Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Advancing IP Interconnection	)	WC Docket No. 25-304
	)	
Accelerating Network Modernization	)	WC Docket No. 25-208
	)	
Call Authentication Trust Anchor	)	WC Docket No. 17-97

REPLY COMMENTS OF NTCA–THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION

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I. INTRODUCTION & SUMMARY

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association ("NTCA")[1] hereby submits these reply comments in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking[2] released by the Federal Communications Commission ("Commission") in the above-captioned proceedings. The *NPRM* seeks comment generally on the current state of time-division multiplexing ("TDM") and Internet Protocol ("IP") interconnection for voice services.[3] The *NPRM* seeks more specific comment on whether obligations applicable to ILECs found in sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended ("the Act"), undermine a TDM-to-IP

[1] NTCA is an industry association composed of approximately 850 community-based companies and cooperatives that provide advanced communications services in rural America and more than 400 other firms that support or themselves are engaged in the provision of such services. NTCA's incumbent local exchange carrier ("ILEC") members are "rural telephone companies" as defined in the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and these entities are referred to herein as "RLECs" in the context of interconnection and the exchange of voice traffic.

[2] *Advancing IP Interconnection*, WC Docket No. 25-304, *Accelerating Network Modernization*, WC Docket No. 25-208, *Call Authentication Trust Anchor*, WC Docket No. 17-97, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 25-73 (rel. Oct. 29, 2025) ("*NPRM*").

[3] *Id*., ¶¶ 17-29.

interconnection transition.[4] Finally, the *NPRM* proposes that the Commission utilize authority granted by section 10 of the Act to forbear from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act to spur greater exchange of voice traffic in IP.[5]

As discussed further below, the record in this proceeding supports forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act and associated TDM interconnection rules only after a clear and legally sound framework for IP interconnection is in place. This will create certainty in the marketplace that will, in turn, promote an ordered and seamless transition to all-IP interconnection and protect consumers. As discussed further herein, the "light-touch" framework proposed by NTCA would provide an effective default set of arrangements in the absence of an agreement otherwise between parties and envisions default points of interconnection ("POIs") that most carriers should be relatively familiar with today. Moreover, a targeted "rural transport rule" as proposed by NTCA would care specifically for universal service considerations related to interconnection with eligible telecommunications carriers ("ETCs"). Finally, NTCA urges the Commission to set an IP interconnection framework upon a solid legal foundation by settling the question of the classification of Voice over Internet Protocol ("VoIP") services.

[4] *Id*., ¶ 30.

[5] *Id*., ¶ 32.

II. THE RECORD IN THIS PROCEEDING SUPPORTS FORBEARANCE FROM STATUTORY INTERCONNECTION REQUIREMENTS CONDITIONED UPON ESTABLISHMENT OF A REGULATORY FRAMEWORK FOR IP INTERCONNECTION THAT ADDRESSES CRITICAL SERVICE RELIABILITY AND CONSUMER PROTECTION STANDARDS.

A. Forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act, alone, will not ensure calls (public safety calls included) will be delivered seamlessly in all IP environment.

In initial comments, NTCA stated that even as reform of the Commission's voice interconnection rules could help promote a technical transition to much-needed all-IP interconnection, any forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act must be paired with a new clearly articulated framework that safeguards the reliability and quality of voice calls across the nation going forward.[6] Simply put, the Commission cannot assume that voice traffic will be exchanged in IP on a reliable basis and that quality and affordability of voice services for all consumers will be assured "on the other side" of forbearance from existing interconnection rules. A TDM interconnection "sunset" date must therefore be paired with a "sunrise" date to create certainty and promote an ordered and seamless transition to all-IP interconnection.

As examples of where the transition could go awry to the detriment of consumers, NTCA pointed to:

- A decade of rural call completion problems – where too many calls destined for rural areas did not arrive at their intended destination on a reliable basis – that only abated after Congress intervened.[7] This is demonstrable proof that

[6] Comments of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association ("NTCA"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. i.

[7] *See Rural Call Completion*, WC Docket No. 13-39, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 13-135 (rel. Nov. 8, 2013), ¶¶ 3-12 (discussing the history of failures with respect to the completion of long-distance telephone calls to rural customers and the Commission's multiple attempts to rectify the situation). As the Commission went on to note, "[e]ven with the significant Commission actions described above, the record leaves no doubt that the problems of completing calls to rural areas, particularly areas served by rural incumbent local exchange carriers (ILECs) continue to be frequent and pervasive throughout rural America." *Id*., ¶ 13. It was only after Congress stepped in that

the reliability of voice services cannot be assumed but rather must be affirmatively cared for.

- The routing of 911 calls depends upon reliable interconnection. While the Commission has established a path toward a complete transition to next generation 911 ("NG911"),[8] public safety answering points ("PSAPs") across the nation will continue to rely on TDM interconnection arrangements for 911 calls as they transition their networks to the ability to accept calls in IP. It cannot be assumed that existing TDM connections will remain in place and reliable for PSAPs as the transition to NG911 proceeds. While the NG911 transition is advancing, the *NG911 Transition Order* does not establish a comprehensive intercarrier interconnection regime or ensure enforceable accountability across carrier boundaries. The Commission should therefore ensure that reachability, resiliency, and operational responsibility are clearly defined during the transition, rather than assuming NG911 modernization alone will resolve interconnection gaps.

- The ongoing fight against unwanted robocalls and spoofing-enabled scammers depends on the exchange of voice calls over all-IP voice networks. A clear roadmap for the transition to all-IP interconnection will provide operators of all sizes with TDM in their networks today – which presents barriers to effective robocalling mitigation and anti-spoofing efforts – the regulatory certainty to transition to the all-IP environment that the *NPRM* recognizes is needed to protect consumers.

- Should the Commission eliminate rules in place today that ensure a shared dispersal of interconnection costs among providers without any clear plan for alternative "rules of the road," the efficiencies to be gained from an all-IP interconnection environment will not accrue fairly to the benefit of all participants in the exchange of voice traffic. Instead, such efficiencies will almost certainly accrue mostly or only to the larger providers as the costs of interconnection flow "downhill" to smaller providers and the rural consumers they serve.[9]

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issues began to improve materially. *See The Improving Rural Call Quality and Reliability Act of 2017*, Pub. L. No. 115-129 (2018) ("the RCC Act"), codified at 47 U.S.C. § 262, *et seq*.

[8] *Facilitating Implementation of Next Generation 911 Services* (NG911), PS Docket No. 21-479, Report and Order, FCC 24-78 (rel. Jul. 19, 2024) ("*NG911 Transition Order*").

[9] As NTCA noted in initial comments, its RLEC members typically subtend tandem switching facilities owned by upstream carriers. These facilities are most often TDM and represent each RLEC's connection with the rest of the world, where voice traffic destined for other providers in the same local or extended calling area, and interexchange carriers as well, is handed off by the RLEC. RLECs are generally responsible only for the costs of transporting voice calls between a point at or near their network edge (either a local central office or an agreed upon "meet point") and these tandem facilities. This creates the shared financial responsibility under which rural providers are not responsible for the transport to and

Several commenters join NTCA in highlighting such concerns. For example, CarrierX correctly notes that "forbearance alone will not deliver interoperability. Simply removing obligations risks leaving a practical gap where smaller carriers cannot efficiently connect to large networks. The Commission should pair forbearance with an affirmative, light-touch mechanism that ensures reachability - specifically, a system of Registered Neutral IP Exchanges."[10] With respect to reliability in an all-IP interconnection environment, INCOMPAS states that "any transition framework that fails to establish clear obligations to exchange voice calls under IP interconnection threatens to undermine the fundamental principle of the PSTN: that every caller can reach every other caller connected to the network."[11] INCOMPAS goes on to note that "[i]f there are no rules of the road governing IP interconnection, voice calls will fail, making prior rural call completion failures look minor in comparison."[12] Parties representing the public safety community and other entities critical to routing 911 calls likewise weighed in on this concern. Intrado, for example, states that while it "fully supports acceleration of the transition to an all IP-network, we are seriously concerned that forbearing from and/or eliminating the Section 251

from far-flung locations. In the absence of this cost-sharing construct, rural providers would be forced to pass along significant costs to a limited number of end users in very rural communities, thereby putting at risk the affordability of voice service in these rural communities. *See also* Comments of Home Telephone ILEC, LLC d/b/a Home Telecom ("Home"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 17 ("A critical aspect of the TDM network is where interconnection occurs. Longstanding Commission rules require other networks to connect within or at the service boundary of RLECs. This is a critical requirement in the provision of a national interconnected network. National providers cannot require RLECs to transport traffic over long distances to reach an interconnection point. This creates the ability for reasonably priced service to the rural customer.").

[10] Comments of CarrierX, Inc. ("CarrierX"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 2.

[11] Comments of INCOMPAS, WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 15.

[12] *Id*.

interconnection and collocation requirements without essential guardrails to protect 9-1-1 will backfire by undermining 9-1-1 availability and resiliency."[13]

Thus, as the Commission considers eliminating rules that govern existing interconnection points, it must ensure that a successor framework preserves the ability of providers of all sizes to interconnect on a comparable basis, and it must ensure the reliability of such calls and maintain authority to hold providers accountable for failures. To be clear, the Commission need not recreate existing TDM interconnection constructs in all respects or port those over entirely to the all-IP environment to care for these concerns. Rather, the Commission can and should strike a balance by adopting "smart deregulation" and ensuring an orderly transition that does not abandon important statutory and other public policy objectives. In part, this means a *proper sequencing of the transition by having a clearly articulated framework for IP interconnection in place to care for these concerns* ***before*** *any forbearance from the Act is granted.*

Moreover, a sunrise date must not leave any development of technical standards with respect to public Internet routing of voice calls "to be determined." As discussed in Section II.B. *infra*, while NTCA has concerns with small providers being forced into this "option" while the largest providers are not, voice providers of all sizes could choose of their own accord to utilize public Internet routing for at least some of their voice traffic. Importantly, the Commission should not accept a "trust us – it will work out" pledge when it comes to reliance upon public Internet routing of calls – to the contrary, the Commission should ensure that relevant standards bodies *first* address the specifics of how calls will be routed, how reliability will be ensured, and

[13] Comments of Intrado Life & Safety, Inc. ("Intrado"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 2. *See also* Comments of Bandwidth Inc. and Bandwidth.com CLEC, LLC ("Bandwidth"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 2 ("The Commission should focus on 911, and the need to coordinate the NextGen 911 transition with the IP interconnection transition so that there are no breaks in 911 service.").

how the security of calls routed over the public Internet will be addressed. Published standards and robust and successful testing that confirms the seamless and secure routing of calls via a *voluntary* alternative such as public Internet routing should be a condition precedent to the issuance of any forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act and any associated Commission rules. At a minimum, such standards and testing should address routing, reachability, security, and performance parameters sufficient to ensure reliable, interoperable voice service (including 911) prior to the Commission's forbearance from existing TDM-based interconnection obligations.

B. Forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act must be paired with establishment of a light-touch framework governing IP interconnection.

In initial comments, NTCA proposed a "light-touch" regulatory framework for IP interconnection with simple "rules of the road" to provide a default construct for this duty in the absence of negotiation.[14] NTCA's proposed framework would promote certainty and fairly apportion burdens and efficiencies in an IP environment.

It should be noted that the large number of commenters supporting adoption of a "light-touch" framework for IP interconnection includes associations representing some of the nation's largest voice providers.[15] While there is a lack of unanimity (or specificity in the record beyond USTelecom and NTCA) with respect to what that framework should look like in practice, the record overall highlights the need for a framework to guide interconnection in an IP environment. To reiterate, the existing TDM interconnection framework should not and need not

[14] NTCA, pp. 27-32.

[15] Comments of USTelecom – The Broadband Association ("USTelecom"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), pp. 16-25; Comments of NCTA – The Internet & Television Association ("NCTA"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 11 (calling for "limited but effective oversight of IP interconnection practices.").

be grafted onto the IP world, but a well-designed IP interconnection framework should retain and build upon what has worked in ensuring the reliability of the voice network and the affordability and quality of service for all consumers. Specifically, NTCA merely suggests (1) a proper sequencing of the transition to all-IP interconnection by establishing a regulatory backstop and ensuring all technical standards and testing are complete ***before*** any forbearance from existing rules is granted and (2) ensuring that the efficiencies anticipated from the IP transition do not accrue only to one set of carriers to the detriment of small providers saddled with new costs.

Thus, deregulation must come with a specific and well-defined duty to interconnect that can substitute for the fundamental protections afforded otherwise by sections 251 (c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act with respect to service quality, reliability, and affordability. Specifically, the Commission should:

1. Ensure that the nation's largest operators cannot unilaterally dictate terms and conditions, including shifting POIs hundreds or even thousands of miles outside of RLEC service areas or declining to interconnect directly at all with smaller operators. As NTCA proposed in initial comments, the Commission should establish a general presumption that all parties will offer the ability to interconnect physically in IP at a minimum of one default location in each state where it seeks to originate or terminate calls. Approximately 40 Internet Exchange Points ("IXPs") already designated by the Commission for universal service fund performance testing purposes house a public Internet gateway operated by large Internet backbone providers, and providers of all kinds are likely quite familiar with these interconnection points and should have a reasonable ability to exchange voice traffic at these locations with minimal incremental burden. These IXPs provide an effective starting point for default locations in most states, and this basic framework should operate as a default only in the absence of an agreement otherwise between the parties;

2. Care further for special universal service considerations with respect to cost and affordability of service by establishing a "rural transport rule" for physical interconnection specifically with carriers that have universal service obligations. This should operate too as a default, pursuant to which IP interconnection between an ETC and any other provider will take place at a mutually agreeable location in the former's designated service area. As an alternative that offers flexibility, providers not wishing to interconnect physically at either the default location in a state (or at the default network edge in the case of an ETC) should assume the financial responsibility for any transport to the required default interconnection point. By operating only as a

default, however, providers would remain free to enter into mutually beneficial alternative arrangements should they so choose and the market warrant;

3. Retain the "good faith" negotiation requirement found in section 251(c)(1).[16] This should at the very least prohibit larger carriers from dictating "take it or leave it" terms and conditions to smaller providers that may have little or no choice but to accept them because such market power abuse is viewed as acceptable; and

4. Reaffirm that the Commission will operate as a "cop on the beat" in the event of a dispute that threatens the continued completion of calls or runs afoul of the "good faith" negotiation standard.[17]

In addition, the Commission should look with skepticism at calls for "agreement-less interconnection,"[18] particularly as these are portrayed as necessary to reduce the burden on certain classes of carriers of having to negotiate numerous, separate interconnection agreements. In reality, these "agreement-less" arrangements would empower larger providers to force smaller providers to either rely on public Internet routing or to transport traffic to distant interconnection points at their own expense, including frequent and unilateral POI relocations that multiply costs.[19] To be sure, an increasing number of providers of all sizes may over time choose

[16] Home, p. 28; Comments of Lumen Technologies, Inc ("Lumen"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 4.

[17] Lumen, p. 4.

[18] Comments of Verizon Communications Inc., WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 1; USTelecom, pp. 20-21.

[19] Specifically, USTelecom states that a "public-internet default also will allow providers to scale sensibly and minimize costs, particularly for smaller providers and new entrants, which can use incremental capacity on their existing internet links to transport voice traffic while, at the same time, realizing the cost savings that accompany the retirement of their copper networks. Indeed, such a default will alleviate concerns that rural providers, such as those in USTelecom's membership, will incur steep costs to transport their voice traffic to interconnection points outside of the LATAs at which they exchange traffic today." USTelecom, p. 18. USTelecom then goes on to state that "[h]owever, for the largest providers — those with 100,000 or more active telephone numbers— the Commission should also require that they designate at least one interconnection point of their choosing at which they will, *without relying on the public internet,* receive traffic destined to them from other voice service providers that meet the recipient provider's minimum traffic volume threshold. *Other providers would be able to exchange calls dialed to the largest providers' customers by building out their own networks to that point, rather than relying on the internet*." USTelecom, p. 19 (emphasis added).

voluntarily to route voice traffic over public Internet connections, and they should continue to have the ability to do so where they are satisfied that service quality can be assured. But as a general matter, as NTCA discussed at length in initial comments,[20] the "typical 'intercarrier call' that traverses the public Internet at some point typically originates on one operator's platform, terminates on a different operator's platform, and traverses multiple independent networks in between, none of which are controlled end-to-end by a single party."[21] This limits providers' ability to enforce service level agreements that care for service quality. While some may point to the success of over-the-top applications, those services often rely on managed overlays and private backbone arrangements, whereas intercarrier voice traffic traverses multiple independently operated networks without unified end-to-end control or enforceable service-level commitments. If everyone but the largest operators is forced to use the public Internet for routing (or to assume substantial new direct IP interconnection costs to the extent available at all), "agreement-less interconnection" would create a "two-tier system" of voice connectivity and service quality in the United States – with the largest providers peering and interconnecting physically among themselves for the exchange of voice traffic with greater assurance (and likely even committed levels) of service quality and reliability while the *lower* tier will consist of the remaining providers who will be compelled as a matter of federal policy to route calls over the public Internet with no similar or comparable assurances as to service quality. As NTCA predicted in initial comments, it is perhaps most telling that those promoting use of the public

[20] NTCA, pp. 10-12.

[21] *Id*., p. 11.

Internet for voice traffic are clearly planning to proactively minimize reliance upon such routing for the majority of their own calls.[22]

C. Forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act should be paired with a cap on TDM interconnection rates/rates for TDM transport used for such interconnection.

The Commission should also condition forbearance from sections 251(c)(2) and (c)(6) of the Act upon tandem and other TDM transport providers agreeing to cap or freeze rates charged for such services. As the backdrop to this discussion, CCA states in response to the NPRM that "[i]n areas where CCA members have no alternative but to interconnect with ILECs to originate and terminate traffic, CCA members are forced to pay whatever charges ILECs demand."[23] As CCA goes on to note, "TDM transport charges have increased by hundreds or thousands of percent in recent years, adding many millions—and potentially tens of millions—in needless costs annually."[24] NTCA members have experienced similar rate increases for TDM transport

[22] USTelecom, p. 19 (stating that pursuant to its proposal "providers will still be permitted — and, where traffic volumes are sufficient, should be encouraged — to rely on negotiated, two-party agreements to exchange calls directly, rather than over the internet. The successfully negotiated agreements that exist today will likely remain in place, and larger providers will likely continue to negotiate them, i*n light of the greater certainty, customization, and operational control that the exchanging parties may find mutually beneficial*."). Emphasis added

[23] Comments of Competitive Carriers Association ("CCA"), WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 10. CCA goes on to state that "some CCA members have turned to third-party vendors to perform the TDM conversion and interconnect with ILECs via collocation projects. The use of a third-party vendor has been helpful to reduce burdens for smaller carriers, but it does not resolve the issue in the long term. Third-party vendor alternatives often require carriers to give up control over important network resources such as numbering, they are costly, and they are also subject to the whims of ILECs and are at risk of rate increases or interconnection refusals. The existence of third-party solutions is not a valid reason for the Commission to grant Section 251 forbearance here."). CCA, p. 11.

[24] *Id*.

connections to price cap tandems, and these small providers also find that alternative arrangements are not available or are just as costly.[25]

These rate increases show no signs of abating, and they should serve as a warning flare of the types of market power abuse that could emerge in the absence of an IP interconnection framework that sets forth clear and enforceable "rules of the road." The tendency of those in possession of market power to engage in "take or leave it" pricing is not technology agnostic – it is likely if not inevitable that in the absence of rules constraining certain operators' ability to engage in the type of behavior CCA points to these practices will blead over to the IP interconnection environment. In the vacuum created by a regulation free "wild west," the nation's largest operators will at every opportunity look to shed costs and impose them on other providers that have little or no alternative.

At the very least, the Commission should when it comes to tandem operations and related transport, as CCA proposes "cap the rates that ILECs may charge for TDM interconnection, including services required for TDM interconnection and TDM conversion, at current levels."[26] As CCA goes on to the state, this "would also help conserve resources for use by carriers to hasten their transition to IP when, otherwise, they would be diverting such funds to pay increasing TDM interconnection costs to ILECs."[27] Bandwidth addresses this issue as well, stating that "[n]o ILEC should be permitted to take any action intended to coerce interconnecting

[25] *See* Comments of John Staurulakis, LLC, WC Docket Nos. 21-17, 17-144 (fil. Nov. 3, 2025), pp. 7-8 (discussing one rural carrier whose costs for nine TDM circuits have tripled from less than $40,000 per month to $150,000 per month over the course of less than a year).

[26] CCA, p. 17.

[27] *Id*.

carriers to change their form of interconnection or abandon their interconnection entirely."[28] Bandwidth further states that "facilities for interconnection (including any transport currently offered) must remain available, and ILECs should be prohibited from raising prices for TDM interconnection or related transport above regulated access charge levels or unilaterally re-classifying those services."[29] Bandwidth and CCA helpfully highlight how market power abuses are already occurring and how the Commission can prevent these from undermining what should be an orderly transition to an all-IP interconnection environment.

D. *Loper Bright* compels the Commission to place an IP interconnection framework on a solid legal foundation.

Finally, NTCA encourages the Commission to place any legal framework it establishes for IP interconnection on a solid legal foundation – and classification of VoIP as an interstate "telecommunications service" is consistent with the Act and would provide certainty that such a framework can be enforced.

As the Commission knows well, the *Loper Bright*[30] decision represents a critical shift in the deference afforded to administrative agencies' interpretations of the legal authority granted to them by Congress. In the instant context, a court "exercising independent judgment in determining the meaning of statutory provisions"[31] and looking at the "best reading" of the statute,[32] might look with skepticism at the Commission, once again, declining to reach a decision as to the regulatory classification of VoIP as it, once again, impose regulatory

[28] Bandwidth, pp. 13-14.

[29] *Id*., p. 14.

[30] *Loper Bright Enterprises v Raimondo*, 603 U.S. 369 (2024).

[31] *Id*. at 371.

[32] *Id.*

requirements on a service that looks and acts like a "telecommunications service" in every material way that prompted such regulation in the first place.[33] From a statutory interpretation perspective, as NTCA noted in initial comments, "[p]roviders of VoIP services offer for a fee directly to the public the ability to transmit information that does not undergo a net protocol conversion in all-IP environment, and thus VoIP is a telecommunications service as defined by the Act."[34] This places the service well within the definition of a "telecommunications service," particularly as the presence of a "net protocol" conversation – that has long been used to assert that VoIP is more properly viewed as an "information service" – falls by the wayside in an all-IP environment.[35] Moreover, a post-*Loper Bright* review of the Commission's asserted legal authority to apply an IP interconnection framework to VoIP is likely to consider how the agency itself has over two decades erased any distinction between this service and legacy voice services that <u>*are*</u> classified as "telecommunications services." Again, as NTCA noted in initial comments, VoIP services are subject to the Commission's 911, DIRS/NORS, USF contribution, Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act, Customer Proprietary Network Information, local number portability, and disability access rules.[36]

[33] *See* NTCA, p. 25 (stating that "from the consumer perspective, it stretches the imagination to believe that most VoIP subscribers have any sense at all of the underlying network technology in question – from the user's perspective, all that is apparent is that they initiate a call on a device and the call (hopefully) completes. The format in which the call is routed by the provider in question is likely invisible to all but the most sophisticated customer, and in a 'technology neutral' regulatory construct should be irrelevant to determining the functionality provided.").

[34] *Id*., pp. 21-22.

[35] *Id*., p. 23 ("As the voice services industry transitions to an 'all IP' environment and all calls therefore originate and terminate in IP, the very concept of a 'net protocol conversion' falls away.).

[36] *Id*., pp. 24-25.

With this in mind, while a number of commenters point to section 251(a) and the Commission's ancillary authority as a source of authority here,[37] at least one party credibly argues that this would be a shaky, at best, legal foundation for IP interconnection rules, stating that, "[o]nce TDM is fully retired, there is no Title II service for VoIP regulation to be ancillary to, meaning that ancillary authority is no longer available."[38] With respect to section 251(e) as a source of authority, a reviewing court would have to determine that the "best reading" of the statute is that this subsection addressing a very specific piece of how voice service is provided (the use of numbering resources) is more suited to address IP interconnection than section 251(a) and its very specific "*duty to interconnect*."[39]

Certainty and predictability are critical to the TDM-to-IP interconnection transition – providers need it to justify investment in IP more broadly and to pursue IP interconnection arrangements specifically, and consumers will benefit from an IP interconnection framework that protects the seamless exchange of calls. Cobbling together sections from the Act (or relying on provisions clearly meant to address numbering only, for example) and relying on dubious assertions of ancillary authority risks having the IP interconnection framework that emerges from this proceeding set aside/undermined.

III. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the record supports adoption of a light-touch regulatory framework to facilitate the TDM-to-IP interconnection transition.

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[37] USTelecom, pp. 32-34.

[38] Comments of Public Knowledge, The Center for Rural Strategies, and Communications Workers of America, WC Docket No. 25-304 (fil. Jan. 20, 2026), p. 21.

[39] 47 U.S.C. § 251(a).

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