

LOUISIANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

ORDER NUMBER S-37736

CP-TEL NETWORK SERVICES, INC., EX PARTE.

Docket No. S-37736, In re: Petition for designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier ("ETC") within Louisiana for the limited purpose of offering lifeline services.

(Decided at the December 17, 2025 Business and Executive Session.)

ORDER

I. Background

On September 23, 2025, CP-TEL Network Services, Inc. ("CP-TNS" or "Company") filed a petition ("Petition") seeking designation as an Eligible Telecommunications Carrier ("ETC") pursuant to Section 214(e) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended ("Act") (47 U.S.C. § 214(e)); 47 C.F.R. Part 54; and the Louisiana Public Service Commission's ("Commission" or "LPSC") General Order No. R-27841 dated May 20, 2004 ("ETC General Order").¹ The Petition sought this designation solely to provide Lifeline services to eligible and qualifying Louisiana consumers.

Notice of the Company's Petition was published in the Commission's Official Bulletin No. 1359 dated September 26, 2025, with an intervention period of fifteen (15) days. No intervention or protest was filed. As set forth in the Petition, the Company plans to offer all of the supported services required by the Act through its own and leased facilities. Because the Company intends to provide supported services using its own facilities or a combination of owned and leased facilities, the Company does not need to seek FCC forbearance from the requirement that ETCs must provide services using their own facilities, at least in part.

CP-TNS, a Louisiana corporation, is a competitive local exchange carrier ("CLEC") and competitive access provider ("CAP"),² providing telecommunications and broadband internet access services to customers in Louisiana via its own fiber optic network and leased facilities in Natchitoches, Many, and Mansfield, Louisiana. In 2024, CP-TNS was acquired by HNG Holdings, LLC ("HNG").³ As part of that transaction, the operating subsidiaries of HNG were re-branded as "Pelican Broadband", with all HNG subsidiaries operating under the Pelican Broadband trade name.

Subsequent to designation as an ETC, CP-TNS will provide the Lifeline supported services, including voice and broadband, throughout the designated area, and will offer Lifeline voice and broadband service to eligible and qualified low-income customers in Louisiana.

Lifeline is the FCC's program to help make communications services more affordable for

¹ See, Docket No. R-27841, LPSC ex parte, *In re: Establishment of public interest criteria applicable to telecommunications carriers seeking ETC designation pursuant to 47 USC 214(e)(2) in areas served by rural telephone companies.*

² See, LPSC Certificate of Authority to Operate No. TSP 00343, dated July 7, 2000, Docket No. S-24326.

³ See, LPSC Order No. S-37005, dated January 12, 2024. As part of the transaction approved in Order No. S-37005, CP-TNS became an indirect subsidiary of HNG along with Campti-Pleasant Hill Telephone Company, Inc., and an affiliate of Northeast Louisiana Telephone Company, Inc., Northeast Telephone Services, Inc. and Northeast Long Distance, LLC.

low-income consumers. Currently, the Lifeline program provides up to a \$9.25 monthly discount on bundled voice and minimum-standard or above-minimum-standard broadband service for eligible low-income subscribers, up to a \$5.25 monthly discount for standalone voice service or bundled voice and below-minimum-standard broadband service for eligible low-income subscribers, and up to \$34.25 per month for those on Tribal lands. Subscribers may receive a Lifeline discount on either a wireline or a wireless service. Only ETCs may receive Lifeline support and provide Lifeline service to qualifying low-income consumers, and all ETCs must offer Lifeline service. 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.5, 101(d), 201(a)(1).

After conducting its review LPSC Staff filed its Report and Recommendation on November 24, 2025 recommending that the Commission grant the Company's Petition, subject to conditions. The matter was placed on the Commission's December 17, 2025 Business and Executive Session ("B&E") Agenda. This matter was considered at the December 17, 2025 B&E, at which the Commission voted to adopt Staff's recommendations.

II. Jurisdiction and Applicable Law

The Commission exercises jurisdiction over public utilities and common carriers in Louisiana pursuant Article IV, Section 21 (B) of the Louisiana Constitution, which states:

The commission shall regulate all common carriers and public utilities and have such other regulatory authority as provided by law. It shall adopt and enforce reasonable rules, regulations and procedures necessary for the discharge of its duties, and shall have other powers and perform other duties as provided by law.

Pursuant to Section 214(e)(2) of the Act (47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2)), State commissions are given the authority to designate as ETCs those common carriers that meet the service requirements found in 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.101, thereby entitling them to Universal Service Fund ("USF") support in accordance with 47 U.S.C. § 254.

To be eligible for ETC designation, 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1) mandates that a common carrier "offer the services that are supported by Federal universal service support mechanisms under section 254(c) of this title, either using its own facilities or a combination of its own facilities and resale of another carrier's services (including the services offered by another ETC); and ... advertise the availability of such services and the charges therefor using media of general distribution." 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1). Finally, a State commission must find the designation of an ETC consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity, particularly in the case of an additional ETC for an area served by a rural telephone company. 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2).

FCC regulations regarding ETC obligations supplement these statutory requirements. In particular, 47 C.F.R. § 54.101 requires the following:

1. An ETC must offer voice telephony service as set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a)(1).
2. An ETC subject to a high-cost public interest obligation to offer broadband Internet access services⁴ must offer broadband services within the areas

⁴ Effective February 8, 2021, broadband Internet access services are no longer services supported by the universal service Lifeline program. Nevertheless, the FCC has preserved its authority to fund broadband Internet access services through the Lifeline program. See *Mozilla Corp. v. Fed. Comm'n Comm'n*, 940 F.3d 1 (D.C. Cir. 2019); In the Matter of Restoring Internet Freedom, Bridging the Digital Divide for Low-Income Consumers, and Lifeline and Link

where it receives high-cost support consistent with obligations particular to certain support programs, none of which apply to this case.

3. An ETC must comply with 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.400-423 relating to USF support for low-income consumers through the Lifeline program.⁵

Thus, under applicable law and regulations, the Commission must conduct a two-fold analysis prior to approving or denying a request for ETC designation. First, the Commission must determine whether the Company complies with 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1)-(2) and applicable FCC regulations, i.e., generally whether the Company offers supported universal services consistent with its regulatory obligations and whether the Company advertises the availability of and charges for those services through media of general distribution.⁶ Second, the Commission must determine whether granting the Company's Petition would be in the public interest. Additionally, the Commission may also consider factors reviewed by the FCC in its consideration of requests for ETC designation under 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6); nevertheless, as these factors are merely persuasive and not binding upon the Commission's evaluation of petitions for ETC designation, Staff has pretermitted discussion of the FCC's non-binding criteria.

Consistent with the above federal and State authority, the Commission issued the ETC General Order which created a list of thirteen public interest criteria to be applied on a case-specific basis to all requests for ETC designation in areas served by rural telephone carriers. Some of the public interest factors enumerated in the ETC General Order do not apply in this instance, because the Company does not seek to provide wireless telephony services, i.e., commercial mobile radio services and private mobile radio services,⁷ and because some of the underlying FCC and Commission regulations have been repealed or waived⁸ or were not subsequently adopted.⁹

Accordingly, Staff has applied the remaining, applicable public interest criteria of the ETC General Order in its review of the specific facts presented by the Company's Petition.

Those criteria, as applicable to current, non-wireless ETC designation requests, are as follows:

1. Benefits of increased competitive choice resulting from the designation.
2. Impact of multiple designations on the Universal Service Fund.
3. Unique advantages and disadvantages of the competitive service offering.
4. Commitment to quality of service by the competitive provider.
5. Information regarding the number of requests for service in the designated area that go unfulfilled and adoption of a process setting forth specific steps that will be considered if a request for service is received from a customer within the designated ETC service area, but outside the existing signal coverage area.
6. Compliance with all existing and future state and federal 911 and E-911 mandates.
7. Compliance with Sections 301A-C and 401 of the Commission's TSP Billing Order.

Up Reform and Modernization, WC Docket No. 17-108, WC Docket No. 17-287, WC Docket No. 11-42, Order on Remand, FCC 20-151 (rel. Feb. 6, 2012); Order on Remand, 86 Fed. Reg. 994,1021 (Jan. 7, 2021) (to be codified at 47 C.F.R. § 54.101). *But see* 47 C.F.R. § 54.4000) (2021), which contains the following definition of broadband Internet access service: "Broadband Internet access service' is defined as a mass-market retail service by wire or radio that provides the capability to transmit data to and receive data from all or substantially all Internet endpoints, including any capabilities that are incidental to and enable the operation of the communications service, but excluding dial-up service."

⁵ 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(d) (2021).

⁶ Additional obligations apply to ETCs receiving Lifeline support for offering Lifeline services to low-income consumers. *See* 47 C.F.R. § 54.405 (2016).

⁷ For this reason, ordering paragraphs A(6),(9) of the ETC General Order does not apply to this docket.

⁸ For this reason, ordering paragraphs A(10),(13) of the ETC General Order does not apply to this docket.

⁹ For this reason, ordering paragraph A(12) of the ETC General Order does not apply to this docket.

III. Staff Review

A. Compliance with 47 U.S.C. § 214(e) and 47 C.F.R. Part 54, Subparts B, C, D, and E.

Section 214(e)(2) of the Act grants this Commission the primary responsibility for determining whether to approve a common carrier's request for designation as an ETC. Specifically, the Act provides that the Commission may, in an area served by a rural telecommunications carrier, and shall, in all other areas, designate more than one common carrier as an ETC for a service area designated by the Commission if the carrier meets the requirements of the Act. *See* 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2). The Company meets the definition of a common carrier.

After reviewing the Company's Petition, Staff found that the Company meets all of the compliance requirements to be designated as an ETC. Based on the Company's Petition, the Company has demonstrated compliance with the requirements outlined in 47 U.S.C. § 214(e) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.101. The Company offers eligible voice telephony services with the functionalities supported by federal universal service support mechanisms in the Designated Service Areas (statewide basis). Eligible voice telephony service must provide:

1. Voice grade access to the public switched network;
2. Minutes of use for local service provided at no additional charge to end-users;
3. Access to the emergency services provided by local government or other public safety organizations, such as 911 and enhanced 911 (E-911), to the extent the local government in an eligible carrier's service area has implemented 911 or enhanced 911 systems; and
4. Toll limitation for qualifying low-income consumers.

The Company has committed to provide all of the supported services enumerated under 47 U.S.C. § 254(c) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.101(a) at the required levels of service quality provided by applicable regulations.

Further support for the Company's compliance is found in its regulatory history and current scope of service. The Company and its affiliates have never been denied ETC designation by any jurisdiction, nor has any jurisdiction suspended or revoked ETC designation granted to the Company or suspended or delayed consideration of ETC designation requested by the Company. In addition, the Company currently holds the authority to operate as a telecommunications service provider in Louisiana as a CLEC¹⁰ and is an affiliate of Northeast Louisiana Telephone Company, Inc. (a Rural ILEC) and Campti-Pleasant Hill Telephone Company, Inc. (a Rural ILEC), which have been providing Lifeline services as ETCs in Louisiana for many years.

In its Petition, the Company indicated that it will advertise its federally supported services through media of general distribution as required by the FCC's rules. The Company will announce and advertise telecommunications services as an ETC in its Designated Service Areas and will publicize the availability of Lifeline services in a manner reasonably designed to reach those likely to qualify for those services. The media of general distribution that the Company may utilize include newspaper, bill inserts, mail circular, website, radio or targeted advertising of residential customers who would potentially qualify for the Lifeline program.

For the foregoing reasons, the Company's commitments, history of compliance to date, and planned advertising campaign justify the requested ETC designation, if the designation is determined to be in the public interest.

¹⁰ See, LPSC Certificate of Authority to Operate No. TSP 00343, dated July 7, 2000, Docket No. S-24326.

B. Public Interest Analysis

As set forth in 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2) and as previously discussed, State commissions are vested with the primary responsibility and authority for designating common carriers as ETCs. In connection with their reviews, State commissions must not only find that the applying carrier has proved that it in fact offers or will offer supported universal services, but the commissions must also find that the designation of the applying carrier is in the public interest. For this Commission, such a determination is made by reviewing the relevant criteria established by the ETC General Order as applied on a case-specific basis. What follows is Staffs analysis of each public interest criterion applicable to the specific facts presented by this Company's Petition.

1. Benefits of Increased Competitive Choice Resulting from ETC Designation.

CP-TNS states that it will use its facilities-based networks to provide both voice and high-speed internet services to qualifying and eligible low-income customers. By offering this service, CP-TNS states that it will further increase the choices available to consumers eligible for the Lifeline program. The FCC has acknowledged the benefits to customers of being able to choose from among a variety of telecommunications service providers. Increasing customer choice promotes competition and innovation.

Staff agrees with the Company that the designation will result in increased competition for services. Thus, Commission approval of the Petition should create competitive pressure for other wireline providers within the proposed service area. Accordingly, carriers will have incentive to provide better quality service, more service options, and potentially decrease prices.

2. Impact of Multiple Designations on the Universal Service Fund.

CP-TNS states that Lifeline support is portable because such support moves with the customer to the carrier of the customer's choice. The number of customers eligible for Lifeline support is the same regardless of the number of ETCs. Designating the Company as an ETC would only increase the amount of USF Lifeline funding in situations where the ETC obtains customers not already enrolled in another ETC Lifeline program. The FCC has recognized that "any increase in the size of the [universal service] fund would be minimal and would be outweighed by the benefit of increasing eligible participation in the Lifeline program, furthering the statutory goal of providing access to low-income consumers."¹¹

3. Unique Advantages and Disadvantages of the Competitive Service Offering.

The Company cites that it will make use of its current infrastructure to provide both voice and high-speed broadband internet services for qualifying eligible low-income customers in its ETC Designated Areas. CP-TNS believes that because of its infrastructure there are no disadvantages to certifying the Company as an ETC for Lifeline purposes.

4. Commitment to Quality of Service by the Competitive Provider.

CP-TNS certifies that it will comply with the service requirements applicable to Lifeline support. CP-TNS also certifies that it will provide high quality, high speed broadband internet services and voice service to qualifying and eligible low-income customers using both copper and FTTP fiber optic-based networks.

¹¹ Application of "TracFone Wireless, Inc. for Forbearance from 47 U.S.C. 214(e)(1)(A) and 47 C.F.R. 54.201(i), Order, 20 FCC Rcd 15095 (2005) at para. 17.

5. Information Regarding the Number of Requests for Service in the Designated Area that Go Unfilled and Adoption of a Process Setting Forth Specific Steps that will be Considered if a Request for Service is Received from a Customer Within the Designated ETC Service Area, but Outside the Existing Signal Coverage Area.

CP-TNS commits to providing supported service throughout its ETC Designated Area to all customers making a reasonable request pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(1) and 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(d). The Company also commits to providing service within a reasonable period of time to potential customers who are within CP-TNS's ETC Designated Area but outside of the existing network coverage. This commitment is contingent upon CP-TNS being able to (1) modify, adjust, or replace network or customer facilities or (2) reselling services from another carrier's facilities to provide the service, in each case if service can be provided at reasonable cost.

6. Compliance with All Existing and Future State and Federal 911 and E-911 Mandates.

The Company certifies that it will comply with all existing and future state and federal 911 and E911 mandates.

7. Compliance with Sections 301.A-C and 401 of the Commission's TSP Billing Order.

CP-TNS commits to complying with the Commission's TSP Billing Order dated July 14, 2000. CP-TNS already has a tariff on file with the LPSC for CLEC services. This tariff identifies and describes terms, rates, and conditions of services offered in the State of Louisiana.

IV. Staff Recommendation

The Staff Report and Recommendation filed November 24, 2025 found that the Company demonstrated, consistent with the requirements of the Act, applicable FCC regulations, and the ETC General Order, that it will make available to its customers universal service offerings that provide all of the services supported by the federal universal service program and that it will appropriately advertise the availability of those services. The Company committed to provide all of the services supported by the federal universal service program as defined by 47 C.F.R. § 54.101. Finally, the Company represented that it will advertise the availability of those services using media of general distribution and in a manner reasonably designed to reach those likely to qualify for those services.

Staff determined that granting ETC designation to the Company is consistent with the Commission's public interest criteria as adopted in its ETC General Order. Thus, Staff found that designation of the Company as an ETC for the limited purposes delineated in its Staff Report and Recommendation is in the public interest.

Accordingly, Staff recommended that the Commission grant CP-TNS' Petition to be designated as an ETC in the Designated Service Areas (statewide basis) so that the Company may provide supported voice and broadband services solely for the purpose of receiving Lifeline support, subject to certain conditions.

V. Commission Consideration

This matter was considered at the Commission's December 17, 2025 Business and Executive Session. On motion of Vice Chairman Skrmetta, seconded by Commissioner Coussan, and unanimously adopted, the Commission voted to accept the Staff Report and Recommendation filed into the record on November 24, 2025.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED:

That the Staff Report and Recommendation filed into the record on November 24, 2025 is adopted. CP-TEL Network Services, Inc. is designated as an ETC in the Designated Service Areas so that the Company may provide supported voice and broadband services solely for the purpose of receiving Lifeline support, subject to the following conditions:

1. The Company shall comply with the requirements set forth in 47 C.F.R. § 54.422(c), which mandates that certain information be filed with the Administrator (i.e., the federal Universal Service Administrative Company) upon a state commission designating an ETC, within sixty (60) days of the date of this Order. The Company shall file proof of such compliance into the record of this docket within thirty (30) days of performing such compliance; and
2. The Company shall file a new petition with the Commission if the Company seeks to amend its ETC designation to allow it to provide federally supported services through resale only, or to provide wireless services; and
3. The Company's ETC designation is conditioned upon full and timely compliance with all applicable rules and regulations of state and federal agencies, including, but not limited to, the rules and regulations of the Commission and the FCC. The Commission reserves the right to suspend or revoke the Company's ETC designation after notice and opportunity for hearing in the event the Company is found to be non-compliant with the same; and
4. This Order is effective immediately.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA
January 8, 2026



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brandon M. Frey".

BRANDON M. FREY
SECRETARY

/S/ MIKE FRANCIS
DISTRICT IV
CHAIRMAN MIKE FRANCIS

/S/ ERIC F. SKRMETTA
DISTRICT I
VICE CHAIRMAN ERIC F. SKRMETTA

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COMMISSIONER FOSTER L. CAMPBELL

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/S/ JEAN-PAUL P. COUSSAN
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COMMISSIONER JEAN-PAUL P. COUSSAN