

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON STATE
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

In the Matter of the Notification and
Petition of

UNITED STATES CELLULAR
CORPORATION

For Relinquishment of Its High-Cost
Eligible Telecommunications Carrier
Designation Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. §
214(e)(4) and Request for Waiver of WAC
480-120-083.

DOCKET UT-250179

ORDER 01

GRANTING CONDITIONAL
RELINQUISHMENT OF HIGH-
COST ELIGIBLE
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
CARRIER DESIGNATION AND
GRANTING WAIVER OF WAC
480-120-083.

BACKGROUND

- 1 On March 18, 2025, United States Cellular Corporation (UScellular or Company) filed with the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission) its Petition and Notice of Relinquishment for its High-Cost Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (ETC) Designation Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4) (Petition).
- 2 The Commission had previously designated UScellular as a High-Cost ETC on December 23, 1997, in Order 01 under Docket UT-970345.¹
- 3 In its Petition, UScellular seeks to relinquish its ETC designation in Washington, contingent upon and coincident with consummation of the T-Mobile transaction (Closing) currently under review at the FCC.² The expected Closing date is anticipated to occur mid-year 2025.
- 4 Although UScellular seeks to relinquish its support, UScellular submits that T-Mobile is committed to continuing to serve all of UScellular's customers, including Lifeline

¹ See, *In the Matter of the Petitions of Yelm Telephone Company et al.*, Dockets UT-970333-UT-970354, UT-970356, Order Designating Eligible Telecommunications Carriers (December 23, 1997) as Order 01 in Docket UT-970345.

² Applications of T-Mobile US, Inc. and United States Cellular Corporation for Consent to Transfer Control of Licenses and Authorizations, FCC GN Docket No. 24- 286.

customers, and expanding 5-G coverage in rural Washington. In addition, there are also a number of other ETCs providing service throughout the Company's service area.

- 5 Commission staff (Staff) has reviewed UScellular's Petition and supporting documents, and the letter submitted to the Commission by T-Mobile, dated May 28, 2025 (T-Mobile Letter). Staff recommends that the Commission grant the Company's Petition on a conditional basis coincident with the Closing of the transaction between T-Mobile and the Company (Transaction). Staff submit that the service areas in question are served by at least one other ETC and that customers will not be materially impacted by granting the Petition because T-Mobile has offered to continue serving all customers (either through T-Mobile itself or through Assurance Wireless, a T-Mobile affiliate that provides Lifeline service in Washington).
- 6 Staff also recommends that the Commission grant a waiver of WAC 480-120-083 as it applies to UScellular.

DISCUSSION

- 7 We agree with Staff's recommendation and grant UScellular's Petition and waiver request. Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4), a state commission shall permit an ETC to relinquish its designation in any area served by more than one ETC. The state Commission shall require the remaining ETCs to ensure that all customers are served in the service area at issue.
- 8 UScellular's Petition meets the requirements of 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4). Because the remaining ETCs in these markets (along with T-Mobile as evidenced by the T-Mobile Letter) will be able to serve customers without purchasing or constructing additional facilities, it is not necessary for the Commission to require further action from the remaining ETCs.
- 9 UScellular requests that the Commission grant this Petition on a conditional basis with an effective date coincident with Closing.³ The statute in question, 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4), merely requires that the Company provide the Commission "advance notice" of its intent

³ In the event that the Transaction is not consummated, UScellular's ETC designation will remain effective. On June 30, UScellular filed with the Commission its annual certification report in compliance with WAC 480-123-060, WAC 480-123-070, and WAC 480-123-080. This allows the Commission to certify to the FCC and the Universal Service Administration Company (USAC) UScellular's continued ETC designation in the event that the Transaction does not close.

to relinquish an ETC designation. Because UScellular's Petition satisfies the statute's requirements and the requested effective date is subsequent to the date of the Petition, the Commission grants the Company's requested effective date on a conditional basis, as well as waives the application of WAC 480-120-083.

- 10 WAC 480-120-083(2) requires a telecommunications company to provide notice 30 days advance notice prior to ceasing the provision of any telecommunications service. The rule's notice requirement applies to UScellular as an "exiting telecommunications company," but that is not needed in this instance because, as described in the T-Mobile Letter, T-Mobile intends to facilitate a seamless transition of UScellular customers, including Lifeline customers. UScellular customers, including Lifeline customers, will not be impacted by the Transaction, nor need to take any action to maintain their service, including Lifeline discounts. After Closing of the Transaction, T-Mobile's affiliate, Assurance Wireless (a Lifeline-only ETC), will contact each of UScellular's former Lifeline customers regarding their options going forward, including remaining on their current UScellular Lifeline plan, transitioning to an Assurance Wireless plan, or moving to another ETC. Given these facts, waiver of WAC 480-120-083 is appropriate.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

- 11 (1) The Commission has jurisdiction over eligible telecommunications carriers in Washington and the subject matter of this Order pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4), 47 C.F.R. § 54.205(a) and WAC 480-07-370(3).
- 12 (2) The Commission has designated UScellular an ETC pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1), 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(d) and WAC 480-123-030.
- 13 (3) Pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(4), UScellular is permitted to relinquish its ETC designation with advance notice to the Commission in any areas served by more than one ETC.
- 14 (4) This matter came before the Commission at its regularly scheduled meeting on July 10, 2025.
- 15 (5) After reviewing UScellular's Petition and giving due consideration to all relevant matters, the Commission grants UScellular's Petition on a conditional basis and allows the Company to relinquish its ETC designation in all of its exchanges effective coincidence with Closing of the Transaction.

- 16 (6) The Commission also grants UScellular’s request for a waiver of WAC 480-120-083.

ORDER

THE COMMISSION ORDERS:

- 17 (1) United States Cellular Corporation’s Petition is granted, and UScellular is allowed to relinquish its Eligible Telecommunications Carrier designation as set forth in paragraph 13-15 above.
- 18 (2) The Commission retains jurisdiction over the subject matter and United States Cellular Corporation to effectuate the provisions of this Order.
- 19 (3) The Commissioners, having determined this Order to be consistent with the public interest, directed the Secretary to enter this Order.

DATED at Lacey, Washington, July 10, 2025.

WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

BRIAN J. RYBARIK, Chair

ANN E. RENDAHL, Commissioner

MILTON H. DOUMIT, Commissioner