



Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of

Improving the Resiliency of Mobile
Wireless Networks) PS Docket No. 13-239
Reliability and Continuity of
Communications Networks, Including
Broadband Technologies) PS Docket No. 11-60

Comments of the Resilient Communities Program, New America

I. Introduction

The Resilient Communities Program of New America submits the following public comments in response to the Federal Communications Commission's (the "Commission" or the "FCC") Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("NPRM") in the above-captioned proceeding, and in particular in response to the Ex Parte Presentation "Improving Resiliency, Reliability and Continuity of Mobile Wireless Communications Networks" submitted by AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, US Cellular, and Verizon, together with CTIA (The Wireless Association) on April 27, 2016.

Resilient Communities applauds CTIA et al for their interest in supporting network resilience. However, we do not believe that voluntary steps taken by industry to shore up network resilience should obviate the need for legislative action -- in particular, enforceable data-sharing standards. A cooperative agreement forged solely among industry representatives leaves out leadership by those most informed about local needs and experiences: local groups on the front lines in flood zones, as well as emergency response personnel and government officials.

We are also concerned that participation and compliance with CTIA et al's proposed "Framework" is voluntary -- meaning that if a carrier prefers to withdraw or not comply with parts of it, there are no consequences. We have passed the point where access to communications in a disaster situation is optional. "Safety of life and property" is now tantamount to ubiquitous communications, and those saving lives on the front lines must have access to vital information about network health to target aid and develop contingency plans. Furthermore, consumers --

especially those living in high-risk areas -- must be able to access information about mobile providers' track records in disasters in order to make informed choices.

II. Discussion

As a public interest group working closely with local groups in NYC's flood zones -- some of whom experienced telecommunications outages for over a week during the response to Superstorm Sandy -- we are dubious that a cooperative agreement among carriers sufficiently addresses issues of network fragility and divergent timing of response efforts that became evident after the storm in 2012. We believe that local leaders and elected officials are in a position to understand the needs of local communities and to have the relationships necessary to work with all segments of the population, including those who may be underserved by existing network infrastructure even under normal circumstances, or where infrastructure is fragile and has a track record of outages during disasters.

A. Information Sharing

It is critical for those coordinating response efforts to have detailed information at the local level about telecommunications outages. This vital information determines where and how response workers should concentrate aid. During Sandy, many at-risk and flooded neighborhoods went into "communications blackouts," a situation that made it difficult for survivors on the ground to broadcast their needs and in turn for emergency personnel to target aid or even understand the specific locations of damage or degrees of precarity. Sharing data and resources solely among a network of providers does not achieve the aim of assisting emergency response in overall support of local communities, i.e. addressing the needs of local communities that have been cut off from contact.

Beyond the five prongs named in CTIA's letter, for the sake of saving lives and coordinating response efforts, we believe that industry should abide by information and resource sharing principles as outlined by local groups that have a track record of providing critical first response in their communities, as well as resilience and response experts and government officials. The data-sharing standard proposed by CTIA in its April 27, 2016 *Ex Parte* -- "*DIRS data regarding the total number of cell sites out of service (calculated consistent with established DIRS practices) publicly available on its website on an industry-aggregated, county-by-county basis for any geographic area defined in a DIRS activation notice*" on a once-per-day basis -- lacks sufficient detail at the local level to be useful for emergency response personnel distributing support at the neighborhood level.

Instead of accepting this voluntary standard, we urge the Commission revisit to the standards suggested in the City of New York's Public Comments of 12/13/2013, e.g.:

- *Give local authorities as near as possible to real-time access to specific wireless outages that have occurred in their areas during disasters and up to date status on their*

restoration efforts, to focus searches on areas where outages preclude residents and others from otherwise contacting first responders.

Furthermore, for this information to be most effective, we recommend sharing this data at the Census Tract or Block Group level, which will enable targeted response for those most affected by future disasters.

We also support the following points suggested in the same 2013 public comment from the City of New York:

- *Give consumers real-time access during emergencies to provider-specific outage information, with estimated restoration times, to better enable consumers to pursue alternatives, workarounds and relocation efforts.*
- *Give consumers access to provider-specific outage information and actual restoration times, to enable consumers to consider that information at the point of purchase of wireless services.*
- *Give localities specific information regarding proposed temporary infrastructure deployment measures and operational status of such temporary installations so that localities can facilitate transportation and permitting and better gauge disaster area communications coverage.*

B. Stakeholder and Community Outreach

Furthermore, while we applaud the carriers' stated intention to convene local government representatives' public safety subject matter experts, we propose that the carriers use this opportunity to understand the logistics of response efforts targeted at local scales, and thereafter work with government officials and legislators to determine optimum data types and level of detail that will be necessary to save lives in the future, reserving the possibility that a legislative action or standard may emerge from this process.

Similarly, while we also applaud the carriers' stated intention to work with consumers to provide communications preparedness education and tools, we advise that such a process creates an opportunity for mutual learning, as industry representatives may not be familiar with the grassroots and "whole community" preparedness efforts already underway in many neighborhoods. We anticipate that the carriers could learn from local groups about effective ways to support community-led response, rather than replicating or creating redundancies with existing "preparedness checklists," etc.

III. Conclusion

In short, we propose that the most effective aid is a different kind of mutual aid from that named in CTIA's letter: neighbors helping neighbors with the support of government and broader response resources. We hope that with this goal in mind, the Commission will take steps to



provide response officials and residents with the information they need to help themselves and each other at times of critical need.

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