

BEFORE THE
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

In the Matter of)	Docket No. UT-053021
Eligible Telecommunications Carriers)	
(ETC) Rulemaking)	Comments of Sprint Nextel

Sprint Nextel Corporation, on behalf of its wireless division (consisting of SprintCom, Inc., Sprint Spectrum, L.P., Nextel Wireless, and WirelessCo, L.P., d/b/a Sprint), and its incumbent local exchange carrier operating company in Washington, United Telephone Company of the Northwest d/b/a Sprint (collectively, Sprint), offers these comments in response to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission’s October 21, 2005, Notice of Opportunity to File Written Comments in this docket.

Sprint participates in all aspects of federal and state universal service fund (USF) support mechanisms. Sprint serves as a major wireless carrier as well as a rural incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC) in the State of Washington. Sprint partakes in USF as both a wireline Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) and a wireless competitive ETC (CETC) duly designated by the Commission. At the same time, Sprint is a net payer into the federal universal service fund, making contributions based on its wireless, local, and long distance operations that greatly exceed the support it receives from the federal fund. That combination of experiences underlies Sprint’s support for policies that will preserve service for end-users and ensure the long-term sustainability of

USF while maintaining and enhancing the competitive neutrality of support mechanisms designed to increase the choices available to customers in high-cost areas.

Sprint has previously filed comments (June 1, 2005) in this docket and appreciates the extent to which the Commission has taken our comments and those of others in the industry into account. We note particularly the proposed adoption of Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association (CTIA) service quality standards for wireless carriers and the requirement for a two-year, rather than five-year, plan to be provided with the petition.

Sprint's primary concern is with the proposed reporting requirements. The requirement to provide annual outage reports is duplicative of existing FCC reporting obligations. Such a requirement is also unnecessary in light of existing market incentives, because a competitive carrier that experiences frequent outages and network downtime will rapidly lose customers to other, more reliable providers in its designated service area. Outage reporting requirements for ETC applicants and existing ETCs are not necessary to limit the amount of support paid out because an unreliable carrier that experiences a net loss in customers will experience an equivalent loss in USF support.

The same argument, with reference to existing marketing incentives and loss of customers, also applies to annual reports of "failure to provide service" or "complaints per 1,000 handsets or lines." An unreliable carrier will lose customers and thus USF support whether any reports are made to Commission or not.

A further concern focuses on the advertising requirements, which Sprint believes to be excessive. Sprint has no objection to an annual bill insert or notices in the directory and offices open to the public. Likewise, the company does not object to putting

quarterly notices in newspapers, including tribal newspapers. However, the proposed requirement for placing newspaper ads one-sixteenth page in size four times a quarter, or running radio ads for seven consecutive days each quarter is burdensome, costly, and does not give companies enough flexibility to ensure its advertising is reasonably targeted to reach those likely to qualify for the service. For instance, none of the exchanges Sprint serves as an ILEC have local daily newspapers, though some customers may subscribe to The Seattle Times, The Seattle Post Intelligence, or The Oregonian. If the company chose to advertise in the weekly local papers, and there were five newspapers covering its exchanges, would the rule require the company to run 80 ads a year (5 papers x 4 quarters x 4 times per quarter)? Or would the rule require only 16 ads a year in total for all the papers? The rule also assumes that tribal newsletters and newspapers contain advertising. For such publications that do not include advertising, the editors may permit the company to include information on the program as a feature article or public service announcement at its discretion. If the editor does not care to publish the information as often as the rule calls for, the company should not be held accountable.

Respectfully submitted this 14th day of November, 2005, by

/s/

Nancy L. Judy
State Executive.