to the SLC, we urge it to determine the amount of access shift that will occur in the first two years of the transition (as rates go to interstate levels), and only allow SLC increases that offset this access decline. We estimate, based on very crude data, that the SLC increase needed during the first two years would be approximately 20 to 30 cents for primary residential lines. Finally, vertically integrated carriers who will be net beneficiaries of the decline in access charges should not be allowed to increase their SLCs.

On the issue of access recovery funding for the purposes of universal service, we strongly recommend that such funding be based on actual need, not a desire to make a carrier whole. All carriers should be required to quantify the actual amount of implicit support contained within their current access revenues, and then demonstrate this support is actually needed, and is not already offset by off-the-books unregulated revenue streams. If the Commission establishes an additional access recovery mechanism, then the support should be based on a carriers forward-looking cost, and take into account declining access minutes. The Commission should conclude that these new funds, and all access replacement funds will sunset in five years, absent further Commission action. If a price cap carrier cannot or will not make a needs-based cost showing, then a one-time path back to rate of return regulation (at a rate lower than 11.25 percent) should be permitted.

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On the issue of declaring VoIP an information service, we **strongly** urge the Commission to leave this monumental decision to a Further Notice, as this change will completely upend the structure of Section 251 and create massive uncertainty as to the future of the entire industrial interconnection regime. There is simply no interconnection regime under Title I to ensure competitive access. Therefore this move would jeopardize the future of the advanced telecommunications market, something that is in direct conflict with Section 706 of the 1996 Act.

On the issue of universal service reform, we support the Commission's general goal of modernizing the USF to support broadband. But we have substantial concerns that the current framework in the Draft Proposal will not result in much change from the status quo. Indeed, the fact that no carrier has indicated their willingness to meet the 100 percent benchmark outlined in the Draft Proposal is indicative that no such outcome should be expected.

We feel that the reasonable comparability standard of the Act means that a 768kbps standard is arbitrary. A better approach would be to require services that are reasonably comparable those available in other areas within a given state. This, combined with a flexible approach to serving the last few very high-cost customers, will ensure that a substantial majority of consumers in a given study area have access to broadband services that are not of a quality which is years behind that available in urban areas.

We recommend a carrot-and-stick incentive-based approach that leads to study area disaggregation in the instances where there is no winning bidder. Under this approach, current USF funding will be diverted away from areas where broadband services are currently deployed by unsubsidized carriers, to the truly unserved areas.

Ultimately, we feel that the Commission should establish a solid framework in an Order, and issue a Further Notice with strong tentative conclusions that addresses the more difficult implementation issues. This approach is prudent, as many of the implementation details will need to be sorted out over the next year even if the Commission chooses to only issue a Report and Order. Thus many of the details that commenting parties are most concerned about (and are asking for an additional comment cycle on) can be dealt with in the Further Notice. We recommend a 3 to 6 month comment cycle and a 3 to 6 month deliberation cycle, culminating with a final Order on November 4th 2009.

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Respectfully submitted,

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Dated: October 24, 2008



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October 29, 2008

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

***Ex Parte* Notice**

**Re: Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime
CC Docket No. 01-92**

**High-Cost Universal Service Support
WC Docket No. 05-337**

**Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service
CC Docket No. 96-45**

Dear Ms. Dortch,

Attached is a revised version of an *ex parte* filing made earlier today, with a modification to the second bullet on page two. Specifically, it clarifies that the second component of the supplemental interstate common line support (ICLS) is available only to those rural rate of return-regulated incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) that have committed to the five-year broadband build-out requirement.

In accordance with FCC rules, this letter is being filed electronically in the above-captioned dockets.

Sincerely,

Stuart Polikoff
Director of Government Relations
OPASTCO



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October 29, 2008

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
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Washington, DC 20554

***Ex Parte* Notice**

**Re: Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime
CC Docket No. 01-92**

**High-Cost Universal Service Support
WC Docket No. 05-337**

**Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service
CC Docket No. 96-45**

Dear Ms. Dortch,

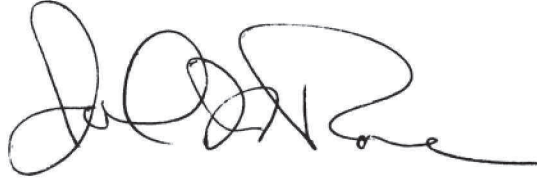
On October 28, 2008, H. Keith Oliver of Home Telephone Company, Inc., Mark Gailey of Totah Communications, Inc., Catherine Moyer of Pioneer Communications, Roger Nishi of Waitsfield & Champlain Valley Telecom, Robert DeBroux of TDS Telecom, John Rose and Stuart Polikoff of the Organization for the Promotion and Advancement of Small Telecommunications Companies (OPASTCO), and Derrick Owens and Jason Williams of the Western Telecommunications Alliance (WTA) held a conference call with Chairman Kevin Martin, his Chief of Staff, Daniel Gonzalez, his Legal Advisor, Amy Bender, and Dana Shaffer and Donald Stockdale of the Wireline Competition Bureau. The purpose of the conference call was to discuss Chairman Martin's draft Order addressing the comprehensive reform of intercarrier compensation and universal service and its potential impacts on rural, rate of return (RoR)-regulated incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs).

Based on our understanding of the draft Order from our discussion, and subject to any major undisclosed modifications, OPASTCO and WTA support its adoption, provided that at a minimum, the following items are included to address the service areas of rural RoR ILECs.

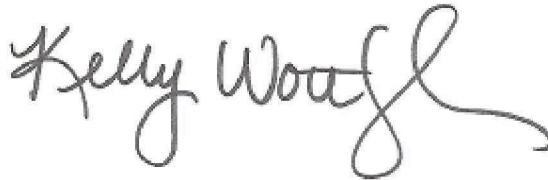
- Supplemental interstate common line support (ICLS) (i.e., “the restructure mechanism”) is automatically available for carriers that are currently under RoR regulation in the interstate jurisdiction without any other conditions applying, particularly those related to the way a carrier is regulated in the state jurisdiction.
- Supplemental ICLS for rural RoR ILECs has two components. The first component compensates rural RoR ILECs for all of the revenues lost as a result of the mandated reductions in intercarrier compensation rates that are not otherwise recoverable through increases in subscriber line charges (SLCs). The first component remains in effect for the entire 10-year transition to the final state-established uniform terminating rates. The second component is available only to those rural RoR ILECs that have committed to the five-year broadband build-out requirement and is intended to ensure that those rural RoR ILECs continue to have an opportunity to earn their authorized interstate rate of return, subject to a cap. This component will provide compensation for unrecoverable revenue losses attributable to losses in access lines and interstate and intrastate minutes of use, using 2008 as a base year. The second component remains in effect for the first five years of the transition and is capped at \$100 million in year one, \$200 million in year two, \$300 million in year three, \$400 million in year four, and \$500 million in year five. Prior to year five, the FCC shall conduct a proceeding to determine if modifications are required.
- The “Rural Transport Rule” applies to rural RoR ILECs. This means that for local and extended area service (EAS) calls made by a rural RoR ILEC’s customer to a non-rural carrier’s customer, the rural RoR ILEC will be responsible for transport to a non-rural terminating carrier’s point of presence (POP) when it is located within the rural RoR ILEC’s service area. When the non-rural terminating carrier’s POP is located outside the rural RoR ILEC’s service area, the rural RoR ILEC’s transport and provisioning obligation stops at its meet point and the non-rural terminating carrier is responsible for the remaining transport to its POP.
- The broadband build-out requirement has a limited automatic exception for very high-cost loops and allows rural RoR ILECs to serve those customers by satellite without filing a waiver request. A very high-cost loop is defined as a loop in which the additional cost to provide broadband is in excess of 150 percent of the carrier’s study area average loop cost. The automatic exception cannot apply to more than two percent of a carrier’s total loops within a study area.
- All high-cost universal service mechanisms utilized by rural RoR ILECs continue to operate as they do today through 2010. This includes high-cost loop support (HCLS), local switching support (LSS), interstate common line support (ICLS), safety net additive support, and safety valve support. Support from these mechanisms will be frozen by study area at 2010 levels.

OPASTCO and WTA appreciate the opportunity to provide input on behalf of our membership. These issues are vital to our companies and rural consumers. We recognize that reform of intercarrier compensation and universal service is critical at this point in time. Again, with the inclusion of the modifications set forth above, and absent any major undisclosed changes, OPASTCO and WTA support the Chairman's proposal.

Sincerely,



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Kelly Worthington, Executive Vice President
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cc: Chairman Kevin Martin
Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein
Commissioner Michael Copps
Commissioner Robert McDowell
Commissioner Deborah Tate
Amy Bender
Nicholas Alexander
Scott Deutchman
Scott Bergmann
Greg Orlando
Dana R. Shaffer
Julie Veach
Kirk S. Burgee
Donald Stockdale
Marcus Maher
Jeremy Marcus
Randy Clarke
Alexander Minard

October 22, 2008

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
12th Street Lobby, TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Notice of *Ex Parte* Communication: WC Docket Nos. 01-92, 04-36, 05-337, 06-122

Dear Ms. Dortch:

CTIA – The Wireless Association® (“CTIA”) takes this opportunity to underscore the need for fundamental reforms to the universal service and intercarrier compensation systems so that they better reflect consumer choice and the competitive marketplace. Specifically, CTIA supports: (1) Unification of the intercarrier compensation system, with a uniform termination rate no higher than \$0.0007 per minute, as a transition to a bill-and-keep system; (2) Dedicated universal service support for the deployment and maintenance of advanced mobile wireless services in high-cost areas; (3) The establishment of Lifeline and Link Up discounts to enable lower-income individuals to purchase affordable broadband services utilizing the technology of their choice; and (4) A numbers-based universal service contribution system that does not unfairly treat over 44 million wireless prepaid and over 70 million wireless family-plan customers. As the Commission considers how best to implement these changes, CTIA respectfully requests three changes to the draft Report and Order, Order on Remand, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking currently under consideration. Namely, the Commission should:

1. Reduce the proposed transition to unified cost-based rates for traffic termination from ten years, as has been proposed, to five years;
2. Provide a five year transition from support currently provided to competitive eligible telecommunications carriers (“ETCs”) under the identical support rule to any successor mechanism(s); and
3. Seek comment on an appropriate universal service mechanism (or mechanisms) focused on the deployment and maintenance of advanced mobile wireless services in high-cost and rural areas.

These changes, while modest, will significantly increase the consumer benefits of the Commission’s intercarrier compensation and universal service reform efforts.

First, CTIA supports a five year transition to a unified cost-based rate for traffic termination. There is broad agreement in the record that unification of the intercarrier compensation system is long overdue. Parties agree that the current disparate intercarrier compensation system severely distorts the competitive marketplace and undermines the efficient deployment of next generation voice, data, and video services delivered over

broadband capable facilities.¹ According to the Commission, “a regulatory scheme based on these distinctions is increasingly unworkable in the current environment and creates distortions in the marketplace at the expense of healthy competition. Additional problems with the existing intercarrier compensation regimes result from changes in the way network costs are incurred today and how market developments affect carrier incentives. These developments and others . . . confirm the urgent need to reform the current intercarrier compensation rules.”² The transition to a unified intercarrier compensation system, therefore, should not take another decade to achieve. Instead, CTIA supports a more reasonable five year transition period, which will provide state commissions, as well as impacted carriers and customers more than sufficient time to transition to a modified compensation structure.

Second, CTIA supports the same five year transition period for changes to the high-cost support available to competitive ETCs. The Federal-State Joint Board on Universal service (“Joint Board”) suggested such a transition period in its Recommended Decision on high-cost universal service reform.³ Over a specified period of time, the Joint Board envisioned that wireless ETCs would transition from existing funding sources to a successor Mobility Fund.⁴ Wireless ETCs have now invested billions of dollars to deploy wireless facilities in rural and high-cost areas with the expectation that high-cost support will be available to help defray both the initial deployment and ongoing maintenance and operations costs of these networks. Indeed, under the FCC’s ETC designation guidelines, the FCC and many states require wireless ETCs to submit and comply with five year build out plans. As the FCC has stated, failure to comply with these build out commitments could result in revocation of an ETC’s designation. In the wireline context, the Commission has provided reasonable transition periods for any significant changes in high-cost support amounts. Wireless ETCs, too, should be provided a reasonable transition period. To this end, CTIA supports a five-year period during which wireless carriers are transitioned off of the existing support mechanisms and onto any successor mechanisms.⁵

Third, the Commission should shelve the interim wireless “actual cost” mechanism under consideration and seek comment on a more appropriate high-cost mechanism (or

¹ See Letter from AT&T, CompTIA, CTIA, Global Crossing, ITIC, NAM, New Global Telecom, PointOne, Sprint Nextel Corp., TIA, T-Mobile, Verizon, and the VON Coalition to Chairman Martin, Commissioner Copps, Commissioner McDowell, Commissioner Adelstein, and Commissioner Tate, FCC, CC Docket No. 01-92 (filed Aug. 6, 2008). See also, e.g., Comments of National Cable & Telecommunications Association, WC Docket No. 08-160, CC Docket No. 01-92 (Aug. 26, 2008) at 2 (“NCTA consistently has supported rational reform of the intercarrier compensation regime.”); Comments of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates to Refresh the Record, CC Docket No. 01-92 (July 7, 2008) at 7 (“NASUCA agrees that the current regime of widely varying rates for the same functionality depending on the type of call and the carriers involved creates opportunities for abuse and arbitrage, and cannot be sustained in the long run. NASUCA therefore also agrees that reform is needed.”); Comments of The Rural Alliance, CC Docket No. 01-92 (June 27, 2008) at 7 (“If the Commission believes that the Missoula Plan cannot be adopted at this time, then the Commission should consider simplified, yet still comprehensive intercarrier compensation reform.”).

² *In re: Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 20 FCC Red. 4685 at para. 3 (rel. Mar. 3, 2005).

³ See *High-Cost Universal Service Support, Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Recommended Decision, FCC 07J-4. paras. 27-28 (rel. Nov. 20, 2007) (“*Recommended Decision*”).

⁴ *Id.* at para. 28.

⁵ *Id.* at para. 27.

mechanisms) to permanently replace the identical support rule (if eliminated). Such a mechanism should provide dedicated universal service support for the deployment and maintenance of advanced mobile wireless services in high-cost areas. Initial comments in this proceeding presented extensive data demonstrating that technology and the marketplace have changed in fundamental ways since the current universal service mechanisms were adopted in 1997.⁶ These data show that consumers today primarily value mobility and broadband.⁷ As Verizon recently observed, an increasing percentage of U.S. households rely exclusively or almost exclusively on their mobile wireless services for their network connectivity and growth in wireless-only households is accelerating (especially in light of a challenging economic outlook).⁸ The marketplace developments demonstrate that any universal service policies must, consistent with section 254 of the Act, ensure that wireless carriers have competitively- and technologically-neutral access to high-cost funding. Section 254 of Act also demands that such support mechanisms provide “specific, predictable, and sufficient” support that ensures consumers in high-cost rural areas have access to mobile wireless services that are “comparable” to those available in urban areas.⁹

The initial comments in this proceeding reveal a striking level of acknowledgement that mobility and broadband are the services that consumers are demanding today. Even many rural incumbent local exchange carrier (“rural ILEC”) interests acknowledge the very strong consumer demand for broadband and mobility and the need to fund these services, which should be, but are not yet, ubiquitously available.¹⁰ State public utility commissions and NASUCA also point out their constituent citizens’ needs for broadband and mobility.¹¹ The Commission’s reform efforts must be fundamentally driven by the need to ensure ubiquitous availability of mobile and broadband services. In light of these fundamental marketplace and technological realities, it is unsurprising that there is significant support in the record for the Joint Board’s proposal to set aside universal service funding for areas where it is not economical to provide mobile wireless and broadband services absent support.¹²

⁶ CTIA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 2-11.

⁷ *Id.* at 10.

⁸ See Letter and Brief from Verizon and Verizon Wireless, in CC Docket No. 01-92, WC Docket Nos. 04-36, 06-122, at 6-7 (filed Sep. 19, 2008). See also Simon Flannery et al., *Telecom Services, Cutting the Cord: Voice First Broadband Close Behind*, Morgan Stanley Research (Oct. 1, 2008).

⁹ See 47 U.S.C. § 254(b).

¹⁰ See, e.g., ITTA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 8-9; KRITC comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 4-7; Montana Independent comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 17; OPASTCO comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 22; WTA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 5-9, 22-23. See also USTelecom comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 24, 34; Rural Tel. Finance Coop. comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 15, 2008), at 3.

¹¹ See, e.g., Connecticut comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 5; Oklahoma comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 17; NASUCA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 21-22.

¹² See, e.g., OPASTCO comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 21-22; NASUCA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 11-13; WTA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 3; TIA comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 16, 2008), at 1-2; CoBank comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 4-5; Connecticut DPUC comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 (filed Apr. 17, 2008), at 4-5.

Unfortunately, while the Commission appears ready to set aside between \$3 and \$4 billion annually for the extension of ILEC broadband networks, as a practical matter, no funding is being set aside for the extension of mobile wireless broadband networks. The Commission is now considering a mechanism to determine support for wireless ETCs that is not focused on making sure that wireless services are ubiquitously available, but rather is inexplicably intended to eliminate almost all universal service support for wireless carriers. Contrary to the FCC's tentative conclusion in the *Identical Support Rule NPRM*, the wireless ETC "actual cost" formula currently under consideration is neither based on wireless carriers' actual costs nor is it designed to direct appropriate amounts of high-cost support where it is needed. Rejecting another tentative conclusion, the Commission is considering a proposal to exclude spectrum costs from a wireless carriers' actual cost calculation.¹³ Spectrum costs should be included in any determination of a wireless carrier's actual costs. Spectrum is a considerable cost of doing business for wireless carriers, akin to a LEC's loop costs.¹⁴ As evidenced by the recent Advanced Wireless Services and 700 MHz auctions, wireless carriers are making considerable investments in spectrum assets in order to deploy the next generation, higher-bandwidth mobile wireless broadband services increasingly demanded by consumers. Just as it would be inappropriate to exclude a LEC's loop costs from determination of its costs, it is inappropriate to excluded wireless carriers' spectrum costs.

It is also our understanding that the draft order inexplicably would divide a *wireless ETC's* costs by the relevant *incumbent LEC's* switched access lines to arrive at the *wireless ETC's* average costs. Such a formula – which defies common sense – should instead divide a wireless ETC's costs by its number of subscribers residing in the relevant incumbent LEC's service area to arrive at a truer estimation of a wireless ETC's average costs.

Having determined a wireless ETC's average costs and comparing those costs to the relevant rural or non-rural incumbent LEC cost benchmark (strangely, instead of a wireless cost benchmark), the wireless ETC would still only qualify for the same support it currently receives under the "interim" CETC cap. In other words, the high-cost wireless ETC would receive no more support than it received under the cap, a result that in no way would reflect "actual costs." Further, those high-cost rural areas that do not currently qualify for support under the "interim" cap would remain unsupported.

The proposed "actual cost" formula would continue to penalize those rural consumers without access to mobile wireless services where they live or where they travel.¹⁵ As CTIA noted in its comments, roughly 23.2 million U.S. residents currently lack broadband-capable wireless service at their primary place of residence, and more than 2.5 million miles of roads are not covered by a broadband-capable wireless signal (amounting to 42% of the road miles in the United States). A recently study conducted by CostQuest Associates estimates the total cost of completing the initial effort to construct a dual-mode 3G (Evolution Data

¹³ See *High-Cost Universal Support: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, WC Docket No. 05-337, CC Docket No. 96-45, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 08-4 (rel. Jan. 29, 2008) ("*Identical Support Rule NPRM*") at para. 17.

¹⁴ If the Commission excludes spectrum costs, it should in fairness and consistent with competitive and technology neutrality principles exclude loop costs in ILEC support calculations.

¹⁵ See CTIA Comments in WC Docket No. 05-337 and CC Docket No. 96-45 and accompanying study by CostQuest Associates, filed April 17, 2008.

Optimized (“EvDO”) and High-Speed Downlink Packet Access (“HSDPA”)) broadband-capable network in these areas at approximately \$22 billion. This estimate does not include the substantial costs of operating, maintaining, and upgrading those same networks. The mechanism for determining CETC support that is currently under consideration by the Commission would not address these challenges.

Instead of pursuing another “illusory bandaid” mechanism such as is currently under consideration,¹⁶ at the outset of a five year transition period, the Commission should seek comment on and develop a successor universal service mechanism(s) specifically designed to ensure the deployment and maintenance of advanced mobile wireless services in high-cost areas. As part of that proceeding, CTIA respectfully requests that the Commission give serious consideration to the establishment of two mechanisms: (1) One grant-based mechanism focused on extending advanced mobile wireless networks to underserved areas; and (2) One mechanism focused on ensuring that advanced mobile wireless services are maintained in objectively identified high-cost rural areas. Both mechanisms could determine support amounts, if any, based on objectively verifiable measures of actual cost. CTIA welcomes the opportunity to discuss these proposed changes with the Commission and any other interested parties.

Pursuant to Section 1.1206 of the Commission’s rules, a copy of this letter is being filed via ECFS with your office. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Sincerely,

/s/ Paul W. Garnett

Paul W. Garnett

Chairman Kevin J. Martin
Commissioner Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Daniel Gonzalez
Amy Bender
Scott Deutchman
Scott Bergmann
Greg Orlando
Nicholas Alexander
Dana Shaffer
Donald Stockdale
Al Lewis
Jeremy Marcus

¹⁶ See Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps to the CETC Cap Order issued April 29, 2008.

APPENDIX E
INITIAL REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY ACT ANALYSIS

1. As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980, as amended (RFA),¹ the Commission has prepared this Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities by the policies and rules proposed in this Further Notice. Written public comments are requested on this IRFA. Comments must be identified as responses to the IRFA and must be filed by the deadlines for comments on the Further Notice. The Commission will send a copy of the Further Notice, including this IRFA, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration (SBA).² In addition, the Further Notice and IRFA (or summaries thereof) will be published in the Federal Register.³

A. Need for, and Objectives of, the Proposed Rules

2. Today, the Commission adopts a Further Notice on possible steps for the implementation of universal service and intercarrier compensation comprehensive reform. We believe it is best to leave the following topics to a Further Notice to help ensure the development of a reasoned and complete record on the issues.

3. Specifically, the Commission seeks comment on the appropriate, applicable cost standard under section 252(d)(2) of the Act. We seek comment on whether comprehensive reform for intercarrier compensation should apply to providers operating in Alaska, Hawaii, or any U.S. Territory or possession. Additionally, we seek comment on how carriers' current rates should be transitioned to a new intercarrier compensation regime. Also, we seek comment on whether the Commission should set any conditions on the reciprocal compensation rates set by states. Should any transitional rates apply to VoIP traffic?

4. We also seek comment on the appropriate default rules regarding where a carriers' "network edge" should be following any transition. The Further Notice also seeks comment on whether the reciprocal compensation rates between carriers should be symmetrical without exception and regardless of whether traffic exchanged between the carriers is balanced or not. In addition, we seek comment on the appropriate guidelines regarding the application of section 251(f)(2) of the Act.

5. We seek comment on the appropriate treatment of existing agreements between parties. We also seek comment on various revenue recovery opportunities for carriers and possible supplemental universal service recovery support that would be available where necessary. Should the Commission also require carriers to file an annual report showing how any net access savings are allocated? We also seek comment on whether or not the Commission should enlist the aid of the Separations Joint Board on possible changes to end-user charges.

6. The Further Notice also seeks comment on measures to ensure the ability of carriers to receive the appropriate compensation for traffic terminated on their networks. We also seek comment on an interim solution to the "access stimulation" arbitrage problem. Additionally, we seek comment on whether originating access charges are inconsistent with comprehensive reform and the appropriate transition for the elimination of originating access. We also seek comment on whether or not any comprehensive reform warrants the adoption of rules or

¹ See 5 U.S.C. § 603. The RFA, *see* 5 U.S.C. §§ 601–612, has been amended by the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 (SBREFA), Pub. L. No. 104-121, Title II, 110 Stat. 857 (1996).

² See 5 U.S.C. § 603(a).

³ See *id.*

guidelines governing the terms and conditions of transit service.

7. We also seek comment on how best to reform the distribution of high-cost universal service support. Specifically, we seek comment on ways to control the growth of the high-cost fund, including whether it is necessary to cap high-cost universal service support to fulfill our statutory obligation to create a specific, predictable, and sufficient universal service mechanism. We seek comment on how any such caps should be implemented. We seek comment on whether we should condition receipt of high-cost support on an eligible telecommunications carrier's (ETC) commitment to provide broadband Internet access service throughout its service area. We seek comment on the use of reverse auctions as a method for disbursing high-cost support, either to areas where an incumbent LEC does not commit to provide broadband Internet access service, or for the distribution of high-cost support to all ETCs. We seek comment on eliminating the identical support rule for competitive ETCs, and on whether competitive ETC support should be based on their own costs or disbursed via reverse auctions.

8. We seek comment on whether to adopt a pilot program to provide universal service support to low-income consumers for broadband Internet access service. Should low-income consumers receive support under the pilot program for discounts on broadband Internet access service and devices necessary to access such services? What implementation and reporting requirements associated with such a pilot program should the Commission adopt?

9. We also seek comment on reforming the universal service contribution assessment methodology. Specifically, we seek comment on whether to adopt a contribution mechanism of \$1.00 per residential telephone number, and move to a connections and/or numbers-based contribution mechanism for business services; or whether to adopt a contribution mechanism of \$0.85 per telephone number for all numbers, and a connections-based contribution mechanism for business services of \$5.00 per connection up to 64 kbps and \$35.00 per connection over 64 kbps. We seek comment on what numbers should be assessable under a numbers-based contribution mechanism. We also seek comment on how to treat wireless prepaid plans, on exceptions to the contribution obligations, on reporting and recordkeeping requirements, and on a transition to the new contribution methodology.

10. Finally, we seek comment on what revisions to our rules are needed to implement comprehensive reform. For example, what changes, if any, are needed to the rules contained in Parts 51, 54, 61, and 69?

B. Legal Basis

11. The legal basis for any action that may be taken pursuant to the Further Notice is contained in sections 1-4, 201-209, 214, 218-220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, 503 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and Sections 601 and 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, 47 U.S.C. §§ 151-154, 157 nt, 201-209, 214, 218-220, 224, 251, 252, 254, 303(r), 332, 403, 502, 503 and sections 1.1, 1.411-1.429 and 1.1200-1.1216 of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. §§ 1.1, 1.411-1.429 and 1.1200-1.1216.

C. Description and Estimate of the Number of Small Entities to Which the Proposed Rules Will Apply

12. The RFA directs agencies to provide a description of, and where feasible, an estimate of the number of small entities that may be affected by the proposed rules, if adopted.⁴ The RFA generally defines the term "small entity" as having the same meaning as the terms "small business," "small

⁴ See 5 U.S.C. § 603(b)(3).

organization,” and “small governmental jurisdiction.”⁵ In addition, the term “small business” has the same meaning as the term “small-business concern” under the Small Business Act.⁶ A small-business concern” is one which: (1) is independently owned and operated; (2) is not dominant in its field of operation; and (3) satisfies any additional criteria established by the Small Business Administration.⁷

13. **Wired Telecommunications Carriers.** The SBA has developed a small business size standard for Wired Telecommunications Carriers, which consists of all such companies having 1,500 or fewer employees.⁸ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were 2,432 firms in this category, total, that operated for the entire year.⁹ Of this total, 2,395 firms had employment of 999 or fewer employees, and an additional 37 firms had employment of 1,000 employees or more.¹⁰ Thus, under this size standard, the majority of firms can be considered small.

14. **Local Exchange Carriers (LECs).** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to local exchange services. The closest applicable size standard under SBA rules is for Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.¹¹ According to Commission data, 1,311 carriers reported that they were incumbent local exchange service providers.¹² Of these 1,311 carriers, an estimated 1,024 have 1,500 or fewer employees and 287 have more than 1,500 employees.¹³ Consequently, the Commission estimates that most providers of local exchange service are small entities that may be affected by the rules and policies proposed in the Further Notice.

15. **Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (incumbent LECs).** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to incumbent local exchange services. The closest applicable size standard under SBA rules is for Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.¹⁴ According to Commission data, 1,311 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of local exchange services.¹⁵ Of these 1,307 carriers, an estimated 1,024 have 1,500 or fewer employees and 287 have more than 1,500 employees.¹⁶ Consequently, the Commission estimates that most providers of incumbent local exchange service are small businesses that may be affected by rules

⁵ See 5 U.S.C. § 601(6).

⁶ See 5 U.S.C. § 601(3) (incorporating by reference the definition of “small-business concern” in the Small Business Act, 15 U.S.C. § 632). Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 601(3), the statutory definition of a small business applies “unless an agency, after consultation with the Office of Advocacy of the Small Business Administration and after opportunity for public comment, establishes one or more definitions of such term which are appropriate to the activities of the agency and publishes such definition(s) in the Federal Register.”

⁷ See 15 U.S.C. § 632.

⁸ 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 Economic Census, Subject Series: Information, “Establishment and Firm Size (Including Legal Form of Organization),” North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 517110.

⁹ 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

¹⁰ See *id.*

¹¹ 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

¹² See *Trends in Telephone Service*, Federal Communications Commission, Wireline Competition Bureau, Industry Analysis and Technology Division at Table 5.3 (Aug. 2008) (*Trends in Telephone Service*).

¹³ See *id.*

¹⁴ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

¹⁵ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

¹⁶ See *id.*

adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

16. We have included small incumbent LECs in this present RFA analysis. As noted above, a “small business” under the RFA is one that, *inter alia*, meets the pertinent small business size standard (e.g., a telephone communications business having 1,500 or fewer employees), and “is not dominant in its field of operation.”¹⁷ The SBA’s Office of Advocacy contends that, for RFA purposes, small incumbent LECs are not dominant in their field of operation because any such dominance is not “national” in scope.¹⁸ We have therefore included small incumbent LECs in this RFA analysis, although we emphasize that this RFA action has no effect on Commission analyses and determinations in other, non-RFA contexts.

17. **Competitive Local Exchange Carriers (competitive LECs), Competitive Access Providers (CAPs), Shared-Tenant Service Providers, and Other Local Service Providers.** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for these service providers. The appropriate size standard under SBA rules is for the category Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.¹⁹ According to Commission data, 1,005 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of either competitive local exchange services or competitive access provider services.²⁰ Of these 1,005 carriers, an estimated 918 have 1,500 or fewer employees and 87 have more than 1,500 employees.²¹ In addition, 16 carriers have reported that they are Shared-Tenant Service Providers, and all 16 are estimated to have 1,500 or fewer employees.²² In addition, 89 carriers have reported that they are Other Local Service Providers.²³ Of the 89, all 89 have 1,500 or fewer employees and none has more than 1,500 employees.²⁴ Consequently, the Commission estimates that most providers of competitive local exchange service, competitive access providers, Shared-Tenant Service Providers, and Other Local Service Providers are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

18. **Interexchange Carriers (IXCs).** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to interexchange services. The closest applicable size standard under SBA rules is for Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.²⁵ According to Commission data, 300 companies reported that their primary telecommunications service activity was the provision of interexchange services.²⁶ Of these 300 companies, an estimated 268 have 1,500 or fewer employees and 32 have more than 1,500 employees.²⁷ Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of

¹⁷ 5 U.S.C. § 601(3).

¹⁸ See Letter from Jere W. Glover, Chief Counsel for Advocacy, SBA, to William E. Kennard, Chairman, FCC (May 27, 1999). The Small Business Act contains a definition of “small business concern,” which the RFA incorporates into its own definition of “small business.” See 15 U.S.C. § 632(a); see also 5 U.S.C. § 601(3). SBA regulations interpret “small business concern” to include the concept of dominance on a national basis. See 13 C.F.R. § 121.102(b).

¹⁹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

²⁰ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

²¹ See *id.*

²² See *id.*

²³ See *id.*

²⁴ See *id.*

²⁵ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

²⁶ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

²⁷ See *id.*

interexchange service providers are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

19. **Operator Service Providers (OSPs).** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for operator service providers. The appropriate size standard under SBA rules is for the category Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.²⁸ According to Commission data, 28 carriers have reported that they are engaged in the provision of operator services.²⁹ Of these, an estimated 27 have 1,500 or fewer employees and one has more than 1,500 employees.³⁰ Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of OSPs are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

20. **Payphone Service Providers (PSPs).** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for payphone services providers. The appropriate size standard under SBA rules is for the category Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.³¹ According to Commission data, 526 carriers have reported that they are engaged in the provision of payphone services.³² Of these, an estimated 524 have 1,500 or fewer employees and two have more than 1,500 employees.³³ Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of payphone service providers are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

21. **Prepaid Calling Card Providers.** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for prepaid calling card providers. The appropriate size standard under SBA rules is for the category Telecommunications Resellers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.³⁴ According to Commission data, 88 carriers have reported that they are engaged in the provision of prepaid calling cards.³⁵ Of these, an estimated 85 have 1,500 or fewer employees and three have more than 1,500 employees.³⁶ Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of prepaid calling card providers are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

22. **Local Resellers.** The SBA has developed a small business size standard for the category of Telecommunications Resellers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.³⁷ According to Commission data, 151 carriers have reported that they are engaged in the provision of local resale services.³⁸ Of these, an estimated 149 have 1,500 or fewer employees and two have more than 1,500 employees.³⁹ Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of

²⁸ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

²⁹ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

³⁰ See *id.*

³¹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

³² See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

³³ See *id.*

³⁴ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517911.

³⁵ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

³⁶ See *id.*

³⁷ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517911.

³⁸ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

³⁹ See *id.*

local resellers are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

23. **Toll Resellers.** The SBA has developed a small business size standard for the category of Telecommunications Resellers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.⁴⁰ According to Commission data, 815 carriers have reported that they are engaged in the provision of toll resale services.⁴¹ Of these, an estimated 787 have 1,500 or fewer employees and 28 have more than 1,500 employees.⁴² Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of toll resellers are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

24. **Other Toll Carriers.** Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to Other Toll Carriers. This category includes toll carriers that do not fall within the categories of interexchange carriers, operator service providers, prepaid calling card providers, satellite service carriers, or toll resellers. The closest applicable size standard under SBA rules is for Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.⁴³ According to Commission data, 91 companies reported that their primary telecommunications service activity was the provision of other toll carriage.⁴⁴ Of these 91 companies, an estimated 88 have 1,500 or fewer employees and three have more than 1,500 employees.⁴⁵ Consequently, the Commission estimates that most Other Toll Carriers are small entities that may be affected by the rules and policies adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

25. **800 and 800-Like Service Subscribers.**⁴⁶ Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for 800 and 800-like service (toll free) subscribers. The appropriate size standard under SBA rules is for the category Telecommunications Resellers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.⁴⁷ The most reliable source of information regarding the number of these service subscribers appears to be data the Commission collects on the 800, 888, 877, and 866 numbers in use.⁴⁸ According to our data, at the beginning of December 2007, the number of 800 numbers assigned was 7,860,000; the number of 888 numbers assigned was 5,210,184; the number of 877 numbers assigned was 4,388,682; and the number of 866 numbers assigned was 7,029,116.⁴⁹ We do not have data specifying the number of these subscribers that are not independently owned and operated or have more than 1,500 employees, and thus are unable at this time to estimate with greater precision the number of toll free subscribers that would qualify as small businesses under the SBA size standard. Consequently, we estimate that there are 7,860,000 or fewer small entity 800 subscribers; 5,210,184 or fewer small entity 888 subscribers; 4,388,682 or fewer small entity 877 subscribers; and 7,029,166 or fewer small entity 866 subscribers.

1. Wireless Carriers and Service Providers

26. Below, for those services subject to auctions, we note that, as a general matter, the number of winning bidders that qualify as small businesses at the close of an auction does not necessarily

⁴⁰ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517911.

⁴¹ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

⁴² See *id.*

⁴³ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517110.

⁴⁴ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

⁴⁵ See *id.*

⁴⁶ We include all toll-free number subscribers in this category, including those for 888 numbers.

⁴⁷ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517911.

⁴⁸ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Tables 18.4, 18.5, 18.6, 18.7.

⁴⁹ See *id.*

represent the number of small businesses currently in service. Also, the Commission does not generally track subsequent business size unless, in the context of assignments or transfers, unjust enrichment issues are implicated.

27. **Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite).** Since 2007, the SBA has recognized wireless firms within this new, broad, economic census category.⁵⁰ Prior to that time, the SBA had developed a small business size standard for wireless firms within the now-superseded census categories of Paging and Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications.⁵¹ Under the present and prior categories, the SBA has deemed a wireless business to be small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. Because Census Bureau data are not yet available for the new category, we will estimate small business prevalence using the prior categories and associated data. For the first category of Paging, data for 2002 show that there were 807 firms that operated for the entire year.⁵² Of this total, 804 firms had employment of 999 or fewer employees, and three firms had employment of 1,000 employees or more.⁵³ For the second category of Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications, data for 2002 show that there were 1,397 firms that operated for the entire year.⁵⁴ Of this total, 1,378 firms had employment of 999 or fewer employees, and 19 firms had employment of 1,000 employees or more.⁵⁵ Thus, using the prior categories and the available data, we estimate that the majority of wireless firms can be considered small. According to Commission data, 434 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of cellular service, Personal Communications Service (PCS), or Specialized Mobile Radio (SMR) Telephony services, which are placed together in the data.⁵⁶ We have estimated that 222 of these are small, under the SBA small business size standard.⁵⁷ Thus, under this category and size standard, approximately half of firms can be considered small.

28. **Broadband Personal Communications Service.** The broadband personal communications service (PCS) spectrum is divided into six frequency blocks designated A through F, and the Commission has held auctions for each block. The Commission defined “small entity” for Blocks C and F as an entity that has average gross revenues of \$40 million or less in the three previous calendar years.⁵⁸ For Block F, an additional classification for “very small business” was added and is defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates, has average gross revenues of not more than \$15 million for the preceding three calendar years.⁵⁹ These standards defining “small entity” in the context of broadband

⁵⁰ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517210. 2007 Census data are not yet available.

⁵¹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS codes 517211, 517212.

⁵² See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517211.

⁵³ *Id.* The census data do not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that have employment of 1,500 or fewer employees; the largest category provided is for firms with “1,000 employees or more.”

⁵⁴ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212.

⁵⁵ See *id.* The census data do not provide a more precise estimate of the number of firms that have employment of 1,500 or fewer employees; the largest category provided is for firms with “1,000 employees or more.”

⁵⁶ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

⁵⁷ See *id.*

⁵⁸ See generally *Amendment of Parts 20 and 24 of the Commission’s Rules – Broadband PCS Competitive Bidding and the Commercial Mobile Radio Service Spectrum Cap*, WT Docket No. 96-59, GN Docket No. 90-314, Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 7824 (1996); see also 47 C.F.R. § 24.720(b)(1).

⁵⁹ See generally *Amendment of Parts 20 and 24 of the Commission’s Rules – Broadband PCS Competitive Bidding and the Commercial Mobile Radio Service Spectrum Cap*, WT Docket No. 96-59, GN Docket No. 90-314, Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 7824 (1996); see also 47 C.F.R. § 24.720(b)(2).

PCS auctions have been approved by the SBA.⁶⁰ No small businesses, within the SBA-approved small business size standards bid successfully for licenses in Blocks A and B. There were 90 winning bidders that qualified as small entities in the Block C auctions. A total of 93 small and very small business bidders won approximately 40 percent of the 1,479 licenses for Blocks D, E, and F.⁶¹ On March 23, 1999, the Commission re-auctioned 347 C, D, E, and F Block licenses. There were 48 small business winning bidders. On January 26, 2001, the Commission completed the auction of 422 C and F Broadband PCS licenses in Auction No. 35. Of the 35 winning bidders in that auction, 29 qualified as “small” or “very small” businesses. Subsequent events, concerning Auction 35, including judicial and agency determinations, resulted in a total of 163 C and F Block licenses being available for grant.

29. **Narrowband Personal Communications Services.** To date, two auctions of narrowband PCS licenses have been conducted. For purposes of the two auctions that have been held, “small businesses” were entities with average gross revenues for the prior three calendar years of \$40 million or less. Through these auctions, the Commission has awarded a total of 41 licenses, out of which 11 were obtained by small businesses. To ensure meaningful participation of small business entities in future auctions, the Commission has adopted a two-tiered small business size standard in the *Narrowband PCS Second Report and Order*.⁶² A “small business” is an entity that, together with affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues for the three preceding years of not more than \$40 million. A “very small business” is an entity that, together with affiliates and controlling interests, has average gross revenues for the three preceding years of not more than \$15 million. The SBA has approved these small business size standards.⁶³ In the future, the Commission will auction 459 licenses to serve Metropolitan Trading Areas (MTAs) and 408 response channel licenses. There is also one megahertz of narrowband PCS spectrum that has been held in reserve and that the Commission has not yet decided to release for licensing. The Commission cannot predict accurately the number of licenses that will be awarded to small entities in future actions. However, four of the 16 winning bidders in the two previous narrowband PCS auctions were small businesses, as that term was defined under the Commission’s rules.⁶⁴ The Commission assumes, for purposes of this analysis that a large portion of the remaining narrowband PCS licenses will be awarded to small entities. The Commission also assumes that at least some small businesses will acquire narrowband PCS licenses by means of the Commission’s partitioning and disaggregation rules.

30. **Paging (Private and Common Carrier).** The SBA has developed a small business size standard for Paging, under which a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.⁶⁵ In addition, in the *Paging Third Report and Order*, we developed a small business size standard for “small businesses” and “very small businesses” for purposes of determining their eligibility for special provisions such as

⁶⁰ See, e.g., *Implementation of Section 309(j) of the Communications Act – Competitive Bidding*, PP Docket No. 93-253, Fifth Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 5532 (1994).

⁶¹ See FCC News, Broadband PCS, D, E and F Block Auction Closes, No. 71744 (rel. Jan. 14, 1997). See also *Amendment of the Commission’s Rules Regarding Installment Payment Financing for Personal Communications Services (PCS) Licensees*, WT Docket No. 97-82, Second Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 12 FCC Rcd 16436 (1997).

⁶² See generally *Amendment of the Commission’s Rules to Establish New Personal Communications Services, Narrowband PCS*, GEN Docket No. 90-314, ET Docket No. 92-100, PP Docket No. 93-253, Second Report and Order and Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 15 FCC Rcd 10456 (2000).

⁶³ See Letter to Amy Zoslov, Chief, Auctions and Industry Analysis Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, FCC, from Aida Alvarez, Administrator, SBA (Dec. 2, 1998).

⁶⁴ See 47 C.F.R. § 24.321(a).

⁶⁵ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517211 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite),” NAICS code 517210.).

bidding credits and installment payments.⁶⁶ A “small business” is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$15 million for the preceding three years. Additionally, a “very small business” is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues that are not more than \$3 million for the preceding three years.⁶⁷ The SBA has approved these small business size standards.⁶⁸ According to Commission data, 281 carriers have reported that they are engaged in Paging or Messaging Service.⁶⁹ Of these, an estimated 279 have 1,500 or fewer employees, and two have more than 1,500 employees.⁷⁰ Consequently, the Commission estimates that the majority of paging providers are small entities that may be affected by our action. An auction of Metropolitan Economic Area licenses commenced on February 24, 2000, and closed on March 2, 2000. Of the 985 licenses auctioned, 440 were sold. Fifty-seven companies claiming small business status won.

31. **Wireless Telephony.** Wireless telephony includes cellular, PCS, and specialized mobile radio (SMR) telephony carriers. As noted earlier, the SBA has developed a small business size standard for Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications services.⁷¹ Under that SBA small business size standard, a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.⁷² According to Commission data, 434 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of wireless telephony.⁷³ We have estimated that 222 of these are small under the SBA small business size standard.⁷⁴

32. **220 MHz Radio Service – Phase I Licensees.** The 220 MHz service has both Phase I and Phase II licenses. Phase I licensing was conducted by lotteries in 1992 and 1993. There are approximately 1,515 such non-nationwide licensees and four nationwide licensees currently authorized to operate in the 220 MHz band. The Commission has not developed a small business size standard for small entities specifically applicable to such incumbent 220 MHz Phase I licensees. To estimate the number of such licensees that are small businesses, we apply the small business size standard under the SBA rules applicable to Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications companies. Under this category, the SBA deems a wireless business to be small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.⁷⁵ The Commission estimates that nearly all such licensees are small businesses under the SBA’s small business size standard that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

33. **220 MHz Radio Service – Phase II Licensees.** The 220 MHz service has both Phase I

⁶⁶ See *Amendment of Part 90 of the Commission’s Rules to Provide for the Use of the 220-222 MHz Band by the Private Land Mobile Radio Service*, PR Docket No. 89-552, GN Docket No. 93-252, PP Docket No. 93-253, Third Report and Order and Fifth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 12 FCC Rcd 10943, 11068–70, paras. 291–295 (1997) (*220 MHz Third Report and Order*).

⁶⁷ See Letter to Amy Zoslov, Chief, Auctions and Industry Analysis Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, FCC, from A. Alvarez, Administrator, SBA (Dec. 2, 1998).

⁶⁸ See *Revision of Part 22 and Part 90 of the Commission’s Rules to Facilitate Future Development of Paging Systems*, WT Docket No. 96-18, PR Docket No. 93-253, Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration and Third Report and Order, 14 FCC Rcd 10030, 10085–88, paras. 98–107 (1999) (*Paging Third Report and Order*).

⁶⁹ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

⁷⁰ See *id.*

⁷¹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212. (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite),” NAICS code 517201.)

⁷² See *id.*

⁷³ See *Trends in Telephone Service* at Table 5.3.

⁷⁴ See *id.*

⁷⁵ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212.

and Phase II licenses. The Phase II 220 MHz service is a new service, and is subject to spectrum auctions. In the *220 MHz Third Report and Order*, we adopted a small business size standard for “small” and “very small” businesses for purposes of determining their eligibility for special provisions such as bidding credits and installment payments.⁷⁶ This small business size standard indicates that a “small business” is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$15 million for the preceding three years.⁷⁷ A “very small business” is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues that do not exceed \$3 million for the preceding three years.⁷⁸ The SBA has approved these small business size standards.⁷⁹ Auctions of Phase II licenses commenced on September 15, 1998, and closed on October 22, 1998.⁸⁰ In the first auction, 908 licenses were auctioned in three different-sized geographic areas: three nationwide licenses, 30 Regional Economic Area Group (EAG) Licenses, and 875 Economic Area (EA) Licenses. Of the 908 licenses auctioned, 693 were sold. Thirty-nine small businesses won licenses in the first 220 MHz auction. The second auction included 225 licenses: 216 EA licenses and 9 EAG licenses. Fourteen companies claiming small business status won 158 licenses.⁸¹

34. **800 MHz and 900 MHz Specialized Mobile Radio Licenses.** The Commission awards “small entity” and “very small entity” bidding credits in auctions for Specialized Mobile Radio (SMR) geographic area licenses in the 800 MHz and 900 MHz bands to firms that had revenues of no more than \$15 million in each of the three previous calendar years, or that had revenues of no more than \$3 million in each of the previous calendar years, respectively.⁸² These bidding credits apply to SMR providers in the 800 MHz and 900 MHz bands that either hold geographic area licenses or have obtained extended implementation authorizations. The Commission does not know how many firms provide 800 MHz or 900 MHz geographic area SMR service pursuant to extended implementation authorizations, nor how many of these providers have annual revenues of no more than \$15 million. One firm has over \$15 million in revenues. The Commission assumes, for purposes here, that all of the remaining existing extended implementation authorizations are held by small entities, as that term is defined by the SBA. The Commission has held auctions for geographic area licenses in the 800 MHz and 900 MHz SMR bands. There were 60 winning bidders that qualified as small or very small entities in the 900 MHz SMR auctions. Of the 1,020 licenses won in the 900 MHz auction, bidders qualifying as small or very small entities won 263 licenses. In the 800 MHz auction, 38 of the 524 licenses won were won by small and very small entities.

35. **700 MHz Guard Band Licensees.** In the *700 MHz Guard Band Order*, we adopted a small business size standard for “small businesses” and “very small businesses” for purposes of determining their eligibility for special provisions such as bidding credits and installment payments.⁸³ A “small business” is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$40 million for the preceding three years.⁸⁴ Additionally, a “very small business”

⁷⁶ See *220 MHz Third Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 11068–70, at paras. 291–95.

⁷⁷ See *id.* at 11068–69, para. 291.

⁷⁸ See *id.* at 11068–70, paras. 291–95.

⁷⁹ See Letter to D. Phythyon, Chief, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, FCC, from Aida Alvarez, Administrator, SBA (Jan. 6, 1998).

⁸⁰ See *Phase II 220 MHz Service Auction Closes*, Public Notice, 14 FCC Rcd 605 (1998).

⁸¹ See *Phase II 220 MHz Service Spectrum Auction Closes*, Public Notice, 14 FCC Rcd 11218 (1999).

⁸² See 47 C.F.R. § 90.814(b).

⁸³ See *Service Rules for the 746-764 and 776-794 MHz Bands, and Revisions to Part 27 of the Commission’s Rules*, WT Docket No. 99-168, Second Report and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 5299 (2000) (*700 MHz Guard Band Order*).

⁸⁴ See *id.* at 5343–45 paras. 106–10.

is an entity that, together with its affiliates and controlling principals, has average gross revenues that are not more than \$15 million for the preceding three years.⁸⁵ An auction of 52 Major Economic Area (MEA) licenses commenced on September 6, 2000, and closed on September 21, 2000.⁸⁶ Of the 104 licenses auctioned, 96 licenses were sold to nine bidders. Five of these bidders were small businesses that won a total of 26 licenses. A second auction of 700 MHz Guard Band licenses commenced on February 13, 2001 and closed on February 21, 2001. All eight of the licenses auctioned were sold to three bidders. One of these bidders was a small business that won a total of two licenses.⁸⁷

36. **Rural Radiotelephone Service.** The Commission has not adopted a size standard for small businesses specific to the Rural Radiotelephone Service.⁸⁸ A significant subset of the Rural Radiotelephone Service is the Basic Exchange Telephone Radio System (BETRS).⁸⁹ The Commission uses the SBA's small business size standard applicable to Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications, *i.e.*, an entity employing no more than 1,500 persons.⁹⁰ There are approximately 1,000 licensees in the Rural Radiotelephone Service, and the Commission estimates that there are 1,000 or fewer small entity licensees in the Rural Radiotelephone Service that may be affected by the rules and policies adopted herein.

37. **Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service.** The Commission has not adopted a small business size standard specific to the Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service.⁹¹ We will use SBA's small business size standard applicable to Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications, *i.e.*, an entity employing no more than 1,500 persons.⁹² There are approximately 100 licensees in the Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service, and we estimate that almost all of them qualify as small under the SBA small business size standard and may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

38. **Aviation and Marine Radio Services.** Small businesses in the aviation and marine radio services use a very high frequency (VHF) marine or aircraft radio and, as appropriate, an emergency position-indicating radio beacon (and/or radar) or an emergency locator transmitter. The Commission has not developed a small business size standard specifically applicable to these small businesses. For purposes of this analysis, the Commission uses the SBA small business size standard for the category Cellular and Other Telecommunications, which is 1,500 or fewer employees.⁹³ Most applicants for recreational licenses are individuals. Approximately 581,000 ship station licensees and 131,000 aircraft station licensees operate domestically and are not subject to the radio carriage requirements of any statute or treaty. For purposes of our evaluations in this analysis, we estimate that there are up to approximately 712,000 licensees that are small businesses (or individuals) under the SBA standard. In addition, between December 3, 1998 and December 14, 1998, the Commission held an auction of 42 VHF Public Coast licenses in the 157.1875-157.4500 MHz (ship transmit) and 161.775-162.0125 MHz (coast transmit)

⁸⁵ *See id.*

⁸⁶ *See 700 MHz Guard Band Auction Closes*, Public Notice, 15 FCC Rcd 18026 (2000).

⁸⁷ *See 700 MHz Guard Band Auction Closes*, Public Notice, 16 FCC Rcd 4590 (2001).

⁸⁸ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 22.99.

⁸⁹ *See* 47 C.F.R. §§ 22.757, 22.759.

⁹⁰ *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to "Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite)," NAICS code 517210.).

⁹¹ *See* 47 C.F.R. § 22.99.

⁹² *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to "Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite)," NAICS code 517210.).

⁹³ *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to "Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite)," NAICS code 517210.).

bands. For purposes of the auction, the Commission defined a “small” business as an entity that, together with controlling interests and affiliates, has average gross revenues for the preceding three years not to exceed \$15 million dollars.⁹⁴ In addition, a “very small” business is one that, together with controlling interests and affiliates, has average gross revenues for the preceding three years not to exceed \$3 million dollars.⁹⁵ There are approximately 10,672 licensees in the Marine Coast Service, and the Commission estimates that almost all of them qualify as “small” businesses under the above special small business size standards and may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

39. **Fixed Microwave Services.** Fixed microwave services include common carrier,⁹⁶ private operational-fixed,⁹⁷ and broadcast auxiliary radio services.⁹⁸ At present, there are approximately 22,015 common carrier fixed licensees and 61,670 private operational-fixed licensees and broadcast auxiliary radio licensees in the microwave services. The Commission has not created a size standard for a small business specifically with respect to fixed microwave services. For purposes of this analysis, the Commission uses the SBA small business size standard for the category Cellular and Other Telecommunications, which is 1,500 or fewer employees.⁹⁹ The Commission does not have data specifying the number of these licensees that have more than 1,500 employees, and thus is unable at this time to estimate with greater precision the number of fixed microwave service licensees that would qualify as small business concerns under the SBA’s small business size standard. Consequently, the Commission estimates that there are up to 22,015 common carrier fixed licensees and up to 61,670 private operational-fixed licensees and broadcast auxiliary radio licensees in the microwave services that may be small and may be affected by the rules and policies adopted herein. We note, however, that the common carrier microwave fixed licensee category includes some large entities.

40. **Offshore Radiotelephone Service.** This service operates on several UHF television broadcast channels that are not used for television broadcasting in the coastal areas of states bordering the Gulf of Mexico.¹⁰⁰ There are approximately 55 licensees in this service. We are unable to estimate at this time the number of licensees that would qualify as small under the SBA’s small business size standard for Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications services.¹⁰¹ Under that SBA small business size

⁹⁴ See generally *Amendment of the Commission’s Rules Concerning Maritime Communications*, PR Docket No. 92-257, Third Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 13 FCC Rcd 19853, 19884–88 paras. 64–73 (1998).

⁹⁵ See *id.*

⁹⁶ See 47 C.F.R. §§ 101 *et seq.* (formerly, Part 21 of the Commission’s Rules) for common carrier fixed microwave services (except Multipoint Distribution Service).

⁹⁷ Persons eligible under parts 80 and 90 of the Commission’s Rules can use Private Operational-Fixed Microwave services. See 47 C.F.R. Parts 80 and 90. Stations in this service are called operational-fixed to distinguish them from common carrier and public fixed stations. Only the licensee may use the operational-fixed station, and only for communications related to the licensee’s commercial, industrial, or safety operations.

⁹⁸ Auxiliary Microwave Service is governed by Part 74 of Title 47 of the Commission’s Rules. See 47 C.F.R. Part 74. This service is available to licensees of broadcast stations and to broadcast and cable network entities. Broadcast auxiliary microwave stations are used for relaying broadcast television signals from the studio to the transmitter, or between two points such as a main studio and an auxiliary studio. The service also includes mobile television pickups, which relay signals from a remote location back to the studio.

⁹⁹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite),” NAICS code 517210.).

¹⁰⁰ This service is governed by Subpart I of Part 22 of the Commission’s Rules. See 47 C.F.R. §§ 22.1001–1037.

¹⁰¹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite),” NAICS code 517210.).

standard, a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees.¹⁰²

41. **Wireless Communications Services.** This service can be used for fixed, mobile, radiolocation, and digital audio broadcasting satellite uses. The Commission established small business size standards for the wireless communications services (WCS) auction. A “small business” is an entity with average gross revenues of \$40 million for each of the three preceding years, and a “very small business” is an entity with average gross revenues of \$15 million for each of the three preceding years. The SBA has approved these small business size standards.¹⁰³ The Commission auctioned geographic area licenses in the WCS service. In the auction, there were seven winning bidders that qualified as “very small business” entities, and one that qualified as a “small business” entity. We conclude that the number of geographic area WCS licenses affected by this analysis includes these eight entities.

42. **39 GHz Service.** The Commission created a special small business size standard for 39 GHz licenses – an entity that has average gross revenues of \$40 million or less in the three previous calendar years.¹⁰⁴ An additional size standard for “very small business” is: an entity that, together with affiliates, has average gross revenues of not more than \$15 million for the preceding three calendar years.¹⁰⁵ The SBA has approved these small business size standards.¹⁰⁶ The auction of the 2,173 39 GHz licenses began on April 12, 2000 and closed on May 8, 2000. The 18 bidders who claimed small business status won 849 licenses. Consequently, the Commission estimates that 18 or fewer 39 GHz licensees are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

43. **Wireless Cable Systems.** Wireless cable systems use 2 GHz band frequencies of the Broadband Radio Service (BRS), formerly Multipoint Distribution Service (MDS),¹⁰⁷ and the Educational Broadband Service (EBS), formerly Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS),¹⁰⁸ to transmit video programming and provide broadband services to residential subscribers.¹⁰⁹ These services were originally designed for the delivery of multichannel video programming, similar to that of traditional cable systems, but over the past several years licensees have focused their operations instead on providing two-way high-speed Internet access services.¹¹⁰ We estimate that the number of wireless cable subscribers is

¹⁰² *See id.*

¹⁰³ *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite),” NAICS code 517210.).

¹⁰⁴ *See Amendment of the Commission’s Rules Regarding the 37.0-38.6 GHz and 38.6-40.0 GHz Bands*, ET Docket No. 95-183, PP Docket No. 93-253, Report and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 18600, 18661–64, paras. 149–151 (1997).

¹⁰⁵ *See id.*

¹⁰⁶ *See* Letter to Kathleen O’Brien Ham, Chief, Auctions and Industry Analysis Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, FCC, from Aida Alvarez, Administrator, SBA (Feb. 4, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ MDS, also known as Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service (MMDS) has been renamed the Broadband Radio Service (BRS) and is regulated by Part 27 of the Commission’s rules; *see* 47 C.F.R. Part 27, subpart M. *See Amendment of Parts 1, 21, 73, 74 and 101 of the Commission’s Rules to Facilitate the Provision of Fixed and Mobile Broadband Access, Educational and Other Advanced Services in the 2150-2162 and 2500-2690 MHz Bands*, WT Docket Nos. 03-66, 03-67, 02-68, 00-230, MM Docket No. 97-217, RM-10586, RM-9718, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 19 FCC Rcd 14165 (2004) (*MDS/ITFS Order*).

¹⁰⁸ ITFS, an educational service, has been renamed the Educational Broadband Service (EBS); *see generally*, *MDS/ITFS Order*, 19 FCC Rcd 14165 (2004). EBS systems are regulated by Part 76 of the Commission’s rules; *see* 47 C.F.R. Part 76.

¹⁰⁹ *See generally Annual Assessment of the Status of Competition in the Market for the Delivery of Video Programming*, MB Docket No. 06-189, Notice of Inquiry, 21 FCC Rcd 12229, 12253, para. 71 (2006) (in which the Commission seeks industry comment on new uses of traditional cable systems).

¹¹⁰ *See id.*

approximately 100,000, as of March 2005. Local Multipoint Distribution Service (LMDS) is a fixed broadband point-to-multipoint microwave service that provides for two-way video telecommunications.¹¹¹ As described below, the SBA small business size standard for the broad census category of Cable and Other Program Distribution, which consists of such entities generating \$13.5 million or less in annual receipts, appears applicable to MDS, ITFS and LMDS.¹¹²

44. The Commission has defined small MDS (now BRS) and LMDS entities in the context of Commission license auctions. In the 1996 MDS auction,¹¹³ the Commission defined a small business as an entity that had annual average gross revenues of less than \$40 million in the previous three calendar years. This definition of a small entity in the context of MDS auctions has been approved by the SBA.¹¹⁴ In the MDS auction, 67 bidders won 493 licenses. Of the 67 auction winners, 61 claimed small business status. At this time, the Commission estimates that of the 61 small business MDS auction winners, 48 remain small business licensees. In addition to the 48 small businesses that hold BTA authorizations, there are approximately 392 incumbent MDS licensees that have gross revenues that are not more than \$40 million and are thus considered small entities.¹¹⁵ MDS licensees and wireless cable operators that did not receive their licenses as a result of the MDS auction fall under the SBA small business size standard for Cable and Other Program Distribution.¹¹⁶ Information available to us indicates that there are approximately 850 of these licensees and operators that do not generate revenue in excess of \$13.5 million annually. Therefore, we estimate that there are approximately 850 small entity MDS (or BRS) providers, as defined by the SBA and the Commission's auction rules that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

45. Educational institutions are included in this analysis as small entities; however, the Commission has not created a specific small business size standard for ITFS (now EBS).¹¹⁷ We estimate that there are currently 2,032 ITFS (or EBS) licensees, and all but 100 of the licenses are held by educational institutions. Thus, we estimate that at least 1,932 ITFS licensees are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

46. In the 1998 and 1999 LMDS auctions,¹¹⁸ the Commission defined a small business as an

¹¹¹ See *Rulemaking to Amend Parts 1, 2, 21, and 25 of the Commission's Rules to Redesignate the 27.5-29.5 GHz Frequency Band, to Reallocate the 29.5-30.0 GHz Frequency Band, to Establish Rules and Policies for Local Multipoint Distribution Service and for Fixed Satellite Services*, CC Docket No. 92-297, Second Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration, Fifth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 12 FCC Rcd 12545 (1997) (*LMDS Order*).

¹¹² See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517510.

¹¹³ MDS Auction No. 6 began on Nov. 13, 1995, and closed on Mar. 28, 1996 (67 bidders won 493 licenses).

¹¹⁴ See generally *Amendment of Parts 21 and 74 of the Commission's Rules with Regard to Filing Procedures in the Multipoint Distribution Service and in the Instructional Television Fixed Service*, MM Docket No. 94-131, Report and Order, 10 FCC Rcd 9589 (1995).

¹¹⁵ Hundreds of stations were licensed to incumbent MDS licensees prior to implementation of Section 309(j) of the Communications Act of 1934. See 47 U.S.C. § 309(j). For these pre-auction licenses, the applicable standard is SBA's small business size standards for "other telecommunications" (annual receipts of \$13.5 million or less). See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517910.

¹¹⁶ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517510.

¹¹⁷ In addition, the term "small entity" under SBREFA applies to small organizations (nonprofits) and to small governmental jurisdictions (cities, counties, towns, townships, villages, school districts, and special districts with populations of less than 50,000). See 5 U.S.C. §§ 601(4)-(6). We do not collect annual revenue data on ITFS (now EBS) licensees.

¹¹⁸ The Commission has held two LMDS auctions: Auction 17 and Auction 23. Auction No. 17, the first LMDS auction, began on Feb. 18, 1998, and closed on Mar. 25, 1998. (104 bidders won 864 licenses.) Auction No. 23, the LMDS re-auction, began on Apr. 27, 1999, and closed on May 12, 1999. (40 bidders won 161 licenses.)

entity that has annual average gross revenues of less than \$40 million in the previous three calendar years.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the Commission added an additional classification for a “very small business,” which was defined as an entity that had annual average gross revenues of less than \$15 million in the previous three calendar years.¹²⁰ These definitions of “small business” and “very small business” in the context of the LMDS auctions have been approved by the SBA.¹²¹ In the first LMDS auction, 104 bidders won 864 licenses. Of the 104 auction winners, 93 claimed status as small or very small businesses. In the LMDS re-auction, 40 bidders won 161 licenses. Based on this information, we believe that the number of small LMDS licenses will include the 93 winning bidders in the first auction and the 40 winning bidders in the re-auction, for a total of 133 small entity LMDS providers as defined by the SBA and the Commission’s auction rules.

47. **218-219 MHz Service.** The first auction of 218-219 MHz spectrum resulted in 170 entities winning licenses for 594 Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) licenses. Of the 594 licenses, 557 were won by entities qualifying as a small business. For that auction, the small business size standard was an entity that, together with its affiliates, has no more than a \$6 million net worth and, after federal income taxes (excluding any carry over losses), has no more than \$2 million in annual profits each year for the previous two years.¹²² In the *218-219 MHz Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order*, we established a small business size standard for a “small business” as an entity that, together with its affiliates and persons or entities that hold interests in such an entity and their affiliates, has average annual gross revenues not to exceed \$15 million for the preceding three years.¹²³ A “very small business” is defined as an entity that, together with its affiliates and persons or entities that hold interests in such an entity and its affiliates, has average annual gross revenues not to exceed \$3 million for the preceding three years.¹²⁴ These size standards will be used in future auctions of 218-219 MHz spectrum.

48. **24 GHz – Incumbent Licensees.** This analysis may affect incumbent licensees who were relocated to the 24 GHz band from the 18 GHz band, and applicants who wish to provide services in the 24 GHz band. The applicable SBA small business size standard is that of “Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications” companies. This category provides that such a company is small if it employs no more than 1,500 persons.¹²⁵ We believe that there are only two licensees in the 24 GHz band that were relocated from the 18 GHz band, Teligent¹²⁶ and TRW, Inc. It is our understanding that Teligent and its related companies have less than 1,500 employees, though this may change in the future. TRW is not a small entity. Thus, only one incumbent licensee in the 24 GHz band is a small business entity.

49. **24 GHz – Future Licensees.** With respect to new applicants in the 24 GHz band, the

¹¹⁹ See generally *LMDS Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 12545 (1997).

¹²⁰ See *id.*

¹²¹ See Letter to Daniel Phythyon, Chief, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (FCC) from A. Alvarez, Administrator, SBA (Jan. 6, 1998).

¹²² See generally *Implementation of Section 309(j) of the Communications Act – Competitive Bidding*, PP Docket No. 93-253, Fourth Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 2330 (1994).

¹²³ See generally *Amendment of Part 95 of the Commission’s Rules to Provide Regulatory Flexibility in the 218-219 MHz Service*, WT Docket No. 98-169, Report and Order and Memorandum Opinion and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 1497 (1999).

¹²⁴ See *id.*

¹²⁵ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517212 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wireless Telecommunications Carriers (except Satellite),” NAICS code 517210.).

¹²⁶ Teligent acquired the DEMS licenses of FirstMark, the only licensee other than TRW in the 24 GHz band whose license has been modified to require relocation to the 24 GHz band.

size standard for “small business” is an entity that, together with controlling interests and affiliates, has average annual gross revenues for the three preceding years not in excess of \$15 million.¹²⁷ “Very small business” in the 24 GHz band is an entity that, together with controlling interests and affiliates, has average gross revenues not exceeding \$3 million for the preceding three years.¹²⁸ The SBA has approved these small business size standards.¹²⁹ These size standards will apply to a future 24 GHz license auction, if held.

2. Satellite Service Providers

50. **Satellite Telecommunications.** Since 2007, the SBA has recognized satellite firms within this revised category, with a small business size standard of \$15 million.¹³⁰ The most current Census Bureau data, however, are from the (last) economic census of 2002, and we will use those figures to gauge the prevalence of small businesses in this category. Those size standards are for the two census categories of “Satellite Telecommunications” and “Other Telecommunications.” Under both prior categories, such a business was considered small if it had, as now, \$15 million or less in average annual receipts.¹³¹

51. The first category of Satellite Telecommunications “comprises establishments primarily engaged in providing point-to-point telecommunications services to other establishments in the telecommunications and broadcasting industries by forwarding and receiving communications signals via a system of satellites or reselling satellite telecommunications.”¹³² For this category, Census Bureau data for 2002 show that there were a total of 371 firms that operated for the entire year.¹³³ Of this total, 307 firms had annual receipts of under \$10 million, and 26 firms had receipts of \$10 million to \$24,999,999.¹³⁴ Consequently, we estimate that the majority of Satellite Telecommunications firms are small entities that might be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

52. The second category of Other Telecommunications “comprises establishments primarily engaged in (1) providing specialized telecommunications applications, such as satellite tracking, communications telemetry, and radar station operations; or (2) providing satellite terminal stations and associated facilities operationally connected with one or more terrestrial communications systems and capable of transmitting telecommunications to or receiving telecommunications from satellite systems.”¹³⁵ For this category, Census Bureau data for 2002 show that there were a total of 332 firms that operated for

¹²⁷ See *Amendments to Parts 1, 2, 87 and 101 of the Commission’s Rules to License Fixed Services at 24 GHz*, WT Docket No. 99-327, Report and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 16934, 16967 at para. 77 (2000); see also 47 C.F.R. § 101.538(a)(2).

¹²⁸ See *Amendments to Parts 1, 2, 87 and 101 of the Commission’s Rules to License Fixed Services at 24 GHz*, WT Docket No. 99-327, Report and Order, 15 FCC Rcd 16934, 16967 at para. 77 (2000); see also 47 C.F.R. § 101.538(a)(1).

¹²⁹ See Letter to Margaret W. Wiener, Deputy Chief, Auctions and Industry Analysis Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, FCC, from Gary M. Jackson, Assistant Administrator, SBA (July 28, 2000).

¹³⁰ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517410.

¹³¹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS codes 517410 and 517910.

¹³² U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 NAICS Definitions, “517410 Satellite Telecommunications”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF517.HTM>.

¹³³ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517410.

¹³⁴ See *id.* An additional 38 firms had annual receipts of \$25 million or more.

¹³⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 NAICS Definitions, “517910 Other Telecommunications”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF517.HTM>.

the entire year.¹³⁶ Of this total, 303 firms had annual receipts of under \$10 million and 15 firms had annual receipts of \$10 million to \$24,999,999.¹³⁷ Consequently, we estimate that the majority of Other Telecommunications firms are small entities that might be affected by our action.

3. Cable and OVS Operators

53. In 2007, the SBA recognized new census categories for small cable entities.¹³⁸ However, there is no census data yet in existence that may be used to calculate the number of small entities that fit these definitions. Therefore, we will use prior definitions of these types of entities in order to estimate numbers of potentially-affected small business entities.

54. **Cable and Other Program Distribution.** The Census Bureau defines this category as “third-party distribution systems for broadcast programming. . . . [that] deliver visual, aural, or textual programming received from cable networks, local television stations, or radio networks to consumers via cable or direct-to-home satellite systems on a subscription or fee basis. . . [and] do not generally originate programming material.”¹³⁹ The SBA has developed a small business size standard for Cable and Other Program Distribution, of firms having \$13.5 million or less in annual receipts.¹⁴⁰ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were a total of 1,191 firms in this category that operated for the entire year.¹⁴¹ Of this total, 1,087 firms had annual receipts of under \$10 million, and 43 firms had receipts of \$10 million or more but less than \$25 million.¹⁴² Thus, under this size standard, the majority of firms can be considered small and may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

55. **Cable Companies and Systems.** The Commission has developed its own small business size standards, for the purpose of cable rate regulation. Under the Commission’s rules, a “small cable company” is one serving 400,000 or fewer subscribers, nationwide.¹⁴³ Industry data indicate that, of 1,076 cable operators nationwide, all but eleven are small under this size standard.¹⁴⁴ In addition, under the Commission’s rules, a “small system” is a cable system serving 15,000 or fewer subscribers.¹⁴⁵ Industry data indicate that, of 7,208 systems nationwide, 6,139 systems have under 10,000 subscribers, and an additional 379 systems have 10,000-19,999 subscribers.¹⁴⁶ Thus, under this second size standard,

¹³⁶ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517910.

¹³⁷ See *id.* An additional 14 firms had annual receipts of \$25 million or more.

¹³⁸ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201.

¹³⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2002 NAICS Definitions, “517510 Cable and Other Program Distribution”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF517.HTM>.

¹⁴⁰ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517510 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wired Telecommunications Carriers,” NAICS code 517110.).

¹⁴¹ See *id.*

¹⁴² *Id.* An additional 61 firms had annual receipts of \$25 million or more.

¹⁴³ See 47 C.F.R. § 76.901(e). The Commission determined that this size standard equates approximately to a size standard of \$100 million or less in annual revenues. See *Implementation of Sections of the 1992 Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act: Rate Regulation*, Sixth Report and Order and Eleventh Order on Reconsideration, 10 FCC Rcd 7393, 7408 at para. 28 (1995).

¹⁴⁴ These data are derived from R.R. BOWKER, BROADCASTING & CABLE YEARBOOK 2006, “Top 25 Cable/Satellite Operators,” pages A-8 & C-2 (data current as of June 30, 2005); WARREN COMMUNICATIONS NEWS, TELEVISION & CABLE FACTBOOK 2006, “Ownership of Cable Systems in the United States,” pages D-1805 to D-1857.

¹⁴⁵ See 47 C.F.R. § 76.901(c).

¹⁴⁶ WARREN COMMUNICATIONS NEWS, TELEVISION & CABLE FACTBOOK 2006, “U.S. Cable Systems by Subscriber Size,” page F-2 (data current as of Oct. 2005). The data do not include 718 systems for which classifying data were not available.

most cable systems are small and may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

56. **Cable System Operators.** The Act also contains a size standard for small cable system operators, which is “a cable operator that, directly or through an affiliate, serves in the aggregate fewer than 1 percent of all subscribers in the United States and is not affiliated with any entity or entities whose gross annual revenues in the aggregate exceed \$250,000,000.”¹⁴⁷ The Commission has determined that an operator serving fewer than 677,000 subscribers shall be deemed a small operator, if its annual revenues, when combined with the total annual revenues of all its affiliates, do not exceed \$250 million in the aggregate.¹⁴⁸ Industry data indicate that, of 1,076 cable operators nationwide, all but ten are small under this size standard.¹⁴⁹ We note that the Commission neither requests nor collects information on whether cable system operators are affiliated with entities whose gross annual revenues exceed \$250 million,¹⁵⁰ and therefore we are unable to estimate more accurately the number of cable system operators that would qualify as small under this size standard.

57. **Open Video Services.** Open Video Service (OVS) systems provide subscription services.¹⁵¹ As noted above, the SBA has created a small business size standard for Cable and Other Program Distribution.¹⁵² This standard provides that a small entity is one with \$13.5 million or less in annual receipts. The Commission has certified approximately 45 OVS operators to serve 75 areas, and some of these are currently providing service.¹⁵³ Affiliates of Residential Communications Network, Inc. (RCN) received approval to operate OVS systems in New York City, Boston, Washington, D.C., and other areas. RCN has sufficient revenues to assure that they do not qualify as a small business entity. Little financial information is available for the other entities that are authorized to provide OVS and are not yet operational. Given that some entities authorized to provide OVS service have not yet begun to generate revenues, the Commission concludes that up to 44 OVS operators (those remaining) might qualify as small businesses that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

4. Internet Service Providers, Web Portals and Other Information Services

58. In 2007, the SBA recognized two new small business, economic census categories: (1) Internet Publishing and Broadcasting and Web Search Portals¹⁵⁴ and; (2) All Other Information Services.¹⁵⁵ However, there is no census data yet in existence that may be used to calculate the number of small entities that fit these definitions. Therefore, we will use prior definitions of these types of entities in order to estimate numbers of potentially-affected small business entities.

59. **Internet Service Providers.** The SBA has developed a small business size standard for

¹⁴⁷ 47 U.S.C. § 543(m)(2); *see also* 47 C.F.R. § 76.901(f) & nn.1–3.

¹⁴⁸ 47 C.F.R. § 76.901(f); *see FCC Announces New Subscriber Count for the Definition of Small Cable Operator*, Public Notice, 16 FCC Rcd 2225 (Cable Services Bureau 2001).

¹⁴⁹ These data are derived from R.R. BOWKER, BROADCASTING & CABLE YEARBOOK 2006, “Top 25 Cable/Satellite Operators,” pages A-8 & C-2 (data current as of June 30, 2005); WARREN COMMUNICATIONS NEWS, TELEVISION & CABLE FACTBOOK 2006, “Ownership of Cable Systems in the United States,” pages D-1805 to D-1857.

¹⁵⁰ The Commission does receive such information on a case-by-case basis if a cable operator appeals a local franchise authority’s finding that the operator does not qualify as a small cable operator pursuant to § 76.901(f) of the Commission’s rules.

¹⁵¹ *See* 47 U.S.C. § 573.

¹⁵² *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 517510 (This category will be changed for purposes of the 2007 Census to “Wired Telecommunications Carriers,” NAICS code 517110.).

¹⁵³ *See* <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/ovs/csovsccer.html> (current as of Feb. 2007).

¹⁵⁴ *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 519130 (establishing a \$500,000 revenue ceiling).

¹⁵⁵ *See* 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 519190 (establishing a \$6.5 million revenue ceiling).

Internet Service Providers (ISPs). ISPs “provide clients access to the Internet and generally provide related services such as web hosting, web page designing, and hardware or software consulting related to Internet connectivity.”¹⁵⁶ Under the SBA size standard, such a business is small if it has average annual receipts of \$23 million or less.¹⁵⁷ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were 2,529 firms in this category that operated for the entire year.¹⁵⁸ Of these, 2,437 firms had annual receipts of under \$10 million, and an additional 47 firms had receipts of between \$10 million and \$24,999,999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of these firms are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

60. **Web Search Portals.** Our action may pertain to interconnected VoIP services, which could be provided by entities that provide other services such as email, online gaming, web browsing, video conferencing, instant messaging, and other, similar IP-enabled services. The Commission has not adopted a size standard for entities that create or provide these types of services or applications. However, the Census Bureau has identified firms that “operate web sites that use a search engine to generate and maintain extensive databases of Internet addresses and content in an easily searchable format.”¹⁵⁹ The SBA has developed a small business size standard for this category of \$6.5 million or less in average annual receipts.¹⁶⁰ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were 342 firms in this category that operated for the entire year.¹⁶¹ Of these, 303 had annual receipts of under \$5 million, and an additional 15 firms had receipts of between \$5 million and \$9,999,999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of these firms are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

61. **Data Processing, Hosting, and Related Services.** Entities in this category “primarily ... provid[e] infrastructure for hosting or data processing services.”¹⁶² The SBA has developed a small business size standard for this category; that size standard is \$23 million or less in average annual receipts.¹⁶³ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were 6,877 firms in this category that operated for the entire year.¹⁶⁴ Of these, 6,418 had annual receipts of under \$10 million, and an additional 251 firms had receipts of between \$10 million and \$24,999,999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of these firms are small entities that may be affected by rules adopted pursuant to the Further Notice.

62. **All Other Information Services.** The Census Bureau defines this industry as including “establishments primarily engaged in providing other information services (except new syndicates and libraries and archives).”¹⁶⁵ Our action pertains to interconnected VoIP services, which could be provided

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “2002 NAICS Definitions: 518111 Internet Service Providers”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF518.HTM>.

¹⁵⁷ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 518111.

¹⁵⁸ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 518111.

¹⁵⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, “2002 NAICS Definitions: 518112 Web Search Portals”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF518.HTM>.

¹⁶⁰ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 518112.

¹⁶¹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 518112.

¹⁶² U.S. Census Bureau, “2002 NAICS Definitions: 518210 Data Processing, Hosting, and Related Services”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF518.HTM>.

¹⁶³ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 518210.

¹⁶⁴ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 518210.

¹⁶⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, “2002 NAICS Definitions: 519190 All Other Information Services”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF519.HTM>.

by entities that provide other services such as email, online gaming, web browsing, video conferencing, instant messaging, and other, similar IP-enabled services. The SBA has developed a small business size standard for this category; that size standard is \$6.5 million or less in average annual receipts.¹⁶⁶ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were 155 firms in this category that operated for the entire year.¹⁶⁷ Of these, 138 had annual receipts of under \$5 million, and an additional four firms had receipts of between \$5 million and \$9,999,999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of these firms are small entities that may be affected by our action.

63. **Internet Publishing and Broadcasting.** The Census Bureau defines this industry as “establishments engaged in publishing and/or broadcasting content on the Internet exclusively. . . . [that . . .] do not provide traditional (non-Internet) versions of the content that they publish or broadcast.”¹⁶⁸ The SBA has developed a small business size standard for this Census category; that size standard is 500 or fewer employees.¹⁶⁹ According to Census Bureau data for 2002, there were 1,362 firms in this category that operated for the entire year.¹⁷⁰ Of these, 1,351 had employment of 499 or fewer employees, and 11 firms had employment of between 500 and 999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of these firms are small entities that may be affected by our action.

D. Description of Projected Reporting, Recordkeeping, and Other Compliance Requirements for Small Entities

64. In the Further Notice, the Commission seeks comment on issues that must be addressed to comprehensively reform intercarrier compensation. These issues include the Commission’s jurisdiction to adopt such reform, how relevant statutory provisions should be interpreted and applied, and if and how carriers should be allowed to recover revenues that might be reduced by any intercarrier compensation reforms. In addition, the Commission seeks comment on the transition to the elimination of originating access. Compliance with a transition away from originating access charges will apply to all carriers but may prove financially burdensome to some small entities and may include new or reduced administrative processes.

65. The Commission currently does not regulate the provision of transit service between carriers and many carriers have entered into agreements governing the provision of transit traffic. Rules imposing transit service obligations will likely have no significant impact on carriers already providing, or carriers already using, transit service. For carriers that would be affected, the burdens may include determining the price of transit service purchased and/or provided, and developing additional administrative capabilities to account for providing and/or receiving transit service.

66. In this Further Notice the Commission also seeks comment on whether carriers will be able to receive universal service support to recover net reduced revenues from intercarrier compensation as a result of reforms that could be adopted. To allow rate-of-return carriers to receive universal service support in this manner, we may need to modify existing rules. For carriers that may be affected, burdens may include certain reporting and recordkeeping requirements to determine and establish their eligibility to receive such universal service support. Additionally, these carriers may need to modify some administrative processes in order to comply with any new or revised rules the Commission adopts as a result of the Further Notice.

¹⁶⁶ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 519190.

¹⁶⁷ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 519190.

¹⁶⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “2002 NAICS Definitions: 516110 Internet Publishing and Broadcasting”; <http://www.census.gov/epcd/naics02/def/NDEF516.HTM>.

¹⁶⁹ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 516110.

¹⁷⁰ See 13 C.F.R. § 121.201, NAICS code 516110.

67. Possible modifications to the rules in Part 51, if adopted, will affect all carriers. Possible modifications to the rules in Part 61 of the Commission's rules, if adopted, will affect all carriers that file and/or modify tariff filings. For example, modified rules may decrease or increase a carriers' tariff filing requirements. Modifications to the rules in Part 69 of the Commission's rules, if adopted, will affect all carriers that receive and/or pay access charges. Such revisions could require modifications to carrier billing systems and associated reporting and recordkeeping systems. Additionally, modification of the Commission's Part 69 rules may require carriers to modify and/or establish intercarrier compensation agreements.

68. As part of the Further Notice, the Commission seeks comment on reforming the high-cost disbursement mechanism, including the use of reverse auctions, and how best to implement changes to the universal service contribution mechanism. Compliance with a new universal service contribution mechanism will apply to all carriers, which may prove financially burdensome to small entities as they make changes from reporting information based on the revenue-based mechanism. Changes to the high-cost mechanism, and adoption of a broadband pilot program for low-income consumers may also necessitate additional reporting and recordkeeping requirements. Additionally, these proposed changes necessary to implement comprehensive reform also may require changes to Part 54 of the Commission's rules and will affect carriers subject to those rules.

E. Steps Taken to Minimize the Significant Economic Impact on Small Entities, and Significant Alternatives Considered

69. The RFA requires an agency to describe any significant, specifically small business, alternatives that it has considered in reaching its proposed approach, which may include the following four alternatives (among others): "(1) the establishment of differing compliance or reporting requirements or timetables that take into account the resources available to small entities; (2) the clarification, consolidation, or simplification of compliance and reporting requirements under the rules for such small entities; (3) the use of performance rather than design standards; and (4) an exemption from coverage of the rule, or any part thereof, for such small entities."¹⁷¹

70. The Further Notice seeks comment from all interested parties. Small entities are encouraged to bring to the Commission's attention any specific concerns they may have with the proposals outlined in the Further Notice.

71. Throughout these proceedings the Commission has received proposals to treat small entities differently. We believe that consideration of commenters' transition proposals for implementing intercarrier compensation reform, as well as alternatives for a carriers' recovery of intercarrier revenues reduced as a result of any reforms that might be adopted could be consistent with our goals of a unified and simplified intercarrier compensation regime that will reduce arbitrage opportunities and promote innovation and competition and our statutory requirement to secure the viability of universal service.

F. Federal Rules that May Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict with the Proposed Rules

72. None.

¹⁷¹ 5 U.S.C. § 603(c)(1)-(c)(4).

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN KEVIN J. MARTIN**

Re: *High-Cost Universal Service Support*, WC Docket No. 05-337; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45; *Lifeline and Link Up*, WC Docket No. 03-109; *Universal Service Contribution Methodology*, WC Docket No. 06-122; *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket No. 99-200; *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 96-98; *Developing a Unified Inter-carrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92; *Inter-carrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket No. 99-68; *IP-Enabled Services*, WC Docket No. 04-36

Today we tell the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit and the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service that, after years of deliberation, we are still unready to move forward with comprehensive reform of inter-carrier compensation and universal service. Instead, we issue another open-ended Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on a variety of approaches for comprehensive reform, and my colleagues promise to act on it by December 18.

I am disappointed by the Commission's unwillingness to step up and make tough choices to modernize our inter-carrier compensation and universal service programs. I am also doubtful that the Commission will find itself any better equipped to act in another six weeks. However, I vote to approve this item because this is the only path my colleagues could agree on, and failure to respond to the Court in particular would result in an even sorrier state of affairs – immediate vacatur of our rules.

First, I am skeptical of today's response to the Court, which directed us to justify the Commission's interim inter-carrier compensation rules for ISP-bound traffic. The Order treats ISP-bound traffic differently than all other traffic, including other IP traffic. The Order retains the interim rate cap of \$0.0007 for terminating this traffic indefinitely. I doubt that an Order that retains artificial and unsupported distinctions between types of IP traffic and maintains an interim rate without establishing an end game will be seen any more favorably by the Court than the Commission's two previous attempts.

By singling out ISP-bound traffic for different treatment, we perpetuate the current patchwork of rates for different traffic. The Order argues that disparate treatment of ISP-bound traffic is justified to combat arbitrage. Yet arbitrage exists precisely because traffic is terminated at a variety of rates.

In addition, the \$0.0007 rate cap for ISP-bound traffic was intended to be an interim measure pending comprehensive reform of inter-carrier compensation. Indeed, the record does not support a differential rate for ISP-bound traffic except on an interim basis. And even then, \$0.0007 can only be justified as an interim rate under a cost standard that we fail to adopt. A rate of \$0.0007 is inconsistent with the current TELRIC standard, and the Order does not adequately explain why we retain this rate in the absence of moving forward with adopting a cost standard consistent with \$0.0007. However, the Order simply states that the \$0.0007 cap shall remain in place until we adopt more comprehensive inter-carrier compensation reform. That is, we are establishing a perpetual interim rate. Although the Order is silent as to whether the \$0.0007 rate is "interim," let's be clear – this is an interim rate to nowhere. I therefore believe that we have failed to respond to the Court.

In 2005, the Court denied an earlier mandamus petition based on the Commission's representation that it was committed to comprehensive reform. The Commission pointed to its Further Notice on comprehensive reform, including permanent rules to succeed the interim inter-carrier compensation regime for ISP-bound traffic.

Three years later, the Commission once again finds itself asking the Court not to vacate our rules because the Commission remains committed to comprehensive reform. And once again, the Commission points to a Further Notice on comprehensive reform as evidence of its commitment.

I question whether my colleagues will be any more willing to adopt comprehensive reform in December. As explained below, I believe when December comes, the other Commissioners will simply pursue another Further Notice and another round of comment on the most difficult issues. If the Court wants a response – and is willing to give the Commission the benefit of the doubt rather than vacate our rules immediately – it should enforce our promise of reform on pain of automatic vacatur on December 19.

It is unfortunate that the Commission could not agree to adopt the comprehensive solution. I had proposed a comprehensive approach that would have transitioned all traffic to a final uniform rate, regardless of the type of traffic or jurisdiction. This approach would have answered the Court's direction – and I think it would have done so in a legally sustainable way.

Specifically, I would have concluded that all traffic falls within section 251(b)(5) and called upon each state to set a glide path to a reciprocal compensation rate applicable to all traffic under section 252(d)(2). Under this proposal, traffic terminated at rates below the glide path, such as ISP-bound traffic, would continue to be terminated at those rates, on an interim basis, until such traffic is swept into the glide path. Ultimately, the glide path would end at a lower, final uniform rate for all traffic.

Second, I view our failure to implement the Joint Board's recommendations as a tremendous missed opportunity. In particular, I supported the Joint Board's determination that broadband should be included in the universal service program. As I have said before, to fully appreciate and take advantage of the Internet today, consumers need broadband connections. Without this underlying infrastructure, efforts to implement advances in how we communicate, work, and provide education cannot succeed.

My proposal for implementing this recommendation would have spurred rapid and widespread deployment of broadband. I would have asked each carrier receiving high-cost universal service support to commit to provide broadband to all consumers in its study area within 5 years as a condition of continuing to receive support. If a carrier did not make that commitment, we would conduct a reverse auction to find out if any other carrier could do so. If nobody came forward, then we would have identified an unserved area, and could then determine what additional steps might be necessary to bring broadband to those consumers. In addition, I would have created a broadband Lifeline and Link Up program to ensure that low income consumers are not left out of our broadband future.

Finally, I am disappointed with the Further Notice issued today. After a decade of comment on these issues, we begin again from square one. To be clear, this is not a targeted Further Notice on a specific reform proposal. We are putting out for comment several proposals that would lead to radically different outcomes. In the Further Notice and in my colleagues' statement, my colleagues invite comment on conflicting questions, which reveal that they have no fundamental proposal for reform.

- Do we include broadband within the universal service program – or not?
- Do we provide support to competitive carriers based on their own costs? A reverse auction? Or do we phase out their support altogether?
- Should terminating rates be uniform by state – or uniform by carrier?
- Should we use an incremental cost standard for setting termination rates – or the existing TELRIC standard?

These questions have been debated exhaustively in the record for years. I fail to see how further comment over the next six weeks will help us resolve these issues.

Indeed, the longer we wait, the more difficult these issues become. Regulatory arbitrage will increase as long as rates differ by type of traffic and jurisdiction. Moreover, carriers are booking IP

traffic at vastly different rates that must be reconciled eventually. This type of traffic will continue to grow as carriers invest in broadband networks.

I would like to be encouraged by my colleagues' commitment that they will truly be ready to complete this much needed reform on December 18. The nature of the questions they included in the Further Notice makes me doubt they will have found their answers within an additional six weeks. I believe the far more likely outcome is that, in December, the other Commissioners will merely want another Further Notice and another round of comment on the most difficult questions. I do not believe they will be prepared to address the most challenging issues and that the Commission will be negotiating over what further questions to ask in December.

I recognize that few other issues before the Commission are as technically complex and involved, with as many competing interests, as are reforming the intercarrier compensation and universal service programs. But neither of those two realities are excuse for inaction.

**JOINT STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONERS MICHAEL J. COPPS, JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN, DEBORAH TAYLOR
TATE AND ROBERT M. MCDOWELL**

Re: *High-Cost Universal Service Support*, WC Docket No. 05-337; *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, CC Docket No. 96-45; *Lifeline and Link Up*, WC Docket No. 03-109; *Universal Service Contribution Methodology*, WC Docket No. 06-122; *Numbering Resource Optimization*, CC Docket No. 99-200; *Implementation of the Local Competition Provisions in the Telecommunications Act of 1996*, CC Docket No. 96-98; *Developing a Unified Intercarrier Compensation Regime*, CC Docket No. 01-92; *Intercarrier Compensation for ISP-Bound Traffic*, CC Docket No. 99-68; *IP-Enabled Services*, WC Docket No. 04-36

Today's decision responds directly to the mandamus from the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals regarding Core Communications, Inc. The item sets forth the Commission's legal justification for the rules it adopted in 2001 governing intercarrier compensation for telecommunications traffic bound for Internet service providers. It also preserves the ability to move towards a more unified intercarrier compensation regime.

We also issue a Further Notice seeking comment on specific proposals to reform the intercarrier compensation and universal service systems. While we do not pre-judge any of the proposals set forth therein, we do believe that there is a tentative but growing measure of consensus on a number of issues, including: moving intrastate access rates to interstate access levels over a reasonable period of time; not unduly burdening consumers with increases in their rates untethered to reductions in access charges; addressing phantom traffic and traffic stimulation; implementing an alternative cost recovery mechanism in certain circumstances; eliminating the identical support rule and moving over time towards support based on a company's own costs; emphasizing the importance of broadband to the future of universal service; and clarifying the implementation of the Alaska Native regions and tribal lands exception to the CETC cap adopted on May 1, 2008, and the need for special consideration for such areas. We would appreciate stakeholders attention to these issues of concern and consideration of whether modifications along these lines to the attached proposals are warranted. This Further Notice reflects our commitment to comprehensive reform of the intercarrier compensation and universal service systems in an expedited fashion.

Finally, the Commission today has completed a proceeding to consider the recommendations of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service. We appreciate all of the valuable input that the Board has provided the Commission. We however choose not to implement the Joint Board's recommendations at this time. We thank the Board members for their tireless efforts and look forward to obtaining their valuable input on an on-going basis.

For the foregoing reasons, we are pleased to approve today's Report & Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking