

ORIGINAL



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MEMORANDUM

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TO: Docket Control  
FROM: Ernest G. Johnson  
Director  
Utilities Division

*EA for EGTJ*

DATE: June 14, 2005

RE: IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF COMMPARTNERS, LLC FOR A CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE AND NECESSITY TO PROVIDE FACILITIES-BASED LONG DISTANCE AND LOCAL EXCHANGE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SERVICES (DOCKET NO. T-04251A-04-0257)

Attached is the Staff Report for the above referenced application. The Applicant is applying for approval to provide the following services:

- Facilities-Based Long Distance Services
- Facilities-Based Local Exchange Services

Staff is recommending approval of the application.

/ajl

Originator: Adam Lebrecht

Attachment: Original and Ten Copies

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SERVICE LIST FOR: CommPartners, LLC  
DOCKET NO. T-04251A-04-0257

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STAFF REPORT  
UTILITIES DIVISION  
ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION

COMMPARTNERS, LLC  
DOCKET NO. T-04251A-04-0257

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF COMMPARTNERS, LLC FOR A  
CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE AND NECESSITY TO PROVIDE FACILITIES-  
BASED LONG DISTANCE AND LOCAL EXCHANGE TELECOMMUNICATIONS  
SERVICES

JUNE 2005

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## STAFF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Staff Report for CommPartners, LLC, Docket No. T-04251A-04-0257, was the responsibility of the Staff member listed below. Adam Lebrecht was responsible for the review and analysis of the application for a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity to provide facilities-based long distance and facilities-based local exchange services; and petition for a determination that its proposed services should be classified as competitive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Lebrecht', is written over a horizontal line.

Adam Lebrecht  
Executive Consultant I

## 1. INTRODUCTION

On April 5, 2004, CommPartners, LLC ("CommPartners" or "Applicant") filed an application for a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity ("CC&N") to provide facilities-based long distance and facilities-based local exchange services within the State of Arizona. The Applicant petitioned the Arizona Corporation Commission ("Commission") for a determination that its proposed services should be classified as competitive.

On April 7, 2004, Staff determined that the application was not sufficient and a data request was issued to CommPartners. On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004, CommPartners provided a response to Staff's data request. The Legal Division determined that due to the January 27, 2004 decision in matter No. 1 CA-CV 01-0068, known as the Phelps Dodge matter, before Division 1, Court of Appeals of the State of Arizona, additional information concerning the competitiveness of rates of telecommunications providers was needed. The Legal Division and Staff worked together and developed a list of questions that when answered would detail how the Applicant determined its rates and why the Applicant believes its rates are competitive with other telecommunications service providers in the state of Arizona. On December 17, 2004, Staff issued these questions in its second set of data requests to the Applicant. On January 26, 2005, the Applicant responded to Staff's second data request. On February 24, 2005, the Applicant submitted revised tariff pages indicating that it does not collect advances or deposits from its customers. While reviewing this application, Staff determined that the financial information submitted in the original application was not up to date and did not provide information in a format that was consistent with Commission rules. Staff conveyed this concern to CommPartners. On April 4, 2005, CommPartners submitted financial information that was up to date and in a format that is consistent with Commission rules.

Staff's review of this application addresses the overall fitness of the Applicant to receive a CC&N. Staff's analysis also considers whether the Applicant's services should be classified as competitive and if the Applicant's initial rates are just and reasonable.

## 2. THE APPLICATION FOR A CERTIFICATE OF CONVENIENCE & NECESSITY

This section of the Staff Report contains descriptions of the geographic market to be served by the Applicant, the requested services, and the Applicant's technical and financial capability to provide the requested services. In addition, this section contains the Staff evaluation of the Applicant's proposed rates and charges and Staff's recommendation thereon.

### 2.1 DESCRIPTION OF THE GEOGRAPHIC MARKET TO BE SERVED

CommPartners seeks authority to provide telecommunications services throughout the State of Arizona.

## 2.2 DESCRIPTION OF REQUESTED SERVICES

CommPartners proposes to provide facilities-based long distance and facilities-based local exchange services.

## 2.3 THE ORGANIZATION

CommPartners is incorporated under the laws of the State of Nevada and has authority to transact business in Arizona.

## 2.4 TECHNICAL CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE THE REQUESTED SERVICES

CommPartners indicated that it currently has a staff of 6 employees with a total combined experience of over 75 years in the telecommunications industry. Based on this, Staff believes CommPartners possesses the technical capabilities to provide the services it is requesting the authority to provide.

## 2.5 FINANCIAL CAPABILITY TO PROVIDE THE REQUESTED SERVICES

The Applicant provided unaudited financial statements for the six months ending December 31, 2004. These financial statements list assets of \$13,610,831; equity of \$11,984,946; and a net loss of \$2,101,901. The Applicant did provide notes related to the financial statements.

The Applicant stated in its Tariff (reference Sections 2.5 and 2.6 of Tariff No. 1 and Section 2.6.5 of Tariff No. 2) that it does collect advances, deposits and/or prepayments from its customers. Staff believes that the Applicant's customers should be protected by the procurement of a performance bond. Since the Applicant is requesting a CC&N for more than one kind of service, the amount of the performance bond is an aggregate of the minimum bond amount for each type of telecommunications service requested by the Applicant. The amount of bond coverage needed for each service is as follows: facilities-based long distance \$100,000; and facilities-based local exchange \$100,000. The bond coverage needs to increase in increments equal to 50 percent of the total minimum bond amount when the total amount of the advances, deposits, and/or prepayments is within 10 percent of the total minimum bond amount.

To that end, Staff recommends that the Applicant procure a performance bond in the amount of \$200,000. The minimum bond amount of \$200,000 should be increased if at any time it would be insufficient to cover advances, deposits, and/or prepayments collected from the Applicant's customers. The bond amount should be increased in increments of \$100,000. This increase should occur when the total amount of the

advances, deposits, and prepayments is within \$20,000 of the bond amount. If the Applicant desires to discontinue service, it must file an application with the Commission pursuant to AAC R14-2-1107. Additionally, the Applicant must notify each of its customers and the Commission 60 days prior to filing an application to discontinue service. Failure to meet this requirement should result in forfeiture of the Applicant's performance bond. Staff further recommends that proof of the above mentioned performance bond be docketed within 365 days of the effective date of an Order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

## 2.6 ESTABLISHING RATES AND CHARGES

The Applicant would initially be providing service in areas where an incumbent local exchange carrier ("ILEC"), along with various competitive local exchange carriers ("CLECs") and interexchange carriers are providing telephone service. Therefore, the Applicant would have to compete with those providers in order to obtain subscribers to its services. The Applicant would be a new entrant and would face competition from both an incumbent provider and other competitive providers in offering service to its potential customers. Therefore, the Applicant would generally not be able to exert market power. Thus, the competitive process should result in rates that are just and reasonable.

Both an initial rate (the actual rate to be charged) and a maximum rate must be listed for each competitive service offered, provided that the rate for the service is not less than the Company's total service long-run incremental cost of providing the service pursuant to AAC R14-2-1109.

The rates proposed by this filing are for competitive services. In general, rates for competitive services are not set according to rate of return regulation. Staff obtained information from the company and has determined that its fair value rate base is zero. Staff has reviewed the rates to be charged by the Applicant and believes they are just and reasonable as they are comparable to the rates of other competitive local carriers, local incumbant carriers and major long distance companies offering service in Arizona. Accordingly, the company's fair value rate base is too small to be useful in a fair value analysis. In addition, the rate to be ultimately charged by the company will be heavily influenced by the market. Therefore, while Staff considered the fair value rate base information submitted by the company, it did not accord that information substantial weight in its analysis.

## 3. LOCAL EXCHANGE CARRIER SPECIFIC ISSUES

Since the Applicant intends to provide local exchange service, the issues related to the provision of that service are discussed below.

### 3.1 DIRECTORY LISTINGS AND DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE

Callers should be able to determine the telephone numbers belonging to customers of alternative local exchange companies, such as the Applicant. Staff recommends that the Applicant file a plan indicating how it plans to have its customers' telephone numbers included in the incumbent's Directories and Directory Assistance databases before it begins providing local exchange service. This plan shall be docketed within 365 days of the effective date of the Order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

### 3.2 NUMBER PORTABILITY

Another issue associated with the Applicant's proposal to become a competitive local exchange company relates to how telephone numbers should be administered. Local exchange competition may not be vigorous if customers, especially business customers, must change their telephone numbers to take advantage of a competitive local exchange carrier's service offerings. Staff recommends that the Applicant pursue permanent number portability arrangements with other local exchange carriers ("LECs") that are consistent with federal laws, federal rules and state rules.

### 3.3 PROVISION OF BASIC TELEPHONE SERVICE AND UNIVERSAL SERVICE

The Commission has adopted rules to address the level of funding for universal telephone service during and after the transition to a competitive telecommunications services market. The rules contain the terms and conditions for contributions to and support received from telephone service subscribers in order to maintain the Arizona Universal Service Fund ("AUSF"). Under the rules, the Applicant will be required to contribute to the AUSF and it may be eligible for AUSF support. Therefore, Staff recommends that approval of the application for a CC&N be conditioned upon the Applicant's agreement to abide by and participate in the AUSF mechanism established by Decision No. 59623, dated April 24, 1996 (Docket No. RT-00000E-95-0498).

### 3.4 QUALITY OF SERVICE

Staff believes that the Applicant should be ordered to abide by the quality of service standards that were approved by the Commission for Qwest (f/k/a USWC) in Docket No. T-01051B-93-0183 (Decision No. 59421). Because the penalties that were developed in this docket were initiated only because Qwest's level of service was not satisfactory, Staff does not recommend that those penalties apply to the Applicant. In the competitive market that the Applicant wishes to enter, the Applicant generally will have no market power and will be forced to provide a satisfactory level of service or risk

losing its customers. Therefore, Staff believes that it is unnecessary to subject the Applicant to those penalties at this time.

### 3.5 ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICE PROVIDERS

Staff expects that there will be new entrant providers of local exchange service who will install the plant necessary to provide telephone service to, for example, a residential subdivision or an industrial park much like existing local exchange companies do today. There may be areas where the Applicant installs the only local exchange service facilities. In the interest of providing competitive alternatives to the Applicant's local exchange service customers, Staff recommends that the Applicant be prohibited from barring access to alternative local exchange service providers who wish to serve such areas. This way, an alternative local exchange service provider may serve a customer if the customer so desires. Access to other providers should be provided pursuant to the provisions of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the rules promulgated there under and Commission rules on interconnection and unbundling.

### 3.6 911 SERVICE

The Applicant indicated in its application that it will provide all customers with 911 and E911 service, where available, or will coordinate with ILECs and emergency service providers to provide the service. Staff believes that the Applicant should be required to work cooperatively with local governments, public safety agencies, telephone companies, the National Emergency Number Association and all other concerned parties to establish a systematic process in the development of a universal emergency telephone number system. Staff recommends that the Applicant be required to certify, through the 911 service provider in the area in which it intends to provide service, that all issues associated with the provision of 911 service have been resolved with the emergency service providers before it begins to provide local exchange service, within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

### 3.7 CUSTOM LOCAL AREA SIGNALING SERVICES

In its decisions related to Qwest's proposal to offer Caller ID and other CLASS features in the State, the Commission addressed a number of issues regarding the appropriateness of offering these services and under what circumstances it would approve the proposals to offer them. The Commission concluded that Caller ID could be offered provided that per call and line blocking, with the capability to toggle between blocking and unblocking the transmission of the telephone number, should be provided as options to which customers could subscribe with no charge. The Commission also approved a Last Call Return service that will not return calls to telephone numbers that have the privacy indicator activated, which indicates that the number has been blocked. The

Commission further required that Qwest engage in education programs when introducing or providing the service(s).

Staff recommends that the Applicant be required to abide by all the Commission decisions and policies regarding Caller ID and other CLASS services. However, Staff does not believe that it is necessary for the Applicant to engage in the educational program that was ordered for Qwest as long as customers in the areas where the Applicant intends to serve have already been provided with educational material and are aware that they can have their numbers blocked on each call or at all times with line blocking.

### 3.8 EQUAL ACCESS FOR INTEREXCHANGE CARRIERS

Although the Applicant indicated that its switch will be “fully equal access capable” (i.e. would provide equal access to interexchange companies), the Commission requires local exchange companies to provide 2-Primary Interexchange Carriers (“2-PIC”) equal access. 2-PIC equal access allows customers to choose different carriers for interLATA and intraLATA toll service and would allow customers to originate intraLATA calls using the preferred carrier on a 1+ basis. Staff recommends that the Applicant be required to provide 2-PIC equal access.

## 4. REVIEW OF COMPLAINT INFORMATION

The Applicant has neither had an application for service denied, nor revoked in any state. There are, and have been, no formal complaint proceedings involving the Applicant. There have not been any civil or criminal proceedings against the Applicant. Consumer Services reports no complaint history within Arizona.

The Applicant indicated that none of its officers, directors or partners have been involved in any civil or criminal investigations, formal or informal complaints. The applicant also indicated that none of its officers, directors or partners have been convicted of any criminal acts in the past ten (10) years.

## 5. COMPETITIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS

The Applicant has petitioned the Commission for a determination that the services it is seeking to provide should be classified as competitive. The Applicant has published legal notice of the application in all the counties which it is requesting the authorization to provide service. The Applicant has certified that all notification requirements have been completed. Staff's analysis and recommendations are discussed below.

### 5.1 COMPETITIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS FOR LOCAL EXCHANGE SERVICES

**5.1.1 A description of the general economic conditions that exist, which makes the relevant market for the service one that, is competitive.**

The local exchange market that the Applicant seeks to enter is one in which a number of new CLECs have been authorized to provide local exchange service. Nevertheless, ILECs hold a virtual monopoly in the local exchange service market. At locations where ILECs provide local exchange service, the Applicant will be entering the market as an alternative provider of local exchange service and, as such, the Applicant will have to compete with those companies in order to obtain customers. In areas where ILECs do not serve customers, the Applicant may have to convince developers to allow it to provide service to their developments. Staff recommends that, in those instances where the Applicant provides the only facilities used to provide telecommunications service, that the Applicant be required to allow other local exchange companies to use those facilities to serve customers who wish to obtain service from an alternative provider pursuant to federal laws, federal rules and state rules.

**5.1.2 The number of alternative providers of the service.**

Qwest and various independent LECs are the primary providers of local exchange service in the State. Several CLECs and local exchange resellers are also providing local exchange service.

**5.1.3 The estimated market share held by each alternative provider of the service.**

Since Qwest and the independent LECs are the primary providers of local exchange service in the State, they have a large share of the market. Since the CLECs and local exchange resellers have only recently been authorized to offer service they have limited market share.

**5.1.4 The names and addresses of any alternative providers of the service that are also affiliates of the telecommunications Applicant, as defined in AAC R14-2-801.**

None.

**5.1.5 The ability of alternative providers to make functionally equivalent or substitute services readily available at competitive rates, terms and conditions.**

ILECs have the ability to offer the same services that the Applicant has requested in their respective service territories. Similarly many of the CLECs and local exchange resellers also offer substantially similar services.

**5.1.6 Other indicators of market power, which may include growth and shifts in market share, ease of entry and exit, and any affiliation between and among alternative providers of the service(s).**

The local exchange service market is:

- a. One in which ILECs own networks that reach nearly every residence and business in their service territories and which provide them with a virtual monopoly over local exchange service. New entrants are also beginning to enter this market.
- b. One in which new entrants will be dependent upon ILECs:
  1. To terminate traffic to customers.
  2. To provide essential local exchange service elements until the entrant's own network has been built.
  3. To interconnect.
- c. One in which ILECs have had an existing relationship with their customers that the new entrants will have to overcome if they want to compete in the market and one in which new entrants do not have a long history with any customers.
- d. One in which Qwest provides a quality of service that has generated a significant number of complaints. These complaints led the Commission to adopt service quality rules that contain penalties if the service quality standards are not met. A provider of alternative service, such as the Applicant, should provide Qwest--as well as other incumbents--with the incentive to produce higher quality service including service installation and repair on a timely basis.
- e. One in which most customers have few, if any choices since there is generally only one provider of local exchange service in each service territory.
- f. One in which the Applicant will not have the capability to adversely affect prices or restrict output to the detriment of telephone service subscribers.

## 5.2 COMPETITIVE SERVICES ANALYSIS FOR INTEREXCHANGE SERVICES

### 5.2.1 **A description of the general economic conditions that exist, which makes the relevant market for the service one that, is competitive.**

The interexchange market that the Applicant seeks to enter is one in which numerous facilities-based and resold interexchange carriers have been authorized to provide service throughout the State. The Applicant will be a new entrant in this market and, as such, will have to compete with those companies in order to obtain customers.

**5.2.2 The number of alternative providers of the service.**

There are a large number of facilities-based and resold interexchange carriers providing both interLATA and intraLATA interexchange service throughout the State. In addition, various ILECs provide intraLATA interexchange service in many areas of the State.

**5.2.3 The estimated market share held by each alternative provider of the service.**

The large facilities-based interexchange carriers (AT&T, Sprint, etc.) hold a majority of the interLATA interexchange market, and the ILECs provide a large portion of the intraLATA interexchange market. Numerous other interexchange carriers have a smaller part of the market and one in which new entrants do not have a long history with any customers.

**5.2.4 The names and addresses of any alternative providers of the service that are also affiliates of the telecommunications Applicant, as defined in AAC R14-2-801.**

None.

**5.2.5 The ability of alternative providers to make functionally equivalent or substitute services readily available at competitive rates, terms and conditions.**

Both facilities-based and resold interexchange carriers have the ability to offer the same services that the Applicant has requested in their respective service territories. Similarly many of the ILECs offer similar intraLATA toll services.

**5.2.6 Other indicators of market power, which may include growth and shifts in market share, ease of entry and exit, and any affiliation between and among alternative providers of the service(s).**

The interexchange service market is:

- a. One with numerous competitors and limited barriers to entry.
- b. One in which established interexchange carriers have had an existing relationship with their customers that the new entrants will have to overcome if they want to compete in the market.
- c. One in which the Applicant will not have the capability to adversely affect prices or restrict output to the detriment of telephone service subscribers.

**6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following sections contain the Staff recommendations on the application for a CC&N and the Applicant's petition for a Commission determination that its proposed services should be classified as competitive.

#### 6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE APPLICATION FOR A CC&N

Staff recommends that CommPartner's application for a CC&N to provide intrastate telecommunications services, as listed in Section 2.2 of this Report, be granted. In addition, Staff further recommends:

1. That, unless it provides services solely through the use of its own facilities, the Applicant procure an Interconnection Agreement before being allowed to offer local exchange service. The interconnection agreement should be procured within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission. If the Applicant provides services solely through the use of its own facilities, no other information shall be required once the Applicant informs the Commission of that fact by a letter with the Commission's Docket Control Center under the same timeframe and provision of service criteria as above;
2. That the Applicant file, with the Commission's Docket Control Center its plan to have its customers' telephone numbers included in the incumbent's Directories and Directory Assistance databases. This information should be filed within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission;
3. That the Applicant pursue permanent number portability arrangements with other LECs pursuant to Commission rules, federal laws and federal rules;
4. That the Applicant agree to abide by and participate in the AUSF mechanism instituted in Decision No. 59623, dated April 24, 1996 (Docket No. RT-00000E-95-0498);
5. That the Applicant abides by the quality of service standards that were approved by the Commission for Qwest in Docket No. T-01051B-93-0183;
6. That the Applicant be prohibited from barring access to alternative local exchange service providers who wish to serve areas where the Applicant is the only provider of local exchange service facilities;
7. That the Applicant be required to certify, through the 911 service provider in the area in which it intends to provide service, that all issues associated with the provision of 911 service have been resolved with the emergency service providers, within 365 days of the effective date of the order in this matter or 30

- days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission;
8. That the Applicant be required to abide by all the Commission decisions and policies regarding CLASS services;
  9. That the Applicant be required to provide 2-PIC equal access;
  10. That the Applicant be required to notify the Commission immediately upon changes to the Applicant's name, address or telephone number;
  11. That the Applicant comply with all Commission rules, orders, and other requirements relevant to the provision of intrastate telecommunications service;
  12. That the Applicant maintain its accounts and records as required by the Commission;
  13. That the Applicant file with the Commission all financial and other reports that the Commission may require, and in a form and at such times as the Commission may designate;
  14. That the Applicant maintain on file with the Commission all current tariffs and rates, and any service standards that the Commission may require;
  15. That the Applicant cooperate with Commission investigations including, but not limited to customer complaints;
  16. That the Applicant be subject to the Commission's rules governing interconnection and unbundling and the 1996 Telecommunications Act and the rules promulgated thereunder. In the event that the Applicant provides essential services or facilities that potential competitors need in order to provide their services, the Applicant should be required to offer those facilities or services to these providers on non-discriminatory terms and conditions pursuant to federal laws, federal rules, and state rules;
  17. The rates proposed by this filing are for competitive services. In general, rates for competitive services are not set according to rate of return regulation. Staff obtained information from the company and has determined that its fair value rate base is zero. Staff has reviewed the rates to be charged by the Applicant and believes they are just and reasonable as they are comparable to other competitive local carriers, local incumbent carriers and major long distance companies offering service in Arizona. Accordingly, the company's fair value rate base is too small to be useful in a fair value analysis. In addition, the rate to be ultimately charged by the company will be heavily influenced by the market. Therefore, while Staff considered the fair value rate base information submitted by the company, the fair value information provided should not be given substantial weight in this analysis;

18. The Applicant should be ordered to file an application with the Commission pursuant to AAC R14-2-1107, if the Applicant desires to discontinue service. The Applicant should be required to notify each of its local exchange customers and the Commission 60 days prior to filing an application to discontinue service; and any failure to do so should result in forfeiture of the Applicant's performance bond.

Staff further recommends that the Applicant be ordered to comply with the following. If it does not do so, the Applicant's CC&N shall be null and void without further order of the Commission and no time extensions shall be granted.

1. The Applicant shall docket conforming tariffs for each service within its CC&N within 365 days from the date of an Order in this matter or 30 days prior to providing service, whichever comes first, and in accordance with the Decision; and
2. The Applicant shall:
  - a. procure a performance bond equal to \$200,000. The minimum bond amount of \$200,000 should be increased if at any time it would be insufficient to cover advances, deposits, and/or prepayments collected from the Applicant's customers. The bond amount should be increased in increments of \$100,000. This increase should occur when the total amount of the advances, deposits, and prepayments is within \$20,000 of the bond amount.
  - b. docket proof of the performance bond within 365 days of the effective date of an Order in this matter or 30 days prior to the provision of service, whichever comes first, and must remain in effect until further order of the Commission.

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATION ON THE APPLICANT'S PETITION TO HAVE ITS PROPOSED SERVICES CLASSIFIED AS COMPETITIVE

Staff believes that the Applicant's proposed services should be classified as competitive. There are alternatives to the Applicant's services. The Applicant will have to convince customers to purchase its services, and the Applicant has no ability to adversely affect the local exchange or interexchange service markets. Therefore, the Applicant currently has no market power in the local exchange or interexchange service markets where alternative providers of telecommunications services exist. Staff therefore recommends that the Applicant's proposed services be classified as competitive.