

At this stage of the proceeding, in the absence of any proposal that includes details regarding a trial (such as where it is taking place, precisely what will be tested, and how the test environment will differ from the status quo), it is difficult for cable operators to offer much input in response to the *Notice*. As NCTA explained in earlier comments, cable operators already are using IP technology to provide voice services to their customers.⁵ But the technical transition of incumbent LEC networks that is the focus of this proceeding potentially affects the networks and services of every other provider in the marketplace, including cable operators.⁶ Consequently, while we would expect any proposals for trials to come primarily from the incumbent LECs that will be transitioning their networks over the next few years, it is imperative that all the parties affected by those proposals being given an opportunity to review the details of those proposals and participate in any formal or informal process through which those proposals are developed and implemented.

As NCTA explained previously, these trials are “not a test of whether it is technically feasible to exchange IP-based voice traffic. Many companies, including AT&T and other ILECs, already exchange some types of voice traffic in IP format and there is no doubt that it is technically feasible.”⁷ Rather, the goal is to conduct “real world” tests that will “identify issues that might arise for incumbent LEC customers, as well as for incumbent LEC competitors and their voice customers, as TDM services and equipment are eliminated and the incumbent LEC transitions solely to IP-based services and equipment.”⁸ Ideally these trials will be designed to

⁵ Comments of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, GN Docket No. 12-353 (filed Jan. 28, 2013) (NCTA Comments) at 2.

⁶ *Id.* at 3.

⁷ *Id.* at 8.

⁸ *Id.* at 8-9.

produce business and operational approaches that potentially could be replicated across the industry and not just within the confines of the trial.

In reviewing any proposals that are submitted, particularly proposals for a VoIP interconnection trial, a primary consideration for any cable operator (and presumably for other providers as well) will be how the trial will affect any existing interconnection and traffic exchange arrangements between the two parties. Over many years, through the process established pursuant to the 1996 Act, incumbents and competitors generally have developed relatively stable arrangements governing the interconnection of networks and the exchange of voice traffic. Any proposal that would unduly jeopardize the stability of those arrangements – from an operational perspective or a financial perspective – is likely to be cause for concern. For example, carriers would need to consider issues like transport costs and interoperability testing to ensure that any new interconnection arrangement works as intended and does not unduly disadvantage one carrier or the other.

These practical considerations are likely to vary significantly among entities that might be affected by any particular trial. Consequently, for any particular proposal, the Commission should strive to encourage participation by those who are interested without harming the interests of those who choose not to participate. While there are some areas where the Commission eventually may need all carriers to transition to a particular process or standard (e.g., in the area of numbering), at this time there is no reason that an incumbent LEC's voluntary decision to update its technology should lead to any mandatory obligation on any other party.

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The ongoing transition of incumbent LEC networks from TDM to IP-based technology creates the possibility for significant consumer benefits, but also the potential for significant disruption. In developing trials, the Commission should identify trial opportunities that would

increase the body of knowledge that will inform future decisions while striving to avoid any harmful disruption to competitive providers.

Respectfully submitted,

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