



Control Number: 50664



Item Number: 41

Addendum StartPage: 0



Enhance the lives of our customers through  
outstanding service and communications technology



March 20, 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*

Dear Filing Clerk:

Brazoria Telephone Company and its affiliates (collectively, "Btel") wish to inform the Commission of the efforts we are making to support our customers, employees and community during this difficult time. We have been actively monitoring guidance from local, state and federal authorities, and assessing the potential impacts of COVID-19 on our company and community. Btel is grateful for the information and guidance provided by our government officials and healthcare providers in helping us understand the appropriate actions necessary to protect our customers, employees and community.

During this time when employers are encouraging employees to work from home and government officials at all levels are encouraging citizens to exercise social distancing tactics to prevent the transmission of COVID-19, Btel understands the uniquely important role we have as a communications provider. Thanks to our substantial investments in fiber technology, the advanced communications network Btel operates will enable customers across our rural service territory to practice the recommended social distancing by working remotely, accessing remote or distance learning tools for their families, engaging in online commerce to obtain the supplies they need, and/or utilizing telemedicine resources. Btel is working actively to ensure that we continue to supply these critical services to our customers for the duration of this emergency.

Immediately after learning of the potential threat of COVID-19, Btel management began communicating with each department to determine the appropriate actions necessary to mitigate the threat, maintain our high standard of service to our customers, and reinforce our commitment to meeting our customers internet and communications needs. Additional supplies such as gloves, masks, cleaning supplies and handwashing supplies were purchased to meet the anticipated increased need for these items.

Btel issued an e-mail to all employees informing them that the company was enforcing the guidelines adopted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The decision was made to close our office to walk-in customers and ask customers to transact business through the company's drop box, via telephone, or online. Btel requested all employees to inform supervisors of any illnesses and encouraged employees to exercise best practices for decreasing the spread of bacteria and/or viruses including, but not limited to, staying at home if sick, washing hands regularly, and other precautionary actions consistent with the company's Emergency Operations Plan's pandemic procedures and current CDC and World Health Organization guidelines.

Btel participated in a conference call with other members of the Texas Telephone Association (TTA) to discuss TTA activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic. During that meeting, TTA provided critical information to members related to recent actions taken by the Commission during the emergency open meeting held on March 16, 2020 and asked members to keep the Commission informed on any actions taken in response to the COVID-19 virus by filing updates in the above-referenced project through the Commission's E-File system.

On March 18, 2020, Btel informed its national association, NTCA, the Rural Broadband Association, that it was participating in the Federal Communications Commission's Keep Americans Connected Pledge.



Under this pledge, Btel will 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 COVID-19 pandemic. Btel has also pledged to waive any late fees that any residential or small business customers incur because of their economic circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding opening Wi-Fi hotspots, Btel does not currently operate any Wi-Fi hotspots but is working with local officials and schools to see if we can offer such assistance.

On March 18, 2020, Btel provided the attached COVID-19 Press Release and the Btel Customer Notification to the public outlining further measures the Company is implementing to ensure our ability to continue to provide critical services to our customers in a responsible manner. To the extent necessary, Btel may issue additional press releases in the future as we determine this is necessary to assist our communities.

Also, on March 18, 2020, Btel provided the attached notification to all employees implementing practices to address specifics of the virus. Human Resources conducted training for all employees to explain and demonstrate these best practices.

On March 19, 2020, Btel management made the decision to offer an upgraded internet speed for all customers experiencing increased need for working or studying from home. This increase will be at no additional cost to the customer and will remain in effect for 60 days.

Btel continues to monitor governmental agencies' websites including the Governor's Office, the Texas Department of State Health Services, the CDC, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Public Utility Commission, and will take further actions, as appropriate, to protect our customers and our employees.

Btel appreciates the important role that the Commission plays in protecting the public interest during this critical time and is committed to working with the Commission to address important issues during this pandemic. To the extent necessary, Btel requests a waiver of any tariff provisions or Commission rules that might otherwise require the disconnection of service for nonpayment or the imposition of fees or charges related to any of the above measures we are taking to assist our customers.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at (979)798-2121 or at [charlie@btel.com](mailto:charlie@btel.com).

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Charles H. Greenberg', is written over a horizontal line.

Charles H. Greenberg  
President & CEO

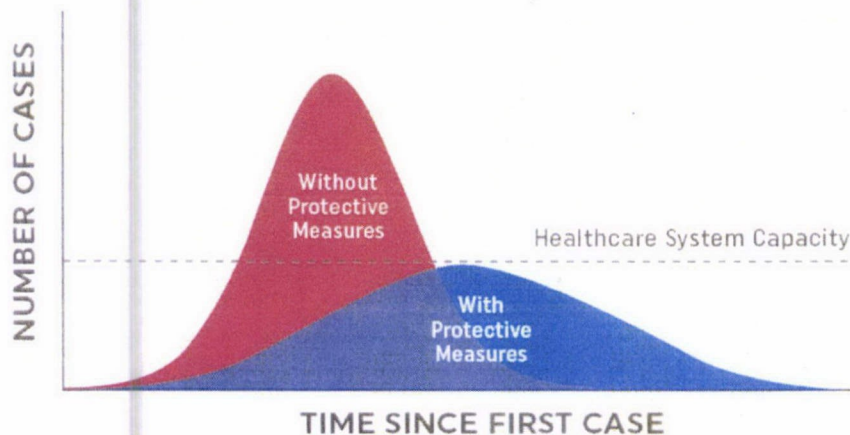
Attachments

## **Btel Press Release – March 18, 2020**

### **Btel takes steps to protect against COVID-19**

At Btel, we value the health and safety of our customers above all else, which is why we are closely monitoring events concerning COVID-19 (coronavirus). We are fortunate that, as of yet, our service area has had no reported cases of COVID-19. But it is still important for all of us to do our part to prevent the spread of the virus.

While taking protective measures may not prevent people from getting the virus, it can help reduce the number of patients our health care system must treat in a short period of time. As the graph below shows, taking measures to protect against COVID-19 can spread the number of cases across a longer period, ensuring that health care providers have the resources to help everyone who needs it.



With that in mind, Btel is taking the following steps, in accordance with CDC guidelines, to protect both our employees and our customers:

- Btel employees who feel sick are being instructed to stay home.
- We are directing employees to cancel any work-related flights and to reschedule any work trips.
- Employees who work directly with customers should avoid shaking hands or making any physical contact.
- We will be providing additional disinfectant products to employees in the office and posting additional reminders for employees to wash their hands often.
- All employees are asked to take proper precautions to ensure the safety of themselves and those around them.





Btel also offers a variety of ways to help you pay your bill from home, as shown below.

## **PAYING YOUR BTTEL BILL FROM HOME IS EASY!**



### **SMARTHUB**

Log in to your SmartHub account to pay your bill. You can manage your account 24/7, set up payments, check usage and much more. There is even an easy-to-use app you can download for FREE to your smartphone.



### **PAY BY PHONE**

With Secure Pay, you can pay by credit card, debit card or checking account by simply calling (844)849-1514. Or you can give us a call at (979) 798-2121 during regular business hours 8-5 Monday - Friday. We will verify your identity, confirm your monthly bill amount and proceed with payment options.



### **PAY BY MAIL**

If paying by mail, include a signed check for the amount listed on your monthly bill. Please include your bill stub with the check and mail to Btel, PO Box 2008, Brazoria TX 77422.

*or feel free to drop your payment into the drop box at our office.*

In addition, we encourage all of our customers to take steps to protect themselves and their families:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Put distance between yourself and other people where possible.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough, or use the inside of your elbow.
- If you are sick, wear a face mask around other people. If you are not sick or caring for someone who is, you do not need a face mask, and they should be saved for caregivers.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, handles, phones and keyboards daily.

We will continue to monitor this situation closely and explore further measures to support our customers and the community as needed. Follow us on social media for updates and visit the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) for more information about COVID-19.



3/18/2020

To all Employees:

We have been working diligently to stay on top of news regarding the Coronavirus (COVID-19). In an effort to protect everyone's health and safety, we are implementing the following practices to address the specifics of this virus.

**Effective immediately we are:**

- **Banning non-essential business travel.** Essential business travel would be considered: travel to a customer site where the customer requires service or has experienced a service disruption that cannot be addressed via remote troubleshooting. All other travel should be considered non-essential. If you feel you have essential travel that is not clearly covered by the definition, please contact your supervisor to discuss.
- **Establishing a series of questions to ask customers to determine when a customer may have health concerns that would require service personnel to take extra precautionary measures.** For the safety of our field personnel, customers may be asked if they or anyone in their household are experiencing any illness that might put our technicians at risk. If they respond yes, we will take all reasonable steps to assist the customer remotely. If the service requires a premises visit, we will require the dispatched technician to exercise additional precautions before entering the premises.
- **Requiring quarantine, for a minimum 14-day period, all employees who have traveled or who live within a household where a household member has traveled to any country with a CDC Level 2 or 3 [Travel Warning](#), or who has disembarked from a cruise ship, within the past 14 days.** At this time, staff will be required to utilize PTO time for the quarantine period unless it is determined that they can work remotely.
- **Strongly encouraging the use of phone, email and/or video conferencing in place of in-person meetings with other staff, business associates and/or member-customers.** We are presently placing door signs on all business office locations to encourage visitors to reach us via email, phone, Teams, or via Facebook messenger or other platforms.
- **Establishing social distancing protocols.** Social distancing is required to help slow the spread of COVID-19. Under no circumstances should employees be convening with each other or with customers without leaving three to six feet distance between them. Employees who work with customers should avoid shaking hands or making any physical contact.
- **Employee Personal Travel.** Employees must notify Btel Human Resources prior to any out of state travel or travel to an area with a severe outbreak of COVID-19, so we may consider any potential risk to our employees and customers. Btel will determine whether the employee must follow certain protocols prior to returning to work.



- **Requiring employees who visit an area with a high-risk factor or severe outbreak to contact HR prior to returning to the office.** This also includes those employees who reside with a person that has visited high-risk areas.
- **Require that any employee who has been exposed to the coronavirus to self-quarantine at home for 14 days.**
- **Continuing to require employees who exhibit signs of illness to stay home and report to HR.**
- **Continuing to enforce CDC guidelines.** The CDC has urged the halt of gatherings of 10 or more people for the next 8 weeks. Please refer to the [CDC's website](#) for further information and a more comprehensive collection of best practices.

We will continue to monitor what is happening in our communities and do our very best to provide information that addresses what we know and how that might affect our staff and service procedures.

Time-off requests during the pandemic are still subject to approval and existing time-off policies.

If you have any questions or concerns about the Btel's pandemic response activities, please contact your supervisor or a member of the management team.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charlie Greenberg". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Charlie Greenberg