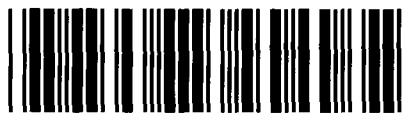




Control Number: 50664



Item Number: 6

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Russell A. Moore  
General Manager/COO  
432.364.0089  
rusty.moore@bigbend.com

March 18, 2020

Public Utility Commission of Texas ("Commission")  
1701 N. Congress Ave.  
Austin, Texas 78701

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

Big Bend Telephone Company, Inc. and its affiliates (collectively, "BBT") stand by the residents of Texas and its customers during this difficult time. We extend our deepest sympathies to those impacted by the COVID-19, and our gratitude to the health care workers and officials from across the state who are working diligently to help our fellow Texans.

We recognize that it is more important now than ever for Texans to stay connected. During these trying times, high quality telecommunications services are allowing people all across the state to work from home, use remote or distance learning, engage in online commerce to obtain the supplies they need, and—perhaps most importantly given the nature of this crisis—access telemedicine resources. Appropriate social distancing would not be possible for many Texans without such connectivity. Connectivity challenges are felt especially sharply in high-cost areas such as BBT's extremely rural, extremely sparsely-populated, mountainous territory. Because BBT has invested in infrastructure in this area for decades, we are able to provide needed telecommunications services to individual customers, businesses, hospitals, schools and libraries, law enforcement, and other crucial services across our territory for the duration of this crisis. Considering that BBT serves about ¼ of the U.S./Mexico land border, reliability is crucial.

During this time of great need, BBT has implemented the following voluntary measures to assist customers impacted by COVID-19:

- We have informed Shawn Hazard, Emergency Management Coordinator, of BBT's initial action, its Emergency Operations Plan ("EOP") and the pandemic section thereof, and past pandemic drills.
- BBT is operating under its EOP Level 1. A copy of this letter is being filed in Project No. 37277, and reports of updates on the status of operations, outages or restoration efforts, if any, will also be filed in Project No. 37277 consistent with 16 TAC § 26.51. Any outages will also be reported to [outages@puc.texas.gov](mailto:outages@puc.texas.gov) and in Project No. 37275.
- We have signed onto the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") [Keep Americans Connected Pledge](#).
  - Deposits will be waived for new or upgrading customers who report to us that they need new or additional services but are unable to provide deposits because their incomes are impacted by COVID-19.

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- We are not disconnecting the services of any customers who let us know they are unable to pay because of COVID-19.
  - No late payment charges will be assessed, and late payments will not be reported to credit reporting agencies, while the state disaster declaration is in place.
  - Early cancellation penalties are waived during this disaster.
  - We will make every effort to accommodate deferred payment plans and flexible payment arrangements for customers who let us know they are impacted by COVID-19.
- The situation is fluid, and BBT will continue monitoring the Commission, the FCC, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and other relevant agencies for guidelines and best practices to keep our employees and customers safe. We are keeping in touch with local officials and leaders as well.

We recognize the important role that BBT and other rural telecommunications providers have during this ongoing public health emergency, and we are taking our service responsibilities very seriously for the duration of this disaster. We will keep the Commission informed of any additional material commitments regarding COVID-19 in this project and/or through Mr. Hazard as may be directed.

To the extent it may be necessary, BBT respectfully requests Commission action related to the suspension of rules requiring tariff pre-approval to waive installation charges or offer promotions to assist customers during this outbreak.

Should the Commission or any customers have questions or concerns, we remain available at 800-592-4781 or <https://www.bigbend.com/contact-us/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Russell A. Moore".

Russell A. Moore  
BBT GM / COO