

News Release

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INDEPENDENT THIRD-PARTY TESTING OF U S WEST OSS SYSTEMS ON FAST TRACK

Region-wide Testing Facilitates Local Competition and Timely Long-Distance Entry

(HELENA, MONTANA)-- The planning and design of an independent third-party test of U S WEST's Operating Support Systems (OSS), which would speed long-distance approval for U S WEST and assure ready access to OSS for local telecommunications competitors, is off to a fast start according to state regulatory commission and company officials. U S WEST is the only Regional Bell Operating Company to agree to region-wide third-party testing of its OSS, which are the complex internal computer systems that handle pre-ordering, ordering, provisioning, maintenance and repair and billing.

"I'm very impressed with U S WEST's commitment to this approach," said Bob Rowe, Montana Public Service Commissioner, and chairman of the participating states' executive committee for the project. "I'm also pleased with the interest shown by competitive telecom providers. If successful, U S WEST will gain quicker in-region long distance entry and competitors will have proven access to high quality OSS. The result will be a win for customers throughout the West."

In June, 13 commissions from U S WEST's 14-state territory signed a letter proposing a region-wide collaborative process to plan and conduct OSS testing. In August, U S WEST notified the states that it agreed in principle with the proposal. Federal regulators consider access to OSS systems essential to local telecommunications competition. They must be shown to work before U S WEST or other Bell Operating Companies are allowed to offer long-distance service within their home region.

"It is in consumers' best interests to expedite our entry into long distance," said Mark Roellig, executive vice president, Public Policy, Human Resources and Law, U S WEST. "We applaud these commissioners for moving quickly to develop a testing process that will effectively demonstrate the accessibility of our OSS systems, facilitating our entry into long distance."

Each participating commission has invited local service competitors in each state to participate in designing and conducting the testing as part of a "Technical Advisory Group" or "TAG." Other interested companies, agencies and organizations are also encouraged to assist in the effort. "The TAG is designed to be an efficient and effective way for competitive telecommunications providers and others to participate in a multi-state process," said Rowe.

Carriers or other parties that intend to participate in the TAG should register electronically by September 15 at <http://psc.state.mt.us/scripts/porlist/listroc.asp>. More than ten parties have already registered. After September 15, interested parties who want to participate should contact Frank Darr of the National Regulatory Research Institute, the states' administrative coordinator for the project, at darr.1@osu.edu, or by calling 614-688-5473. A website to post

information on the project's progress is at: <http://www.nrri.ohio-state.edu/ossdoc.htm>.

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