

Service Date: October 28, 1998

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SERVICE REGULATION  
BEFORE THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION  
OF THE STATE OF MONTANA

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IN THE MATTER OF the Application of            ) UTILITY DIVISION  
Tel West, L.L.C. and                                )  
U S WEST Communications, Inc.                ) DOCKET NO. D98.9.199  
Pursuant to Section 252(e) of the            )  
Telecommunications Act of 1996 for         ) ORDER NO. 6111  
Approval of their Interconnection Agreement )

**FINAL ORDER**

**Introduction and Procedural Background**

1. On February 8, 1996, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act)<sup>1</sup> was signed into law, ushering in a sweeping reform of the telecommunications industry that is intended to bring competition to the local exchange markets. The 1996 Act sets forth methods by which local competition may be encouraged in historically-monopolistic local exchange markets. The 1996 Act requires companies like U S WEST Communications, Inc. (U S WEST) to negotiate agreements with new competitive entrants in their local exchange markets. 47 U.S.C. §§ 251 and 252.

2. U S WEST Communications, Inc. (U S WEST) entered into a resale agreement with Tel West, L.L.C. (Tel West) for resale of U S WEST services according to the 1996 Act. U S WEST filed the parties' agreement, entitled "Agreement for Service Resale Between Tel West, L.L.C. and U S WEST Communications, Inc." (Agreement) with the Montana Public Service Commission (Commission) on September 3, 1998. The Agreement was docketed as

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<sup>1</sup> Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (to be codified as amended in scattered sections of 47 U.S.C.).

D98.9.199 and it provides for Tel West to resell U S WEST's local exchange services in Montana.

3. The Commission issued a Notice Application for Approval of Service Resale Agreement and Opportunity to Intervene and Comment on September 23, 1998, giving public notice of the requirements that the Commission approval of the filing be nondiscriminatory toward other telecommunications carriers not parties to the agreement and be consistent with the public interest, convenience and necessity. The notice stated that no public hearing was contemplated unless requested by an interested party by October 7, 1998. The notice further stated that interested persons could submit limited comments on whether the agreement met these requirements no later than October 16, 1998.

4. No hearing has been requested and no comments or requests for intervention received in regard to the Tel West Agreement. The Tel West Agreement is substantially the same as previously approved interconnection agreements between U S WEST and other competitive local exchange carriers (CLECs). The Commission has rejected certain provisions in many of these contracts and directed U S WEST to remedy its failure to comply with Commission orders in any future filing. U S WEST's agreement with Tel West contains none of the offending provisions.

#### **Applicable Law and Commission Decision**

5. The standards for approving an interconnection agreement differ, depending on whether the agreement has been voluntarily negotiated or has been arbitrated by a state commission. 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(2). The Agreement submitted for approval in this proceeding was negotiated voluntarily by the parties and thus must be reviewed according to the provisions in 47 U.S.C. § 252(e)(2)(A).

6. Section 252(e)(4) of the 1996 Act provides that a negotiated agreement submitted for a state commission's approval must be approved or rejected within 90 days or it will be deemed approved. Thus, Commission approval or rejection according to the substantive standards set forth in the 1996 Act must issue by December 2, 1998, 90 days following the submission of the Tel West Agreement for Commission approval.

7. The Commission must approve or reject the agreement, with written findings as to any deficiencies. 47 U.S.C. . 252(e)(1). Section 252(e)(2)(A) prescribes the grounds for rejection of an agreement reached by voluntary negotiation:

(2) GROUNDS FOR REJECTION.--The State commission may only reject--

(A) an agreement (or any portion thereof) adopted by negotiation under [47 U.S.C. . 252(a)] if it finds that

(i) the agreement (or portion thereof) discriminates against a telecommunications carrier not a party to the agreement; or

(ii) the implementation of such agreement or portion is not consistent with the public interest, convenience, and necessity;

8. Notwithstanding the limited grounds for rejection in 47 U.S.C. . 252(e)(2)(A), the Commission's authority is preserved in . 252 (e)(3) to establish or enforce other requirements of Montana law in its review of arbitrated or negotiated agreements, including requiring compliance with state telecommunications service quality standards or requirements. Such compliance is subject to . 253 of the 1996 Act, which does not permit states to permit or impose any statutes, regulations, or legal requirements that prohibit or have the effect of prohibiting market entry.

9. Unlike an agreement reached through arbitration, a voluntarily negotiated agreement need not comply with standards set forth in . . 251(b) and (c). 47 U.S.C. . . 251(b),

252(c) and 252(a)(1) of the Act permit parties to agree to rates, terms and conditions for interconnection that may not be deemed just, reasonable and nondiscriminatory, and which are not determined according to the pricing standards included in . 252(c) of the Act, as would be required in the case of arbitrated rates set by the Commission.

10. By approving this Agreement, the Commission does not intend to imply that it approves of all the terms and conditions included in the Agreement and makes no findings herein on the appropriateness of many of the terms and conditions. Our interpretation of the 1996 Act is that . . 252(a) and (c) prevent the Commission from addressing such issues in this proceeding.

11. No comments have been received that express any reservations about the parties' agreement not complying with federal law as cited above or with state telecommunications requirements. The MCC, who represents the consumers of the State of Montana, has not intervened in this approval proceeding, and has not filed comments to indicate that any portion of the agreement is not consistent with the public interest, convenience and necessity. There have been no objections raised that the Agreement discriminates improperly or is not consistent with the public interest, convenience and necessity.

12. The Commission finds that the terms in the parties' Agreement appear to conform to the standards required by the 1996 Act and should be approved. In approving this Agreement, the Commission is guided by provisions in state and federal law, which have been enacted to encourage the development of competitive telecommunications markets. Section 69-3-802, MCA, for example, states that it is the policy of the State of Montana to encourage competition in the telecommunications industry and to provide for an orderly transition to a competitive market environment.

**Conclusions of Law**

1. The Commission has authority to supervise, regulate and control public utilities. Section 69-3-102, MCA. U S WEST is a public utility offering regulated telecommunications services in the State of Montana. Section 69-3-101, MCA.

2. Tel West intends to resell telecommunications services and interconnect with U S WEST in U S WEST territories throughout Montana. Section 69-3-804, MCA (1995), has previously provided an exemption from Commission regulation for resellers. Senate Bill 89, passed by the 1997 Montana Legislature and signed into law by the Governor of Montana on April 22, 1997, removes the exemption from regulation in Montana for resellers of regulated telecommunications services. As a reseller of regulated telecommunications services in Montana, Tel West will be subject to Commission authority to supervise, regulate and control public utilities. Before providing services in Montana, Tel West initially will be required to register with the Commission as a telecommunications provider and to provide the requested information to the Commission, if it has not already done so.

3. The Commission has authority to do all things necessary and convenient in the exercise of the powers granted to it by the Montana Legislature and to regulate the mode and manner of all investigations and hearings of public utilities and other parties before it. Section 69-3-103, MCA.

4. The United States Congress enacted the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to encourage competition in the telecommunications industry. Congress gave responsibility for much of the implementation of the 1996 Act to the states, to be handled by the state agency with regulatory control over telecommunications carriers. *See generally*, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-104, 110 Stat. 56 (*amending scattered sections of the Communications*

Act of 1934, 47 U.S.C. . . 151, *et seq.*). The Montana Public Service Commission is the state agency charged with regulating telecommunications carriers in Montana and properly exercises jurisdiction in this Docket pursuant to Title 69, Chapter 3, MCA.

5. Adequate public notice and an opportunity to be heard has been provided to all interested parties in this Docket, as required by the Montana Administrative Procedure Act, Title 2, Chapter 4, MCA.

6. The Commission has jurisdiction to approve the resale agreement negotiated by the parties and submitted to the Commission for approval according to . 252(e)(2)(A). Section 69-3-103, MCA.

7. Approval of interconnection agreements by the Commission is subject to the requirements of federal law as set forth in 47 U.S.C. . 252. Section 252(e) limits the Commission's review of a negotiated agreement to the standards set forth therein for rejection of such agreements. Section 252(e)(4) requires the Commission to approve or reject the Tel West Agreement December 2, 1998, or the Agreement will be deemed approved.

### **Order**

THEREFORE, based upon the foregoing, it is ORDERED that the resale agreement of the parties, submitted to this Commission for approval pursuant to the 1996 Act, is approved as discussed herein, subject to the following condition:

The parties shall file subsequent amendments to the Agreement with the Commission for approval pursuant to the 1996 Act.

DONE AND DATED this 26th day of October, 1998, by a vote of 5-0.

BY ORDER OF THE MONTANA PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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DAVE FISHER, Chairman

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NANCY MCCAFFREE, Vice Chair

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BOB ANDERSON, Commissioner

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DANNY OBERG, Commissioner

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BOB ROWE, Commissioner

ATTEST:

Kathlene M. Anderson  
Commission Secretary

(SEAL)

NOTE: Any interested party may request the Commission to reconsider this decision.  
A motion to reconsider must be filed within ten (10) days. See ARM 38.2.4806.