Wireless Collocation and Tower Siting Issue Brief

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SUMMARY

Electric, gas, and water utilities' extensive infrastructures, such as transmission towers, monopoles and water towers, can provide wireless collocation to support commercial wireless service providers. Utilities also have rights-of-way that are suitable for tower siting. They can leverage their infrastructure and rights-of-way for new business opportunities while at the same time supporting the deployment of wireless services. There is strong demand for wireless collocation and new tower siting services. This demand stems from the need for commercial wireless service providers to expand the capacity and coverage of their networks and to counter the delays and costs they are encountering with permitting their own towers. Utilities have also secured infrastructure and reliable facilities with back-up power and network redundancy, which is an added benefit for commercial wireless service providers.

Utilities are permitted to negotiate with commercial wireless providers to offer wireless collocation and tower siting, and can freely compete in the marketplace with other wireless collocation providers and tower companies. The revenue generated from engaging with wireless carriers or tower companies can also be beneficial to utilities in allowing them to fund projects that might otherwise not receive the required funding. Conversely, the wireless collocation and tower businesses are relatively low risk for utilities, do not require substantial resources to start and operate, and are aligned with utility core businesses. Moreover, utilities can typically maintain control over access to wireless collocation infrastructure and towers in order to protect the safety and reliability of their systems. For all of these reasons, utilities are providing wireless collocation and tower services, and the Utilities Technology Council (UTC) has established the UtiliSite Council to support utilities that are currently providing these services or are interested in doing so.

BACKGROUND

Utilities can place antennas on existing infrastructure for wireless collocation or they can site and construct new towers for commercial wireless providers. Given that utilities have extensive existing transmission and distribution infrastructures, rooftops and water towers, they are uniquely positioned to provide wireless collocation for commercial wireless providers. Wireless collocation also has added benefits:

- It cuts down on the proliferation of new towers
- Utilities are able to maintain control over access to transmission sites and other infrastructure for wireless collocation
- Utilities may provide full time inspectors on each job site to ensure safety, security and reliability

Utilities can site and construct new towers as well, and they typically design, build and construct their towers to higher standards in order to ensure network reliability, safety and security in the aftermath of emergencies, such as power outages. Towers may be traditional lattice structures, monopoles or camouflaged to look like other objects such as trees and flagpoles. To enhance coverage, increase capacity, decrease network load and enhance spectral efficiency, expedient

tower siting is necessary.

In November, 2009, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted a declaratory ruling which set a "shot clock" (90 days for collocation and 150 days for new tower construction) for local zoning authorities to act on tower siting requests. If local zoning authorities do not meet the time frames, they will be presumed to have "failed to act" and tower applicants' have the right to appeal to the courts for action. In addition, a zoning authority may not deny an application filed by one provider based on the presence of another wireless provider in a particular area.

The FCC has also streamlined the process for compliance with environmental and historic review processes under the Environmental Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act. This streamlined policy promotes the use of wireless collocation, particularly involving small antennas that are unlikely to have a substantial impact on the area in which they are deployed.

UTC POSITION

UTC supports utilities currently providing either wireless collocation or new tower siting/construction. These activities make effective use of utility resources and accelerate the deployment of communications services to the public. UTC has established the UtiliSite Council, a committee within UTC, to help utilities with information, advocacy and networking related to wireless collocation and new tower siting.

While the FCC has streamlined the environmental and historical review processes mentioned above, it has yet to address concerns about the tribal notification and clearance process that is associated with tower siting, which has created substantial additional costs and delays for tower projects. This process should also be revisited and streamlined. In addition, public policies should promote the use of utility infrastructure for communications purposes by clarifying that no additional easements and/or rights of way are needed to use electric infrastructure for communications purposes, particularly when there is no additional burden on the underlying land.

ABOUT UTC

The Utilities Technology Council (UTC) is a global trade association dedicated to serving critical infrastructure providers. Through advocacy, education and collaboration, UTC creates a favorable business, regulatory and technological environment for companies that own, manage or provide critical tele-communications systems in support of their core business.

History: UTC was founded in 1948, to advocate for the allocation of additional radio spectrum for power utilities. Over the last 68 years, UTC has evolved into a dynamic organization that represents electric, gas and water utilities, as well as natural gas pipelines, critical infrastruc-ture companies and other industry stakeholders.

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