



Control Number: 50664



Item Number: 11

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March 19, 2020

Central Records Filing Clerk  
Public Utility Commission of Texas  
1701 N. Congress Avenue  
Austin, Texas 78701

Re: Project No. 50664; *Issues Related to the State of Disaster for the Coronavirus Disease 2019*; Project No. 37277,  
*Project for Submitting Emergency Operations Plan and Notification of Emergency Operations Exercises*

Dear Filing Clerk:

Hill Country Telephone Cooperative, Inc. and its affiliates (collectively, "HCTC") provide this response to the Public Utility Commission of Texas' (Commission) request for interested parties to inform the Commission of initiatives related to COVID-19. HCTC understands the dynamic and rapidly changing nature of the coronavirus pandemic and continues to closely monitor local, state and federal authorities for guidance. We appreciate the efforts of the State of Texas and this Commission to actively monitor the numerous issues surrounding this outbreak. We also understand that our customers' daily lifestyles have drastically and necessarily changed and many of our customers are working from home or choosing to stay home rather than interact in public venues.

This new reality means that our customers now depend more than ever on our Internet and telecommunication services. Therefore, we wish to briefly inform the Commission that HCTC remains committed to providing a safe environment in and out of the workplace in order to continue providing robust broadband and telecommunications service to our customers. HCTC employees in customer-facing roles routinely receive training in safety precautions and will continue to exercise these daily safety procedures whether in our retail offices, or in our customers' homes or businesses. In addition to protective safety wear and supplies provided in all company offices and vehicles, employees who are not feeling well or exhibit potential symptoms of coronavirus have been instructed to not come to work.

HCTC continues to provide regular updates to its employees and has advised employees to stay informed about the facts of the virus from reliable sources such as the CDC (i.e. - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>). We are also requiring employees to practice 'social distancing' while utilizing preventive measures such as the following:

- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap. Use hand sanitizer often.
- Cover a cough. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, then dispose of it. If no tissue is handy, cough or sneeze into your elbow rather than into your hands.
- Don't share dishes, glasses, or eating utensils.
- Avoid direct contact with napkins, tissues, handkerchiefs, or similar items used by others.
- Avoid using other employees' phones, desks, offices or other work tools and equipment.
- Keep work surfaces, telephones, computer equipment and other frequently touched surfaces and office equipment clean.
- Avoid shaking hands. If you do shake hands, use hand sanitizer or wash hands afterward.

As we continue to monitor the rapidly changing environment of local, state, and national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, our greatest concern continues to be the safety of our employees and customers. With this in mind and after much consideration, we decided to temporarily close our retail lobbies in each office, effective Wednesday, March 18, 2020. HCTC has informed its customers of its commitment to provide continuity of service



while maintaining precautions to ensure the health and safety of both our employees and customers. We have also informed customers of a variety of avenues they have available to them to conduct business with us – outside of the traditional face-to-face business office visit, including calling us via our toll-free number, online chat, emailing us, paying their bill electronically either through our website payment portal, by phone, or via one of our drop boxes located at our retail locations.

HCTC is proactively evaluating potential teleworking and flexible leave policies to accommodate any employee who is unable to come into the office due to potential exposure or due to school and day care closures. We are also working on additional measures to protect outside plant personnel who interface with customers at their homes and businesses.

Last week, the Federal Communications Commission issued a press release detailing its efforts to ensure that during the current pandemic, Americans who are affected will not lose access to their broadband or telephone connectivity. The FCC has termed this effort the "Keep Americans Connected Pledge." Within 24 hours of the FCC's outreach to the industry seeking support for this effort, HCTC signed onto the pledge and was listed in the FCC's press release along with a number of companies from across the nation supporting the measure, including AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, T-Mobile and a number of other smaller regional providers.

As part of this pledge, HCTC has agreed that for the next 60 days we will:

- (1) not terminate service to any residential or small business customers because of their inability to pay their bills due to the disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic;
- (2) waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the coronavirus pandemic; and
- (3) open its Wi-Fi hotspots to any American who needs them.

In addition to the commitments made through his pledge, HCTC is proactively working to find creative solutions to assist our local school districts to serve students and their families who may not currently have internet service at home. To enact distance learning curricula in the face of school closures, students and teachers alike will be heavily reliant on reliable broadband connections to remain productive and complete required coursework. HCTC is committed to assisting our schools in addressing this critical need.

Please be advised that HCTC is operating under its Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), Level 1. As such, a copy of this letter is being filed in Project No. 37277. Any reports of updates on the status of operations, outages or restoration efforts, if any, will be filed in Project No. 37277, consistent with 16 TAC §26.51.

We will continue to monitor developments and recommendations from the CDC, WHO, the Surgeon General and the President's Coronavirus Taskforce. As news develops, we are communicating new guidelines and cautions to our employees and continue to develop and refine our internal procedures and response plans. While our primary concern remains the health and safety of our employees and customers, we are doing our part to ensure continuity of service that our customers can rely on as we all traverse these uncharted waters together.

HCTC appreciates the opportunity to provide this update to the Commission. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (830) 367-5333.

Respectfully,



R. Craig Cook  
Chief Executive Officer