

February 18, 2014

*By efile*

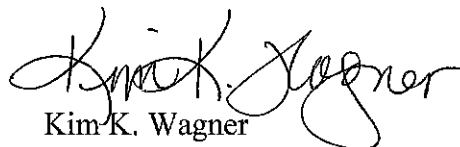
Burl W. Haar  
Minnesota Public Utilities Commission  
350 Metro Square Building  
121 Seventh Place East  
St. Paul, MN 55101-2147

Re: In the Matter of the Commission Investigation of the Completion of Long-Distance  
Calls to Rural Areas in Minnesota  
Docket No. P999/CI-12-1329

Dear Dr. Haar:

Enclosed for filing are the Comments of Integra, in connection with the above-referenced matter. Also enclosed is a Certificate of Service.

Sincerely,



Kim K. Wagner  
Legal & Regulatory Administrator  
Integra Telecom  
763-745-8468 (direct)  
763-745-8459 (department fax)  
[Kim.Wagner@integratelecom.com](mailto:Kim.Wagner@integratelecom.com)

Attachment

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Beverly Jones Heydinger	Chair
David C. Boyd	Commissioner
Nancy Lange	Commissioner
Dan Lipschultz	Commissioner
Betsy Wergin	Commissioner

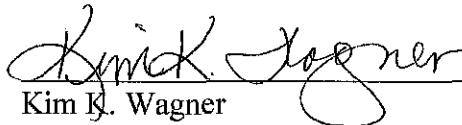
In the Matter of the Commission  
Investigation of the Completion of Long-  
Distance Calls to Rural Areas in Minnesota

**Docket No. P999/CI-12-1329**

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I hereby certify that on February 18, 2014, the attached Comments of Integra were e-filed with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, and that copies of this filing were distributed parties by electronic filing, certified mail, e-mail, or by depositing a true and correct copy thereof properly enveloped with postage paid in the United States Mail at Golden Valley, Minnesota

Dated: February 18, 2014.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Kim K. Wagner

STATE OF MINNESOTA  
BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Beverly Jones Heydinger	Chair
David C. Boyd	Commissioner
Nancy Lange	Commissioner
Dan Lipschultz	Commissioner
Betsy Wergin	Commissioner

In the Matter of the Commission Investigation  
of the Completion of Long-Distance Calls to  
Rural Areas in Minnesota

**Docket No. P999/CI-12-1329**

**COMMENTS OF INTEGRA**

February 18, 2014

INTRODUCTION

On January 13, 2014, the Department of Commerce (Department) filed a petition with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) in Docket No. P999/DI-12-1329 recommending that the Commission open an investigation of rural call completion issues by soliciting comments from interested parties. On January 16, 2014, the Commission issued a Notice of Commission Investigation and Solicitation of Comments, opening the investigation and soliciting comments in response to fourteen questions outlined in the Department’s petition.<sup>1</sup> Integra Telecom of Minnesota, Inc. and Eschelon Telecom of Minnesota, Inc. dba Integra (“collectively Integra”) offer the following initial comments in relation to this Commission investigation. Specific answers to the Commission’s questions are contained in Attachment A.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Notice of Commission Investigation and Solicitation of Comments*, In the Matter of the Commission Investigation of the completion of Long-Distance Calls to Rural Areas in Minnesota, PUC Docket No. P999/CI-12-1329, January 16, 2014.

## COMMENTS

Integra's expectation, and the expectation of our customers, is that originated calls will reach the intended recipient, and that calls originated by third parties directed to Integra customers will also reach the intended recipient. Integra recognizes the importance of the "rural call completion problem"<sup>2</sup> for both call originators and rural telephone consumers.

Integra appreciates the Commission's interest in the rural call completion problem, and the Department's leadership among states in bringing this issue before the Commission. The Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") has undertaken numerous actions in an attempt to address problems in the completion of long-distance telephone calls to rural consumers,<sup>3</sup> including the recent *FCC Rural Call Completion Order* that is currently being implemented by carriers.<sup>4</sup> Though progress in resolving rural call completion problems has been slower than regulators and many carriers would prefer,<sup>5</sup> Integra believes that as a result of both state and federal action and attention to this issue, carriers are working together to expeditiously resolve the problems when they are identified.

While there is a lot of discussion of rural call completion problems, the ways in which the problems may manifest, and the potential reasons as to why the problems exist, there does not appear to be a clear definition of what constitutes a true rural call completion problem, as opposed to an unanswered call or a network completion problem. Any failure of a call to complete to a rural area is not necessarily a rural call completion problem, and every rural call

---

<sup>2</sup> *Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, In the Matter of Rural Call Completion, WC Docket No. 13-39, Released November 8, 2013 ("FCC Rural Call Completion Order"), ¶ 14 and *Comments of the Minnesota Department of Commerce*, In the Matter of the Commission Investigation of the Completion of Long-Distance Calls to Rural Areas in Minnesota, Docket No. P999/DI-12-1329, January 13, 2014 ("DOC Rural Call Completion Comments"), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶¶ 3 – 12, and *DOC Rural Call Completion Comments*, pp. 4-9.

<sup>4</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶ 142.

<sup>5</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶ 13, and *DOC Rural Call Completion Comments*, p. 2.

completion problem is not necessarily a result of nefarious actions on the part of carriers in the call path. Certainly problems such as lengthy periods of dead air on the calling party's end after dialing a number, audible ringing tones on the calling party's end when the called party's telephone never rings at all, false busy signals, inaccurate intercept messages, and the inability of one or both parties to hear the other when the call does go through, should be investigated and remedied.<sup>6</sup> However, it is incorrect to presume that every unanswered call to a rural area is a result of a rural call completion problem, or that all declining terminating access minutes to rural areas is a result of a rural call completion problem. A rural call completion problem as discussed in this docket should be defined, and limited to intentional behavior by providers that seek to avoid terminating calls to rural areas.<sup>7</sup>

The recent *FCC Rural Call Completion Order* attempts to gain greater insight into the rural call completion problem, by requiring carriers such as Integra to collect, report, and store specific data regarding call attempts to both rural and non-rural areas.<sup>8</sup> The *FCC Rural Call Completion Order* requires quarterly reports to the FCC that contain specific call completion data for rural and non-rural areas.<sup>9</sup> The data must include intrastate and interstate toll calls to rural and non-rural OCNs, as well as the number of attempted calls, the number of answered calls, and the number of calls not answered. The data must also specify whether the caller received a busy signal, a ring with no answer, or an indication of an unassigned number.<sup>10</sup> The

---

<sup>6</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶ 14, and *DOC Rural Call Completion Comments*, p. 1 (The *FCC Rural Call Completion Order* (¶ 111) addresses audible ringing tones by prohibiting providers from transmitting an audible ring to a caller's handset when the phone on the other end of the call is not actually ringing).

<sup>7</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶¶ 16 and 17, and *DOC Rural Call Completion Comments*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶ 19.

<sup>9</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶¶ 20 and 31.

<sup>10</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶¶ 65 and 73.

order requires carriers to collect and store originating call detail records<sup>11</sup> to rural areas for six months.<sup>12</sup>

Complying with the FCC's reporting and record keeping requirements is not a simple task, as some of the data is not currently collected, or is collected in ways that are not currently compatible and will now need to be synchronized. One of Integra's concerns as state commissions review this issue is that each commission may implement a reporting and/or recording obligation that is different or inconsistent with what is already in place. This could significantly increase the burden on limited resources that are also often tasked with investigating potential rural call completion problems.

Regardless of what action(s) this Commission takes, or whether the Commission has authority over intermediate providers, it is reasonable to expect all carriers in the call path to adhere to certain principles that are fundamental to driving efficient resolution of rural call completion problems.

First, carriers should be expected to abide by existing rules and laws that prohibit call blocking, choking, reducing, or restricting telephone traffic, that prohibit false audible ringing, that require call signaling information to pass through unaltered, and that prohibit unreasonable discrimination.<sup>13</sup>

Second, when a potential call termination problem is suspected a carrier should be obligated to investigate the issue. This obligation should exist whether the issue is raised by a

---

<sup>11</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, rule § 64.2103 Retention Call Attempts Records (Call detail records need to include calling party number, called party number, date, time, indication of whether a call was handed off to an intermediate provider, rural OCN, intrastate or interstate, SS7 signaling cause code or SIP signaling message code associated with each call attempt).

<sup>12</sup> *FCC Rural Call Completion Order*, ¶ 61.

<sup>13</sup> *DOC Rural Call Completion Comments*, p. 6.

customer to a carrier, a carrier to another carrier, or from a regulatory body.<sup>14</sup> To the extent necessary, carriers should commit to working together to identify and address the root cause(s) of rural call completion problems. Identification of these problems may require cooperation between the originating and terminating carriers, and remedies may require cooperation from all carriers in the call path.

Third, it is important to recognize that not all call failures indicate a rural call completion problem. Call termination problems can be difficult to identify<sup>15</sup> and calls may fail to complete for a number of reasons. Carriers need to collaborate to resolve problems, rather than resorting to blame.

Finally, every carrier making a routing decision in the call path has the ability to remedy a rural call completion problem by electing not to send calls along a problematic call path. The ability to alter the call path should be utilized if carriers are unable to remedy repeated rural call completion problems through other methods.

The Commission is already playing an important role in helping to resolve rural call completion problems, by prioritizing the issue. The Commission's interest in this matter may encourage carriers to work more cooperatively to troubleshoot and resolve call termination issues on behalf of their customers. The Commission should continue to encourage carriers to work together to address rural call completion problems, and to the extent carriers fail to do this and are subject to Commission authority, the Commission should intervene. In addition, the Commission can remind carriers that they are required to abide by state and federal law, and if

---

<sup>14</sup> To the extent it doesn't exist today, each carrier should establish a clear process by which customers and other carriers may identify suspected rural call completion problems. Carriers rely on timely communication and feedback from customers and other carriers in order to properly investigate and address call termination problems.

<sup>15</sup> *DOC Rural Call Completion Comments*, p. 1.

carriers fail to do so they are potentially subject to Commission enforcement actions. The Commission may also continue to monitor the issue to determine if the efforts of the FCC and this Commission result in a reduction of rural call completion problems.

### CONCLUSION

Integra is committed to providing excellent service to its customers in Minnesota, which includes the ability for customers to terminate calls. The rural call completion problem should be narrowly defined as intentional behavior by providers in the call path to avoid terminating calls to rural areas. The fastest resolution of rural call completion problems will result when carriers work together to identify, troubleshoot and resolve these problems as they arise. Integra is committed to working with its customers and other carriers to resolve rural call completion problems. Integra believes that greater scrutiny of this issue by both the FCC and state commissions will encourage carriers to collaborate, to help eliminate the rural call completion problem.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Denney", written over a horizontal line.

Douglas Denney  
Integra  
Vice President, Costs & Policy  
1201 NE Lloyd Blvd., Suite 500  
Portland, OR 97232  
[dkdenney@integratelecom.com](mailto:dkdenney@integratelecom.com)



ATTACHMENT A

**Integra Response to Commission Questions**

1. Are intermediate providers that provide either transport or switching for intrastate Minnesota calls subject to the Commission's jurisdiction as provided in 237.74 Subd. 12 or other statute?

Integra does not take a position on this issue at this time.

2. If intermediate providers are subject to the Commission's jurisdiction, should they be required to obtain a certificate of authority or be subject to a certification/registration process?

Integra does not take a position on this issue at this time.

3. If intermediate providers are required to be certified or register with the Commission, should retail interexchange carriers be required to only use certified/registered intermediate providers for the termination of toll calls?

Integra does not take a position on this issue at this time.

4. If intermediate providers are subject to the Commission's jurisdiction, what requirements, as outlined in Minnesota Rules 7811 and 7812 are applicable and which requirements are not applicable?

Integra does not take a position on this issue at this time.

5. If intermediate providers are not subject to the Commission's jurisdiction, are there any actions that the Commission can take to ensure that calls to rural Minnesota customers are properly completed?

The Commission should encourage all carriers involved in the call path to work together to attempt to resolve call termination problems.

6. If intermediate providers are not subject to the Commission's jurisdiction, should the responsibility for any call termination problems rest solely with the originating interexchange carrier?

No. All carriers involved in the call path should be responsible for addressing and resolving call termination problems.

7. If intermediate providers are not subject to the Commission's jurisdiction, what requirements should the Commission place on the originating interexchange carriers to ensure call termination problems do not occur?

The Commission should encourage all carriers involved in the call path to work together to attempt to resolve call termination problems. To the extent problems continue, and are associated with a specific intermediate provider, originating carriers should be required to route around the intermediate provider.

8. Should there be “point of contact” information for any intermediate carrier so that any call failures identified can more readily be addressed?

Yes.

9. Should there be a requirement that any contract between an originating interexchange carrier and an intermediate carrier require the full cooperation of the intermediate carrier to resolve any call failures, including any inquiries by regulatory agencies?

Integra does not take a position on this issue at this time. Integra routinely works with other carriers, including its intermediate providers, to troubleshoot and resolve call termination problems.

10. What processes are in place to monitor call completion problems?

Integra routinely monitors its network, but call termination problems are difficult to isolate and identify without notice from the originating or terminating customer (or terminating carrier on behalf of the terminating customer).

11. What data has been collected to demonstrate that calls through the originating interexchange carrier are completing?

Integra is in the process of developing systems to collect and store data required by the FCC.

12. If an originating interexchange carrier, do the contracts you have with intermediate providers:

- a) ensure that all calls will be completed?

No. However, contracts with intermediate providers are for the purpose of completing calls and Integra’s expectation is that calls handed off to intermediate providers will be completed.

- b) require that if the intermediate carrier cannot complete the call, it must be handed back for completion?

No.

- c) ensure that the intermediate carrier is not providing a false ring back?

No. However, contracts contain general provisions that require compliance with the law.

d) require that the intermediate carrier is not changing the originating number?

No. However, contracts contain general provisions that require compliance with the law.

e) establish how quickly a call must be completed to the terminating end-user?

No.

13. Do confidentiality clauses in contracts with intermediate providers exist that would prevent the disclosure of information needed to determine where a call failed in the call path? If so, explain why such clauses do, or do not, interfere with resolution of call completion issues.

No. Integra's relationship is with its intermediate providers and Integra does not require information on the relationships its intermediate providers have with other carriers. Integra does expect its intermediate providers to work with it to troubleshoot and resolve call completion problems, when requested, and Integra routinely works with these providers.

14. How should the Commission deal with intrastate calls in which the calling party number has been stripped, or altered so that the call appears interstate when in fact the call is intrastate?

Integra does not take a position on this issue at this time. However, Integra expects the carriers with which it does business to comply with state and federal law.