

MINNESOTA SERVICE QUALITY PLAN

Qwest Corporation d/b/a CenturyLink In Minnesota (“CenturyLink” or “Company”) proposes the following Minnesota Service Quality Plan (“MSQP” or “Plan”) to address the concerns raised by the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (“Commission”) in its Order of September 17, 2024 (“Order”) in Docket No. P-4421/C-20-432, while implementing state policy goals reflected in Minn. Stat. §§ 237.011 and 237.012.

This Plan addresses each area of relief ordered by the Commission, provides the Company’s strategy for providing appropriate relief and adds clarifying language to further Minnesota’s goal to transition from copper-based telecommunications services (currently being abandoned by customers at a rate of 10-15% per year) to high-speed fiber-based services.

1. Out of Service 24 Hours

The Order found the Company in violation of Minn. R. 7810.5800 which provides in relevant part:

Each telephone utility shall make all reasonable efforts to prevent interruptions of service. When interruptions occur, the utility shall reestablish service with the shortest possible delay. The minimum objective should be to clear 95 percent of all out-of-service troubles within 24 hours of the time such troubles are reported....¹

The Commission amended Finding 95 to state:

CenturyLink is in violation of Minn. R. 7810.5800 because the company has not come reasonably close to meeting the minimum standard set forth in the rule. Based on the record, the Commission finds that it is clear the utility has failed to make “all reasonable efforts to prevent interruptions of service” and to reestablish service “with the shortest possible delay.” Meeting these standards is particularly critical to 911 service, and the downward trajectory relative to meeting the 95 percent objective is particularly troubling.

The Commission did not order a specific remedy associated with this finding. Nonetheless, CenturyLink intends to take the following actions to address these concerns:

- a. Hire three new dedicated dispatchers whose duties are to focus on placing the Company’s technician staff in the correct locations to significantly improve performance; and

¹ Minn. R. 7810.5800.

- b. Report performance to the commission every six months for 24 months (“Performance Reports”) following approval of the MSQP.

2. Outside Plant Rehabilitation

The Order required the Company to review and rehabilitate outside plant and equipment to approximately 4,460 customers the Department identified as experiencing four or more troubles within 24 months.² CenturyLink will examine each of those customer accounts and take appropriate action over a 24-month period and report on its progress every six months after the Commission’s final order.

The Company notes that of the 4,460 customers, there are categories of customers where repair or replacement of equipment is likely to be of little benefit to the customer. Those situations include:

- Customers who have dropped service;
- Customers who have not experienced a trouble report for 12 months and for which service appears to be stable;
- Customers who have fiber to the home with a stand-alone voice service available;
- Customers who have alternate services available and are willing to transition to those services.

CenturyLink will identify the actions it has taken line-by-line in its six-month Performance Reports and will identify the customers falling into each category.

3. Rehabilitation of 100-pair cables

The Order requires the Company to review and rehab the 210 100-pair cables that the Department of Commerce (“Department”) expert identified as having a higher level of troubles and to do so within 24 months.³ CenturyLink will undertake this work and report on its progress in the Performance Reports.

² Commission Order, ¶ 3.

³ Order, ¶ 4.

4. Equipment Repair

The Order requires CenturyLink to make repairs promptly to all equipment depicted in the Office of the Attorney General (“OAG”) expert’s photographs.⁴ CenturyLink has resolved all depicted equipment issues and can provide documentation on request.

5. 5-Year Payback

Order requires that CenturyLink to “end its practice of declining to complete maintenance projects for failure to satisfy a five-year payback threshold.”⁵ CenturyLink respectfully states that the record in this case establishes that the Company does not analyze payback time periods for maintenance projects.⁶

CenturyLink will continue to perform maintenance projects without regard to payback periods⁷ but must consider economic considerations such as anticipated revenue and cost when analyzing capital investments. In cases where a capital investment is uneconomic, it will work with the affected customers to ensure they receive adequate service. The Company will include a discussion of any such instances in its Performance Reports.

6. 4-Hour Appointment Window

The Order requires CenturyLink to “schedule repair appointments within a period of no more than four hours.”⁸

CenturyLink recommends that the Commission not maintain its four-hour repair appointment window. Such a requirement will hinder the company’s ability to meet the 95% out of service restoration objective set forth in Minn. R 7810.5800 and will create an increased risk of missed appointments.

7. Plant Pride

The Order requires CenturyLink to institute a Plant Pride program consisting of the following items:

⁴ Order, ¶ 5.

⁵ Order, ¶ 6.

⁶ See Hearing Transcript, 229 (Ardoyno Testimony) (explaining that projects that do not meet payback thresholds may be performed as maintenance expense); Ex 20 (Ardoyno Rebuttal), 9, l. 14-18 (explaining that repairs may be funded out of budgets that do not use a maintenance threshold).

⁷ See Hearing Transcript, 229 (Ardoyno Testimony) (explaining that projects that do not meet payback thresholds may be performed as maintenance expense).

⁸ Order, ¶ 7.

- Modify its existing Proactive Rehab Tracking procedures, or create new procedures to “resolve” all plant rehab reports received from field technicians within 90 days;
- Define the term “resolve” to mean the repair; replacement; or a reasonable alternative resolution, include the possibility of no action, as determined by CenturyLink in consultation with Communications Workers of America (“CWA”);
- Notify the field technician who initially submitted the report of how the report was ultimately resolved;
- Conduct a quarterly meeting between CenturyLink’s director of network service operations for Minnesota and applicable regional leaders and CWA’s area/district leadership to review all reports;
- Educate field technicians about the “Plant Pride” program procedures and keep them informed of the results through communications at the garage level, including through dedicated space to post local results, and encourage CWA’s area/district leadership to educate its members on a regular basis about these new procedures and champion robust participation ⁹

CenturyLink will implement such a program and provide updates on that implementation in its Performance Reports, but suggests that resolving “all” issues within 90 days may be impossible for reasons outside of CenturyLink’s control. At a minimum, force majeure situations should excuse the company from completing all plant pride projects within 90 days. ¹⁰ Further, during winter months, the frozen ground may prevent

⁹ Order, ¶ 8.

¹⁰ Qwest’s Alternative Form of Regulation plan contained language that states:

B. Service Quality Standards and Customer Remedies Apply to Normal Operating Conditions

The service quality standards and customer remedies in this Appendix apply only to normal operating conditions and do not establish a level of performance to be achieved where circumstances are beyond Qwest's control. Qwest is exempted from the otherwise applicable individual customer remedies if it is prevented from meeting a quality of service standard because of conditions caused by persons, things, or events outside the reasonable control of Qwest, that Qwest could not have reasonably anticipated and prevented, or circumstances that endanger the safety of Qwest employees or members of the public, including: (1) delays of a local government unit in granting approval for obtaining easements, permits or access to rights-of-way; where Qwest has made a timely application

various construction activities. Additionally, some solutions require permits, access rights or hard to obtain parts; as such, resolution of such issues may take a longer period of time. The Verizon settlement that formed the basis for this recommendation set a standard of 75% within 90 days.¹¹ A similar standard should be adopted here.

This MSQP provides a reasonable means of addressing the concerns expressed in the Order. The Company therefore respectfully requests that the Commission approve this Plan to resolve this proceeding in a manner consistent with the public interest.

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for any permits; (2) the customer, including but not limited to, no access to customer's premises, delays caused by the customer's construction project or lack of facilities or the customer choosing a later appointment than offered; (3) delays caused by a vendor in the delivery of equipment where Qwest has made a timely order or request; (4) other delays outside the control of Qwest, including, but not limited to, acts of God, explosions or fires, floods, frozen ground, tornadoes, severe weather, epidemics, injunction, war, acts of terrorism, strikes or work stoppages, or negligent or willful misconduct by customers or third parties including outages originating from the introduction of a computer virus onto the provider's network or cable theft. Events caused by Qwest employees or contractors are not outside Qwest's control for the purpose of the Plan.

¹¹ Agreement available online:

<https://documents.dps.ny.gov/public/Common/ViewDoc.aspx?DocRefId=%7BBEB19EB4-5F09-4803-88F3-EA057AD2507F%7D>