Connections

NEWSLETTER OF THE COLORADO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION MAY 2019

STARTING POINT

By **Doug Dean**
Director

Moving can be a stressful experience, and the last thing consumers need are problems caused by unscrupulous or unlicensed moving companies. By taking just a few precautionary steps in advance, consumers can prevent many moving day headaches.

Finding a reputable moving company is the first step. Ask your neighbors, friends, co-workers or relatives for recommendations about which mover to use. Consumers may call or go on-line to verify with the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) that the moving company has an active permit and the appropriate insurance. Consumers may also check with the Better Business Bureau to see if they have information about the company.

Consumers should obtain written estimates from several movers and compare costs and all other services to be provided by the mover. Movers are required by law and PUC rules to provide a written contract prior to the move, listing the services to be provided and the costs for those services. Do not sign blank or incomplete documents. Rates are not regulated by the PUC, but must be specified in the document.

Beware of estimates made over the phone. Most movers will need to see your goods in order to make an accurate estimate of the moving costs. Be suspicious of estimates that are significantly lower than the rest.

Know which company is actually providing the move. Some companies that advertise moving services are simply brokers that do not move goods. Obtain information about how to contact the mover before, during and after the move.

Find out what the mover's responsibilities are for damages that may occur to your belongings. Consumers should consider buying full-value protection for their goods, which means that if items are lost, damaged or destroyed, the mover either can repair them, replace them with similar articles, or make a cash settlement. The PUC has no jurisdiction over claims and damages; consumers must settle those issues with the mover's insurance company or in small claims court.

Movers may not withhold delivery of goods if the customer pays the fee as specified in the contract. Movers must accept at least two of the following forms of payment: (1) cash; (2) cashier's check, money order or traveler's checks; (3) personal check; or

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PUC proposes electric rule amendments

Broad changes target resource planning and other renewable areas

The Public Utilities Commission is revising its electric rules in six areas, including community solar gardens.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) conducted hearings April 29 through May 3 to take comment on a comprehensive proposal to amend its rules regulating electric utilities.

The proposed amendments revise the electric rules in six areas: Electric Resource Planning (ERP), Renewable Energy Standard (RES), Net Metering, Community Solar Gardens, Qualifying Facilities, and Interconnection Standards and Procedures. The proposed rule changes are based on the outreach with stakeholders conducted by PUC staff for more than a year.

The rulemaking also satisfies the requirements of legislation passed in 2018 that requires the PUC to adopt rules allowing the installation, interconnection and use of energy storage systems.

In October of 2017, the PUC opened a miscellaneous proceeding to undertake its first comprehensive review of the Commission's ERP and RES rules in approximately 10 years. The PUC directed staff to work with stakeholders and other interested participants to develop draft rules changes to be presented in a future rulemaking.

In the stakeholder outreach proceeding, staff engaged with various participants in examining potential changes to the electric rules that improve the coordination of the various types of electric utility resource acquisitions. Staff also examined with the participants the policies associated with, and the advancement of, new and existing technologies that can modernize the investor-owned utilities' electric distribution infrastructure.

About three dozen organizations and individuals participated in the stakeholder outreach proceeding, including utilities, consumer groups, environmental and renewable energy advocacy groups, trade organizations and non-utility providers of electricity services, labor organizations, municipal and other government agencies, and several individuals. PUC staff solicited multiple rounds of written comments and organized workshops and working groups.

In February of this year, the PUC issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NOPR) based on the comments and recommendations resulting from the stakeholder process. The PUC solicited written comments and replies on the proposed rule changes prior to the public comment hearings in late April and early May.

The PUC will accept post-hearing written comments on the proposed rules until May 31, and will likely issue a supplemental NOPR in mid-July to address any 2019 legislative changes not encompassed in the proposed rules. A decision on the final rules is not expected before the end of the year.

Legislature extends PUC through 2026

A bill reauthorizing the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for seven years while adding various requirements related to clean energy planning, energy impact bonds, and wholesale electric cooperative resource planning cleared the Colorado Legislature on the final day.

Lawmakers approved the PUC sunset bill on May 3, to become effective upon the governor's signature. The bill continues the PUC through September 1, 2026.

State law requires a periodic review of all state regulatory agencies to evaluate the need for and the effectiveness of the agency's functions, also known as the "sunset" process. The PUC's last review was in 2008 and it extended the agency through June, 2019.

In addition to continuation of the PUC, lawmakers approved a number of significant energy policy changes, including the adoption of provisions that supplement the state renewable energy standard laws by establishing targets for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from electricity generation. These targets are an 80 percent reduction in carbon dioxide emission levels compared to 2005 levels by 2030; and a goal of 100 percent reduction by 2050. The new clean energy planning provisions apply specifically to Xcel Energy, but other utilities may opt in to submitting clean energy plans.

The legislation also allows an electric utility to apply to the PUC for approval of a financing order to issue securitized utility ratepayer-backed bonds when retiring an electric generating facility.

Another provision requires the PUC to promulgate rules that require each wholesale electric cooperative to submit to the Commission an application for approval of an integrated or electric resource plan.

Other modifications to PUC statutes include:

- Requiring the PUC to promulgate rules establishing requirements for investor-owned utilities to file electric distributions plans;
- Requiring investor-owned utilities to include a workforce transition plan when proposing the retirement of an electric generating facility;
- Directing the PUC to require electric public utilities to consider the cost of carbon dioxide emissions in certain proceedings;
- Requiring the PUC to conduct an investigation of financial performance-based incentives and metric

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Utility customers benefit from tax law changes

Colorado utility customers received $167.8 million in benefits in 2018 due to actions taken by the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to ensure that savings from federal tax law changes were passed on to utility customers.

The benefits came in the form of bill credits, lower utility rates, and reductions to future ratepayer liabilities. Utility customers also will see continued savings from lower rates in future years.

On January 1, 2018, several federal tax law changes took effect including a reduction in corporate income tax rates from 35 percent to 21 percent. Prior to the implementation of the new tax laws, the PUC began to ensure that these changes were fully accounted for in utility rates. The PUC also formally opened a statewide proceeding on February 1, 2018, to address the full impact of the tax law changes on utilities. Within that framework, the PUC staff worked with the utility companies to pass the benefits on to consumers through individual rate cases and other proceedings.

The $167.8 million in utility customer savings from those proceedings covers all Colorado electric and gas utilities regulated by the PUC.

PUC Sunset

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tracking to identify mechanisms that may align utility operations, expenditures, and investments with public benefit goals;

- Requiring the PUC to conduct a survey of electric public utility retail rates and consider recommendations that would result in rate relief in certificated electric utility territories with retail rates materially greater than the state average;
- Requiring a utility to reference the docket numbers of relevant rules or adjudicatory matters when submitting an e-filing to the PUC;
- Directing the PUC to open an investigatory proceeding to evaluate the costs and benefits associated with regional transmission organizations, energy imbalance markets, joint tariffs and power pools;
- Allowing retail electric utility customers to generate, consume, store and export electricity produced from certain energy resources to the electric grid, subject to reliability standards, interconnection rules and procedures determined by the PUC;
- Authorizing the PUC to regulate vehicle booting companies through the issuance of permits and enforcement mechanisms including inspections, civil penalties, and permit revocations.

The legislation also implements various recommendations from the PUC Sunset Report, including:

- Authorizing the Commission to promulgate rules to delegate routine administrative matters to staff;
- Providing public utilities alternate forms of communication to notify customers of rate changes and requiring rate changes to be posted on utilities' websites;
- Transferring the administration of the Legal Services Offset Fund from the Department of Law to DORA;
- Making technical changes regarding criminal background checks;
- Repealing a requirement that an electric utility purchase a certain amount of energy from community solar gardens;
- Repealing the ability of the Commission to consider proposals to fund and construct integrated gasification combined cycle generation facilities as new energy technologies.
- Clarifying that the PUC may impose a civil penalty for a violation of railroad crossing safety regulations.

Colorado eligible for 911 upgrade funds

Federal and state funds have been earmarked toward helping Colorado implement the next generation of emergency telephone services.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) on February 1 declared Colorado eligible for up to $2.4 million in federal funding that will enable the state to upgrade its 911 network. With an additional $1 million in matching funds already approved by the Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC), Colorado's local Public Safety 911 call centers will be able to fund an 18-month statewide transition to an IP-based core infrastructure, which is the first step toward implementing Next Generation 911 (NG911).

A fully deployed NG911 network will allow Colorado's 911 call centers to accept not only voice calls but also data from 911 callers. The deployment is further expected to make the statewide 911 network more reliable.

PUC staff has been designated the statewide point of contact for administration of the grant. After consultation with local 911 agencies across the state, PUC staff intends to submit a plan to use the funding for the migration of local 911 call centers across the state to an Emergency Services IP-network (ESInet) as the first step of a full NG911 system implementation, and to alleviate some of the recurring costs of the transition, freeing up local funds to be used for replacing and upgrading equipment in the 911 call centers.

"This grant, along with the contribution from the Colorado PUC, will be a game changer for Next Generation 911 in Colorado," said **Carl Stephens**, Executive Director of the Garfield County Emergency Communications Authority and chair of the PUC's 911 Advisory Task Force. "It will provide a way for local 911 authorities to get onto a statewide ESInet that some could not afford to do otherwise. While there will still be much to do and finance, this is one mountainous obstacle out of our way."

PUC staff to get help in assessing TOU rates

Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC) economics staff will have an improved ability to assess time-of-use (TOU) electric rates due to analytical support for the next year from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

The DOE's Grid Modernization Laboratory Consortium (GMLC) announced on February 7 that the Colorado PUC was selected to receive technical assistance from the national laboratories to support ongoing research on TOU electric rates. The assistance will help PUC staff assess ongoing TOU rate trials and pilot projects, as well as consider the potential for rolling out well-designed time-based rates to all Colorado residential customers in the future.

The announcement follows a year of collaboration between economists at the PUC and experts at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, provided by the U.S. DOE's SunShot Analytical Support program for state commissions.

The GMLC is a strategic partnership between the U.S. DOE and the national laboratories to collaborate on the goal of modernizing the nation's grid. The technical assistance makes experts at the national laboratories available to work with PUC economists for up to a year to better understand the design, considerations, and impacts of next-generation electricity pricing for residential customers.

Under TOU rates, the cost of electricity varies according to the time of day, and sometimes by season, to reflect how electricity does not always cost the same to provide at each moment of the day or across a season.

In November 2016, the Colorado PUC approved an opt-in TOU rate trial for Xcel Energy's residential electricity customers, which now includes nearly 10,000 participants, and in June 2018, directed Black Hills Energy to develop an opt-out TOU rate pilot. A growing number of other jurisdictions and municipalities, including Fort Collins, Colorado Springs and rural electric cooperatives, also are offering TOU rates.

INSIDE CONNECTIONS

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw is quoted as saying, "Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself." **Deidre Hudson** finds considerable satisfaction in fully pursuing that piece of advice.

Hudson is a Program Assistant for the Rail/Transit Safety and Gas Pipeline Safety sections at the Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Her responsibilities include data processing and administrative support for both sections, planning events such as the PUC's annual Gas Pipeline Safety seminar, managing the State Fleet vehicles assigned to the PUC, and stepping in to assist wherever she is needed.

"What I like about my job is that I have two supervisors who care about my professional growth and they listen to my ideas and feedback," she said. "I like the fact that I am trusted to produce quality work and results."

Deidre Hudson

Hudson has spent much of her professional career growing and creating new opportunities for herself. Before starting at the PUC in 2014, she worked in the private sector as a lead in technical support. Prior to that, Hudson taught 4th grade up to 7th grade, and describes teaching as one of her "greatest rewards."

Hudson holds a bachelor's degree in biology and a minor in psychology. She obtained a Certified Nursing Assistant license, but never got the chance to use it.

Aside from work, she enjoys "drawing, doing hair, singing … anything I can do to express myself creatively."

Hudson hopes to continue "creating" herself in different ways well into the future. "A goal of mine is to start a non-profit organization serving the youth of our communities." She also has plans to become a certified life coach.

George Bernard Shaw certainly would be proud of her.

(***Inside Connections*** will feature a PUC employee each edition as selected by PUC section chiefs.)

POSITIVE CHARGES

Congratulations to **Daryl Branson**, who was elected as the Vice President of the Colorado 911 Training Standards Institute in February. The Colorado 911 Training Standards Institute is a non-profit organization that Daryl helped form when he was still with the Colorado 9-1-1 Resource Center.

The Institute represents 911 trainers from across the state and its mission has been to develop and deploy a basic 911 telecommunicator training program that can provide every 911 telecommunicator in the state with a foundational 40-hour instructional curriculum.

The Institute has held two statewide classes so far, with a third one scheduled for June in Delta County.

Daryl Branson

Starting Point

(Continued from page 1)

(4) credit card. Prescription medication, medical supplies and children's goods may not be withheld from customers under any circumstances.

To learn more about Colorado moving regulations or to file a complaint, call the PUC Consumer Affairs office at 303-894-2070 (Denver metro area) or 1-800-456-0858 (outside the Denver metro area). Complaints may also be filed via the PUC website at www.dora.state.co.us/pacific/puc/puccomments.

COLORADO
Department of Regulatory Agencies
Public Utilities Commission

CONNECTIONS is the newsletter of the Colorado Public Utilities Commission. It covers Commission cases and actions of importance to consumers, utilities, consumer groups, and decision makers.

Comments, suggestions, and requests for more information should be directed to:

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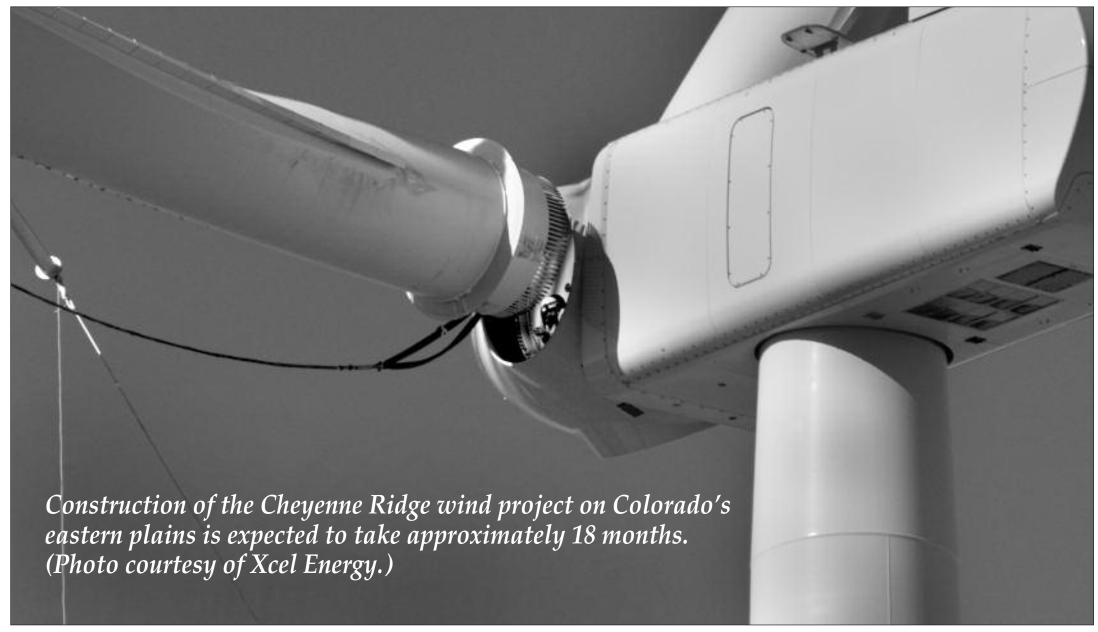
PUC approves Xcel's Cheyenne Ridge wind farm

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has approved an Xcel Energy application for approval to build the 500-megawatt Cheyenne Ridge wind project on Colorado's eastern plains.

The PUC, in deliberations on April 24, approved a settlement agreement reached by nearly all parties in the proceeding, including the company, PUC staff, the Office of Consumer Counsel, the Colorado Energy Office, Western Resource Advocates, along with large customer and labor groups.

Cheyenne Ridge is the proposed company-owned wind facility that is part of the Colorado Energy Plan (CEP) portfolio approved by the PUC last year in Xcel Energy's electric resource plan (ERP) proceeding. Xcel filed the application on December 21 seeking Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCNs) for both the wind farm and the approximately 65-mile 345-kilovolt generation tie-lie to connect the Cheyenne Ridge Wind Farm to Xcel's system.

In its application, the company also sought PUC approval of cost recovery, generation performance metrics and consumer protections, and specific findings with respect to the noise and magnetic fields of the project's generation tie-line.



Construction of the Cheyenne Ridge wind project on Colorado's eastern plains is expected to take approximately 18 months. (Photo courtesy of Xcel Energy.)

Terms of the settlement include a point cost level for capital costs establishing a presumption of prudence for the project at $743 million. Xcel will bring forward the actual point cost for evaluation in the first electric base rate proceeding following the commercial operation of the project. The company will bear the burden to establish that extraordinary circumstances warrant recovery of any costs above the point cost amount.

Other provisions of the settlement include an $82 million cap on the Deferred Tax Asset; provisions addressing the change in the structure of the ownership of the project, specifically requiring Xcel to honor the federal production tax credit impacts on customers just as the project was modeled in the ERP; and a consumer protection mechanism with reporting requirements as agreed to by the parties.

Xcel must satisfy a commercial operation deadline of December 31, 2020 in order to qualify for the full value of the federal production tax credit. The construction period for the project is estimated to be approximately 18 months.

Black Hills seeks $2.5 million increase in gas rates

Black Hills Colorado Gas is seeking approval to increase natural gas base rates by approximately $2.5 million, or 3.5 percent, above its current annual revenues.

Black Hills Colorado Gas is the entity created by the consolidation of Black Hills Gas Utility and Black Hills Gas Distribution (formerly SourceGas) last fall. The rate proposal, filed in February, seeks to combine base rates, general tariffs, gas cost adjustments, construction allowances, existing revenue riders and extension policies of the two former utility companies.

The company also is proposing to combine the three existing base rates areas into two newly-defined rate areas, and the seven existing gas cost adjustment (GCA) areas into three newly-defined GCA regions.

While the overall impact of the proposal would increase company revenues by 3.5 percent, residential and small commercial customers of Black Hills Colorado Gas could see either monthly increases (up to 8 percent) or decreases (down by 8 percent) on their bills, depending on their current rate area.

Black Hills Colorado Gas serves territories on both the western slope—including the towns of Glenwood Springs, Aspen, Snowmass, Delta, Montrose, Ouray, Telluride, Bayfield and Pagosa Springs—and in eastern Colorado—including the towns of Castle Rock, Monument, Woodland Park, Fountain, Firestone, Erie, Akron, Yuma, Limon, Burlington, Ordway, Fowler and La Junta.

Black Hills Colorado Gas is asking for a 10.3 percent return on equity (ROE), up from its currently authorized 9.6 percent. The ROE is the profit that a utility is authorized to earn on its investments. The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) sets a maximum ROE, but it is not guaranteed.

The company also is proposing to establish a new adjustment mechanism—the Distribution System Integrity Rider—to recover the costs, between rate cases, of investments related to the company's safety programs to improve system data and to accelerate the replacement of higher risk pipe. The new rider is proposed to become effective on January 1, 2020 to recover costs incurred in 2019 and 2020.

The base rate component of a monthly natural gas bill includes a fixed monthly customer charge and a volumetric charge, which varies from month to month depending on the amount of gas used. The base rates cover costs for infrastructure, equipment, labor, materials, meter reading and billing.

Base rates are separate from the rates charged for the gas commodity itself, which are passed on to customers on a dollar-for-dollar basis through a separate charge called the "gas cost adjustment." Gas commodity charges account for 65–75 percent of the total monthly bill.

Hearing dates and a final procedural schedule are still to be determined.

Hearing scheduled June 17–21 on DMEA exit fee complaint

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has scheduled a hearing June 17–21 to take evidence in a dispute between Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA) and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association over a fee to withdraw from the wholesale power supplier's system.

DMEA filed a formal complaint with the PUC last December, alleging that Tri-State has set a "punitive exit charge that is unjust, unreasonable, and discriminatory in violation of Colorado law." The association asked the PUC to assert exercise jurisdiction over Tri-State and decide the lawfulness of the proposed exit fee.

The PUC on April 1 issued an interim decision denying a motion by Tri-State to dismiss the formal complaint. Tri-State had argued that the PUC lacked jurisdiction to hear the complaint.

DMEA is a western Colorado nonprofit rural electric association serving approximately 28,000 member-owners in Montrose, Delta and Gunnison counties. Tri-State is a non-profit corporation providing generation and transmission services to 43 member cooperatives in Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska and New Mexico, including DMEA.

As a Tri-State member, DMEA purchases services from Tri-State under a wholesale electric service contract that runs through 2040. In its complaint, DMEA said it has wholesale power options available to it that are "significantly less expensive and environmentally cleaner than Tri-State's power supply."

According to the complaint, DMEA has been at odds with Tri-State for more than a decade over Tri-State's increasing wholesale electric rates and the cooperative's desire to develop more local, cost effective renewable resources. Under its contract, DMEA is required to obtain 95 percent of its energy from Tri-State.

The two sides have been negotiating DMEA's exit from its Tri-State since 2016, but remain far apart, according to the complaint.

DMEA said that if it withdraws from Tri-State, it plans to partner with Guzman Energy, a Colorado wholesale power provider. Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, a New Mexico-based Tri-State member, left Tri-State for Guzman in 2016 after paying a $37 million exit charge.

While not disclosing the exact exit fee requested by Tri-State, the complaint alleges it is "vastly disproportionate to Kit Carson's $37 million charge."

PUC allows special contract with protections for ratepayers

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC), by majority decision, will allow Black Hills Energy to develop a special electric rate to attract a company that wants to build a $100 million data center in Pueblo.

In deliberations on April 24, the PUC approved the company's proposed special contract, subject to conditions that must be met to ensure sufficient protections for the rest of Black Hills' electric ratepayers.

The PUC rejected a general Economic Development Rate (EDR) tariff proposed by the company, stating that it did not comply with the conditions established in a 2018 law authorizing utilities to offer discounted economic development rates under special circumstances. However, the Commission said it would allow Black Hills to modify its proposed EDR tariff in such a way to make it applicable only to this specific customer.

The PUC also said the tariff must be crafted in such a way to adequately ensure that other Black Hills customers do not subsidize the EDR customer, including a condition that the marginal cost for serving the EDR customer be removed from the company's overall cost of service for the duration of the special contract.

The Colorado Legislature passed the EDR Act in 2018, authorizing economic development rates to qualifying commercial or industrial customers. The rates must meet certain criteria, including:

(1) The rate must be lower than the rate that the qualifying customer would be subject to, except the rate can't be lower than the utility's marginal cost of providing service to the qualifying customer;
(2) The rate may be offered for only up to 10 years;
(3) The rate may not lead to situations where other customers subsidize the cost of providing the economic development rate;
(4) The rate may not cause an increase to other utility rates;
(5) Other customers on the utility's system may not experience a rate increase due to the offered economic development rate.

In its application on January 22, Black Hills filed for expedited approval of a special contract for a proposed date center customer. Black Hills said it would acquire market energy to meet the customer's expected 40-megawatt load, and said the company would bear the risk of the incremental expenses.

Review of CenturyLink 911 diversity plan ongoing

A series of informal technical workshops is under way in Colorado to review a Basic Emergency Services (BES) Diversity Plan submitted to the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) by CenturyLink.

The plan, filed on January 9 of this year pursuant to PUC rules, outlines CenturyLink's proposal for deploying, monitoring, backup power, and physically and geographically diverse redundancy for the 9-1-1 system where such measures of reliability are lacking. The requirement for the diversity plan was added to PUC rules in an attempt to improve the performance of the 9-1-1 network following flood and fire-related disasters in recent years.

In its filing, CenturyLink noted that it is a "fundamental principle of telecommunications engineering that provisioning and maintaining geographically diverse transmission paths increases reliability. But geographic diversity is expensive, particularly in a state like Colorado with many rural and mountainous zones."

Earlier this year, the PUC granted CenturyLink's request to initiate a series of regularly-scheduled workshops in which participants, including representatives of CenturyLink, PUC staff, and Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) and other stakeholders, engage in a collaborative review of the diversity plan. The first stakeholder meeting was held on February 19, and meetings have continued generally twice a month.

In its initial filing, CenturyLink noted that its diversity plan is based on the company's current basic emergency service offering—E911 service. Pursuant to a new 911 tariff that became effective on January 4, the aggregation and transport functions of CenturyLink's E911 service will be replaced with a Next Generation 9-1-1 ESInet. This migration is scheduled to occur over the next two years and will involve significant re-engineering and restructuring of CenturyLink's 911 network architecture.

To avoid wasting resources on solving E911 diversity problems that the ESInet service will solve, CenturyLink recommended that the PUC not finalize a BES diversity plan until the ESInet is fully engineered and implemented.

"A general, high-level examination of the diversity in the existing E911 network—along with the costs to improve existing diversity—is a helpful foundation for ultimate diversity plans, but it is impractical to accurately determine the structures and costs of network configurations that have yet to be deployed," CenturyLink said.

In order to monitor the progress of the initial stakeholder review of the diversity plan, the PUC required CenturyLink to submit a status report every two months regarding the technical workshop process and its recommendations on how the Commission should proceed with respect to the diversity plan.

PUC approves Aspen-Pitkin County 911 surcharge increase

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has approved a request to increase the E-911 monthly surcharge for the Aspen-Pitkin County Emergency Telephone Authority.

The PUC in March granted the authority's request to increase the monthly surcharge from $1.25 to $2.00. It is the first surcharge increase for Aspen-Pitkin County since 2010. The new surcharge is expected to go into effect this spring.

The authority is charged with maintaining the 9-1-1 system throughout Pitkin County, along with portions of Eagle and Gunnison counties. In its application, Aspen-Pitkin County stated an increase was necessary to "fund dispatch operation at an increased level and to support future capital needs to match the significant increase in service levels and upcoming technology advancements required to transition to (next generation 9-1-1)."

The authority noted that 9-1-1 revenues had declined at an average annual rate of 1.5 percent from 2012 to 2017. At the same time, an external study of cost of living rates ranked Pitkin County as having the highest cost of living in the state, which factors into personnel costs incurred to operate the 9-1-1 system.

The PUC concluded that additional funding that would be raised by a surcharge rate of $2.00 a month is necessary in order to maintain adequate, reliable and reasonable emergency telephone services in the authority's territory.

Land-line and wireless customers in Colorado pay a monthly surcharge to fund the equipment and operational expenses of the 9-1-1 system. Individual authority boards establish the amount needed to cover the costs of equipment, personnel and access to telephone lines. The surcharge is collected by the telephone provider and passed on to authority boards.

Under Colorado law, a 9-1-1 authority may assess a surcharge of up to 70 cents per customer per month for emergency telephone services without permission from the PUC. Anything above that amount requires PUC approval.

The Aspen-Pitkin County request is the first surcharge increase approved by the PUC in 2019. Six requests by authority boards throughout Colorado for surcharge increases were approved in 2018.

New area code 4 years away

Colorado is less than four years away from needing a new area code to overlay on top of the 303/720 area code, according to the latest projections by the national telephone numbering administrator.

Somos, Inc., the North American Numbering Plan Administrator, released its updated area code exhaust dates in April. The administrator revises its area code exhaust projections twice a year, based on demand for telephone numbers.

For Colorado, the exhaust dates for all three are codes remained fairly stable in the latest projections. The 303/720 area code in the Denver metro area is projected to be the first Colorado area code to run out of useable telephone numbers—in the third quarter of 2023.That is one quarter earlier than the estimate provided last fall.

The forecast for Colorado's 970 area code, which includes Fort Collins, Grand Junction and the western and northern parts of the state, has been moved up three years since last October's projections. Area code relief for 970 is now expected to be needed in the third quarter of 2029.

The 719 area code, which encompasses Colorado Springs, Pueblo and the southeastern part of the state, remains in the best position for numbering resources, according to the projections. The exhaust forecast for 719 is the second quarter of 2045, slightly earlier than the 4Q 2047 projection in October.

Colorado had just one area code (303) until 1988, when 719 was introduced in southeast Colorado. In 1995, the 970 area code was added to serve the northern and western part of the state. Then, in 1998, the 720 area code was overlaid on top of the 303 code to provide number relief in the Denver metro area.

PUC amends rail crossing decision

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has amended its decision in an application by the Regional Transportation District (RTD) and BNSF Railway Company to abolish an at-grade rail-highway crossing at Riverside Cemetery in Denver.

The PUC on April 12 issued a decision granting an unopposed motion filed by RTD requesting that the York Street access be added back to the original application as a potential alternative access to the cemetery.

The PUC in August 2017 approved RTD's application that the existing crossing at Riverside be abolished to accommodate construction of RTD's North Metro Rail Line. RTD had withdrawn York Street as a potential alternative access to the cemetery during the proceeding, stating that the implementation of that access would require relocation of burial plots.

The existing crossing, which currently contains a BNSF line, traverses the entrance to the historic cemetery, which was established in 1876. Approximately 38 trains a day pass the cemetery entrance. Once completed, the North Metro Rail Line is expected to have an additional 86 daily commuter rail crossings at the location of the existing Riverside entrance.

In its 2017 decision, the PUC ruled that RTD and BNSF had met their burden of establishing that the abolishment of the existing at-grade crossing will serve to prevent accidents and promote public safety. The decision also concluded that a proposed entrance into Riverside from Race Court, paid for by RTD and SNSF, was a reasonable alternative access to the cemetery.

In February of this year, RTD filed a motion requesting that York Street be added back to the application as a "reasonable access" to the cemetery. In response to questions posed by the PUC, RTD stated that an analysis performed by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers concluded that the York Street access would not require relocation of burial plots.

RTD also provided details about emergency access to Riverside Cemetery for the Denver Fire Department during construction of the alternative entrance.

With the additional information provided, the PUC ruled there was sufficient information to make a finding that the York Street access was a reasonable alternative access for the cemetery.

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