

Attachment 4

Docket No. P405-P407/CI-18-
122

Department Comments

Jan. 4, 2019

Southern Minn. towns fed up with telecom service

Business Mark Steil · Ceylon, Minn. · Oct 1, 2018



Residents of Ceylon in southern Minnesota say Frontier Communications should complete this telephone line project in town. Here, a tree is used to support the cables. Many of the lines lay on the ground. Mark Steil | MPR News

You would expect to look up to see Frontier Communications telephone lines in the town of Ceylon, neatly swaying from traditional wood utility poles.

But in parts of town, look down. There they are — black cables snaking through the grass.

"There's three lines there, that are just laying across the ground," said John Gibeau, a Ceylon City Council member. "And they run down for probably another 60 yards."

He gives Frontier's work on this telephone line project a failing grade. It looks like the cables were successfully laid out, but that's it. They've never been buried or attached to a telephone pole.

Nearly 400 people have attended a series of public hearings across Minnesota concerning complaints about Frontier Communications as part of a state Public Utilities Commission investigation of the phone and internet company.



Ceylon City Council Member John Gibeau wants Frontier Communications to complete a telephone line project in the southern Minnesota town. Someone attached this line to a fence post to get it off the grass. Mark Steil | MPR News

- Previously: [Hundreds of complaints about Frontier Communications services prompts public hearings](#)

In Ceylon, the problems with Frontier are in plain sight.

Gibeau points out one line draped across a propane gas tank. When the cable reaches a street, it's elevated so that vehicles don't run over it. But not to a telephone pole. Instead the line is supported by the overhead branches.

"It elevates up into the tree that is now acting as a Frontier telephone pole," Gibeau said. "And so it goes up over the tree, and to the next tree across the street. Through a bunch of branches which isn't safe. And this here actually has been this way for almost three years."

Gibeau said one resident worried about severing a Frontier cable with a lawnmower moved the line from the grass into a flower bed for safety. Another attached a line to a post to get it off the ground. Gibeau said town officials have repeatedly asked Frontier to fix the problems, but so far nothing has happened.

They even reached out to the state attorney general's office for help. Now they're taking their case to the Public Utilities Commission.

Gibeau attended the agency's recent hearing in Slayton concerning Frontier complaints. There he told an administrative law judge that the Ceylon issue is larger than just unsafe cables laying in the grass.

He said the unfinished work symbolizes corporate indifference to the vital work of completing an adequate rural telecommunications network.



Ceylon City Council Member John Gibeau says Frontier Communications failed to complete this telephone line project. The cables have not been buried or attached to poles. This one crosses a propane gas tank. Mark Steil | MPR News

"If we don't have proper internet, you can kiss these small towns goodbye," Gibeau said.

Just how important good communication lines are was demonstrated by another testifier at the Slayton hearing. Last summer a construction crew severed the Frontier cable that serves Dale Burkhardt's southern Minnesota farm. He said it hasn't been fixed yet.

"I still don't have a landline, I don't have an internet," Burkhardt said. "I'm getting a little fed up."

During the summer he runs a crop-spraying service. He estimates he's lost about \$10,000 in business because customers can't reach him.

Frontier representatives at the PUC hearings have repeatedly apologized for problems the company's more than 90,000 Minnesota customers have experienced. They include the unfinished Ceylon project, but also numerous complaints about unreliable internet or phone service.

The company's vice president of communications Javier Mendoza says Frontier is listening.

"For us, one customer who is out of service is one customer too many," Mendoza said. "So, we would thank our customers for their patience. We recognize that from time to time we experience service issues and delays. And for those customers that are affected, we apologize to them."

Mendoza also said Frontier officials will visit Ceylon for a firsthand look. He said it's possible not all the cables on the ground are Frontier lines, but promises to assess the situation.

Gibeau has heard similar promises before in a long career as a public official. At the same time Jesse Ventura shocked the state and the world 20 years ago by winning the Minnesota governor's race, Gibeau shocked Ceylon by winning the mayor's seat at age 21.

He said he won't relent on the Frontier issue.

"You don't do that to my town and think you're going to get away with it."

Public hearings taking comments on Frontier Communications

 [pipestonestar.com/articles/public-hearings-taking-comments-on-frontier-communications/](https://www.pipestonestar.com/articles/public-hearings-taking-comments-on-frontier-communications/)

By Kyle Kuphal | on September 11, 2018

September 11, 2018

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (MPUC) has scheduled public hearings to take comments from consumers as part of its ongoing investigation into telephone services provided by Frontier Communications. The nearest public hearing is scheduled for Sept. 25 at 6 p.m. in the Slayton Public Library at 2451 Broadway. Others are scheduled for Ely, McGregor, Wyoming and Lakeville.



The goal is to collect information about customer experiences and concerns and identify possible remedies.

Those who attend the hearings will be able to voice their concerns to Administrative Law Judge Jeffery Oxley, according to a notice from the Minnesota Department of Commerce. Customers may submit copies of their bills, contract, advertising, letters, notes, recordings or other documents to the judge.

Oxley will submit a report of the information gathered to the MPUC.

Customers can also submit written comments until Oct. 3 at 4:30 p.m. by email to consumer.puc@state.mn.us; by letter to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, 121 Seventh Place East, Suite 350, St. Paul, MN 55101; or by visiting mn.gov/puc and selecting Speak Up!. Customers should reference the docket number CI-18-122 when submitting a comment.

The MPUC initiated its investigation in April into whether Frontier had violated any service quality, customer service or billing practices with its telephone services. MPUC has received hundreds of complaints about Frontier regarding the speed and quality of the installation of services, the response time to calls for repairs and the quality of repairs once they're made, charges made for services not requested or received, the quality of internet and telephone services and more.

State Statute allows the MPUC to investigate telephone companies if government entities or customers lodge complaints about the company's services and fees.

Jasper City Council members lodged a complaint to Frontier in February after indicating at a council meeting that they'd heard complaints from residents and in some cases, had their own complaints. The council sent Frontier a letter detailing those complaints, which included "severe interruptions with phone, cable and internet service" and indicated that support tickets were created but closed by Frontier without resolving the issue, "leaving customers without service for days on end."

The city also expressed concern in the letter that cable pedestal boxes owned and operated by

Frontier around the city “are in dire need of repair,” with missing covers leaving wires exposed and posing a safety hazard to residents and their pets.

Cortney Kounkel, Jasper city clerk/treasurer, said last week that the city never received any communication from Frontier regarding the letter it sent, but that most of the damaged pedestal boxes around town had been repaired after the letter was sent.

Frontier did not respond prior to deadline to a request for comment via its listed media contact for its Midwest service area that includes Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

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