

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Improving the Resiliency of Mobile Wireless)	PS Docket No. 11-60
Networks)	
)	

COMMENTS OF COMPETITIVE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

Competitive Carriers Association (“CCA”)¹ submits these comments in response to the Federal Communications Commission’s (“FCC” or “Commission”) Public Notice seeking input on ways to improve wireless network resiliency and promote coordination among various entities.² CCA commends the FCC for its emergency preparedness agenda to foster consumer access to information and critical wireless services during disasters. CCA’s members share these goals, and take pride in providing consumers with network communications that are reliable and secure, including in the nation’s most rural and remote areas and in the most challenging conditions and terrains.

Mobile connections are one of the most efficient ways to communicate after a disaster, “and, thus, are central to the nation’s emergency preparedness, management of crises, and

¹ CCA is the leading association for competitive wireless providers and stakeholders across the United States. CCA’s membership includes nearly 100 competitive wireless providers ranging from small, rural carriers serving fewer than 5,000 subscribers to regional and national providers serving millions of customers. CCA also represents vendors and suppliers that provide products and services throughout the mobile communications supply chain.

² *Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau Seeks Comment on Improving Wireless Network Resiliency Through Encouraging Coordination with Power Companies*, Public Notice, PS Docket No. 11-60 (rel. Jan. 3, 2019).

essential public safety-related communications.”³ CCA’s members accordingly expend enormous resources to provide uninterrupted service to their customers – before, during, and after emergencies. Voluntary arrangements like the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework (“Framework”) have proven to provide carriers with sufficient flexibility to adequately assess an event and properly respond to coordination and recovery tactics, and the Commission should continue to support and foster such voluntary, industry-led arrangements. The Commission also should encourage constructive communications between carriers and third-party entities, including power companies. Finally, the Commission should ensure that its policies do not impose undue or unnecessary burdens on providers attempting to recover in the wake of disasters.

I. THE VOLUNTARY FRAMEWORK HELPS FACILITATE THE FCC’S GOAL FOR EXPEDITIOUS DISASTER RESPONSE AND NETWORK RECOVERY

Preparation and coordination among wireless providers, consumers, and a variety of industry stakeholders helps facilitate carriers’ ability to maintain communications before, during, and after emergencies and disasters. For these reasons, CCA continues to endorse the Framework, and CCA’s members have individually committed to many of the same principles in an effort to harden the nation’s communications networks.⁴ The Framework’s signatories have worked diligently to uphold its principles, and the Framework’s efficiency is evidenced by carriers’ responses to recent natural disasters.

³ See, *Amendments to Part 4 of the Commission’s Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, Report and Order, Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Order on Reconsideration, 31 FCC Rcd 5817.

⁴ Letter from Rebecca Murphy Thompson, EVP & GC, CCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, PS Docket No. 11-60 (filed May 31, 2016) (“CCA Framework Letter”).

For example, prior to Hurricane Michael, carriers that serve areas of predicted impact shared among themselves potential recovery scenarios, exchanged contact information among themselves and with local authorities, and conducted outreach to keep public officials apprised in the wake of the storm.⁵ After Hurricane Maria, T-Mobile provided a generator to the Federal Aviation Administration to facilitate airport operations for critical supplies.⁶ In the wake of Hurricane Lane, Sprint subscribers were able to roam on other compatible wireless networks, and Sprint offered the same benefit to partner networks.⁷ US Cellular agreed to operationalize unrestricted roaming for customers on competitor networks by removing trafficking area codes after Hurricane Florence.⁸

Similarly, Southern Linc has a “fleet of mobile assets” that are routinely pre-positioned before natural disasters.⁹ Those mobile assets proved to be useful to augment service in impacted areas so that capacity and coverage were available for those responding to the effects of Hurricane Michael.¹⁰ Likewise, GCI provided backhaul and transport operations to other providers in the wake of a 2012 wind storm, and in that same year, also offered support when “an

⁵ Comments of T-Mobile US, Inc., PS Docket No. 18-339 at 6 (filed Dec.17, 2018) (“T-Mobile December Comments”); Letter from Ray Rothermel, Counsel – Legal/Government Affairs, Sprint Corporation, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, PS Docket No. 11-60 (filed Nov. 26, 2018) (“Sprint Letter”); Comments of Southern Linc, PS Docket No. 18-339 (filed Dec. 17, 2018) (“Southern Linc Comments”).

⁶ Comments of T-Mobile US, Inc., PS Docket No. 11-60 at 13 (filed Nov. 26, 2018) (“T-Mobile November Comments”).

⁷ Sprint Letter at 4.

⁸ Letter from Grant Spellmeyer, Vice President – Federal Affairs and Public Policy, U.S. Cellular, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, PS Docket No. 11-60 at 1 (filed Nov. 26, 2018).

⁹ Southern Linc Comments at 10.

¹⁰ *See, id.*

undersea fiber cut occurred during an earthquake.”¹¹ Finally, in the wake of recent storms in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, companies like Viya offered portable generators and diesel fuel, coordinated information, and shared a helicopter to assess overall damage to the affected areas.¹²

The Framework’s success thus far is laudable, and largely attributed to its flexibility. Indeed, the voluntary nature of the Framework allows carriers to “effectively and dynamically” allocate resources in the wake of disasters and emergencies.¹³ Each carrier has a unique network and resources to serve distinctive topography, and each disaster presents its own particular challenges. Carriers therefore should not “be compelled to orient... recovery resources around static metrics” that may not fully address what is needed for each event.¹⁴ Specifically, competitive carriers’ ability to implement the Framework’s voluntary commitments depends upon technical feasibility and prioritizing the needs of their consumers.¹⁵ For example, in the wake of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Maria, the Commission’s “flexibility... enabled Viya to rapidly restore... wireless connectivity, which in turn, facilitated efforts by first responders to save lives and reduce the suffering of USVI residents.”¹⁶ It is vital that the Framework continue to be voluntary, flexible, and contingent upon a carrier managing its own network prior to extending relief, where practical.

¹¹ Letter from Kara Leibin Azocar, Regulatory Counsel, Federal Affairs, GCI Communication Corp., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, PS Docket No. 11-60 at 2 (filed Nov. 26, 2018).

¹² *See, e.g.*, Sprint Letter at 5; Comments of Viya, PS Docket No. 17-344 (filed Jan. 22, 2018) (“Viya Comments”).

¹³ T-Mobile November Comments at 2.

¹⁴ Comments of T-Mobile US, Inc., PS Docket No. 11-60 at 6 (filed July 16, 2018) (“T-Mobile July Comments”).

¹⁵ *See*, CCA Framework Letter at 1.

¹⁶ Viya Comments at 14.

The Commission also should be mindful that adopting one-size-fits-all rules for disaster recovery efforts that are inherently unique and fluid risks imposing unnecessary requirements on providers that may ultimately divert critical resources.¹⁷ CCA's members must prioritize limited resources to ensure consumer readiness and network performance and have significant business incentives to promptly address network degradation problems. This is an area where providers and policymakers simply cannot afford to make mistakes. Carriers know best how to harden and recover their own networks to maximize capabilities before and immediately after a catastrophic event. During disasters and emergencies, additional mandates would force carriers to divert critical and finite resources just to comply with the FCC's rules rather than focus on key recovery efforts, without a discernable positive impact to their customers. Such practice would be incongruent with the Commission's goal to connect consumers quickly and safely to a network during and after a disaster as expeditiously as possible.¹⁸

II. THE FCC SHOULD FOSTER COORDINATION AMONG A VARIETY OF ENTITIES, INCLUDING POWER COMPANIES

Every disaster or emergency is unique, and it is essential that the broader ecosystem – including wireless providers and third-party entities – collaborates in a cohesive and transparent manner to address network recovery issues. Coordinated responses will breed more efficient and effective recovery tactics; indeed, the record indicates that network recovery efforts could be enhanced with improved coordination between carriers and stakeholders like power companies,

¹⁷ T-Mobile July Comments at 6.

¹⁸ *See, e.g.*, Letter from Rebecca Murphy Thompson, General Counsel, CCA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, PS Docket No. 15-80, ET Docket No. 04-35 (July 17, 2015); Comments of Competitive Carriers Association and NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association, PS Docket No. 13-239, PS Docket No. 11-60 at 6-7 (filed Jan. 17, 2014).

to expedite recovery before, during, and after emergencies.¹⁹ Restoration of communications, power, and other essential services depends on a variety of entities being able to withstand and recover from disasters, including carriers and third-party entities.

The FCC should encourage communication among carriers, third-party entities, and other governmental agencies to facilitate information sharing and highlight recovery issues arising in the wake of disasters.²⁰ Such coordinated communication could occur at state and local emergency operations centers (“EOCs”). As Southern Linc notes, it “designated a liaison for direct communication and coordination with the EOCs for affected counties in Florida” before Hurricane Michael, and “[t]his preparation and staging of assets and personnel allowed Southern Linc to respond quickly and begin restoration efforts as soon as the storm passed and it was safe to enter the affected areas.”²¹ Transparency and coordination will promote swift action in the wake of disasters and emergencies,²² and will adequately prioritize communications entities for resource allocation and response times during recovery efforts.²³

Finally, the Commission should refrain from mandating backup power requirements and as part of its assessment, should take into consideration the need for flexibility that will allow carriers to strategically prioritize resources and lend to more effective restoration. The record establishes that the best strategy to promote recovery efforts and consumer benefits is to “avoid needlessly taxing the resources of communications companies best situated to effectively

¹⁹ T-Mobile December Comments at 2.

²⁰ *See*, Viya Comments at 2.

²¹ Southern Linc Comments at 11.

²² *See*, Viya Comments at 2.

²³ *See, id.* at 23.

manage recovery efforts.”²⁴ Mandating strict compliance requirements on wireless providers could hinder efforts to swiftly recover communications systems during times of immediate need.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, CCA commends policymakers for promoting voluntary arrangements like the Framework to provide carriers sufficient flexibility to properly respond to, and facilitate, coordination and recovery tactics. It is critical that carriers have access to priority resources—both before and after storms—to ensure seamless communications at all times, for all consumers, across all areas of the United States. The Commission should continue to encourage transparent communication between carriers and third-party entities, and refrain from adopting any policies that would impose unnecessary burdens on carriers. CCA looks forward to working with the FCC and other industry stakeholders to ensure that consumers and wireless networks are adequately prepared to respond to emergencies and disasters.

Respectfully submitted,

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²⁴ See, *id.* at 14.