



NEWS RELEASE
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PSC Settles Complaint Against CenturyLink

Agreement includes commitment to infrastructure improvements in western North Dakota

BISMARCK, ND – The North Dakota Public Service Commission (PSC) today approved an agreement that requires CenturyLink to improve phone service to some western North Dakota communities and includes a commitment of \$2.66 million in infrastructure improvements. The order comes after the Commission filed a formal complaint against the company for a series of complaints related to service.

“This settlement shows a major commitment from CenturyLink to improve service to their customers by rehabilitating their cable network and installing more fiber,” said Commissioner Randy Christmann, who holds the telecommunications portfolio. “Taking care of their staffing shortage problem seems to already be making a noticeable improvement.”

In the complaint, Commission advocacy staff alleged that CenturyLink violated quality of service requirements for telecommunications companies by failing to address problems, such as phone lines not working, in a timely manner. The complaint included 28 different customers that contacted the Commission after the company failed to promptly address problems with their telephone service. While the complaint includes customers from different areas of the state, certain communities in western North Dakota made up the majority of the complaints and were identified as areas with recurring service issues due to aging infrastructure and CenturyLink’s staffing shortages in western North Dakota.

“Customers in these areas went far too long without adequate telephone service, so this resolution is much needed and long awaited,” said Commission Chair Julie Fedorchak. “The good news is these investments will resolve the telephone issues and significantly enhance broadband services for this area as well.”

The order approved today is the result of a settlement agreement worked out between Commission advocacy staff and CenturyLink. In the settlement, CenturyLink agrees to:

- Rehabilitate or replace phone cable routes in the Belfield exchange and the Fairview, Mont. exchange (exchange serves N.D. customers). CenturyLink has identified these routes as the leading cause of trouble reports from customers.
- Expand fiber in the area. CenturyLink will use \$1.2 million in federal funding available through the Connect America Fund to expedite the construction of fiber in the Belfield area. The addition of fiber will strengthen the overall phone system in that area, and certain customers will have access to broadband when complete.

- Fully staff all positions in western North Dakota in order to provide adequate coverage and timely response when customers report problems.
- Improve communication with customers. CenturyLink has agreed to improving communication with customers when they report a problem, including providing a repair commitment date during the initial call and providing advanced notification when that date cannot be met. The company has also agreed to provide information to the customers included in the complaint about the progress of the rehabilitation projects and will implement an internal notification system to North Dakota supervisors when problems are reported.

“As telecommunications continues to be de-regulated, it’s important for the Commission to continue its oversight over the carriers that we still have jurisdiction over to ensure customers are receiving adequate service,” said Commissioner Brian Kalk.

CenturyLink has committed to completing the rehabilitation of the phone cables and the installation of the fiber by the end of 2017. CenturyLink will provide the Commission with a monthly progress report.

The North Dakota Public Service Commission is a constitutionally created state agency with authority to permit, site and regulate certain business activities in the state including electric and gas utilities, telecommunications companies, power plants, electric transmission lines, pipelines, railroads, grain elevators, auctioneers, commercial weighing devices, pipeline safety and coal mine reclamation. For more information, contact the Public Service Commission at (701) 328-2400 or www.psc.nd.gov.

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