Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
Conseil de la radiodiffusion et des télécommunications canadiennes

Telecom Order CRTC 2026-213

PDF version

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Public record: Tariff Notice 7726

Bell Canada – Withdrawal of Channels for Program Transmission

Summary

Bell Canada operates a service called Channels for Program Transmission, which helps radio and television stations deliver broadcasts to the public. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (the Commission) regulates the terms of this service under Bell Canada's General Tariff.

Bell Canada submitted an application asking the Commission for approval to withdraw the service from the marketplace. According to the application, the equipment that enables the service has reached its end of life, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain spare parts. Accordingly, Bell Canada cannot ensure the long-term viability of the service and remaining customers will likely experience increasingly frequent and unresolved service outages if the service is not withdrawn from the marketplace. Bell Canada also submitted that a significant proportion of its customers have already switched to alternative services.

The Commission held a public proceeding to understand customers' perspectives on Bell Canada's proposal and how a possible withdrawal could be implemented. The Commission received a wide range of views, including from organizations representing more than 100 radio and television stations.

Given that Bell Canada cannot ensure the long-term viability of the Channels for Program Transmission service, this decision focuses on the transition to alternative services. The Commission notes that there are a range of alternative services that can provide a comparable quality of service and that many of Bell Canada's customers have already successfully switched to these services. To help make the transition more manageable, the Commission is directing Bell Canada to not withdraw the service until 1 December 2026, subject to situations that may arise before that date where it is no longer possible for Bell Canada to provide the service due to a lack of suitable parts.

Through this decision, the Commission is working to help facilitate a transition to alternative services that will allow Canadian broadcasting services to be offered with the same quality that Canadians currently enjoy, while ensuring they remain reliable and serviceable in the long run.

Application

1. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (the Commission) received an application from Bell Canada, dated 18 September 2025, proposing to withdraw the Channels for Program Transmission service from its General Tariff, effective 1 March 2026.

2. Bell Canada's Channels for Program Transmission service uses Bell Canada's legacy copper network to connect broadcasting studios to local transmission equipment, which then deliver signals to Canadian audiences.

3. In its application, Bell Canada indicated that the equipment needed to maintain the Channels for Program Transmission service is old, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain spare parts. Accordingly, Bell Canada cannot ensure the long-term viability of the service and remaining customers will likely experience increasingly frequent and unresolved service outages.

4. Bell Canada also noted that demand for the Channels for Program Transmission service has fallen in recent years, which can largely be attributed to the legacy copper infrastructure over which the service is provided. Bell Canada submitted that Internet Protocol-Virtual Private Network (IP-VPN), Ethernet, and Internet services are alternatives for its customers that subscribe to the Channels for Program Transmission service.

5. Bell Canada proposed an effective withdrawal date of 1 March 2026 to give customers time to migrate to an alternative service. It also provided the Commission with copies of the notices of withdrawal that were sent to its customers.

6. The Commission received five interventions from the following parties: the Association des radiodiffuseurs communautaires du Québec (ARCQ), Corus Entertainment Inc. (Corus), CKUT-FM (CKUT), Leclerc Communication inc. (Leclerc), and the National Campus and Community Radio Association Inc./l'Association nationale des radios étudiantes et communautaires inc. (NCRA/ANREC). These organizations represent more than 100 radio and television stations. The Commission also received a reply from Bell Canada.

Request for information

7. On 18 December 2025, Commission staff sent a request for information (RFI) to Bell Canada to obtain additional information on its proposal to withdraw the Channels for Program Transmission service.

8. In the RFI, Commission staff asked Bell Canada to:

    - clarify why its application was submitted as a withdrawal, as opposed to seeking destandardization or forbearance of the service;

- provide more information about available alternatives to the Channels for Program Transmission service; and
- clarify how Bell Canada engaged with customers of its Channels for Program Transmission service to identify alternative solutions.

9. In response to the RFI, Bell Canada stated that it is proposing to withdraw the Channels for Program Transmission service, rather than first seeking destandardization or forbearance, because (i) the service has no new customers and there is little to no demand for additional circuits, and (ii) there are growing technical challenges associated with Bell Canada's ability to maintain the service. Bell Canada submitted that the infrastructure used to support the service is old, that manufacturer support for the equipment used to provide the service was withdrawn many years ago, and that spare parts are exceedingly difficult to obtain, even in used condition. Bell Canada added that, in its view, withdrawing the service is the only practical and effective way to encourage customers to migrate to alternative services. Bell Canada also expressed concern that it may no longer be able to maintain or restore the service within 6 to 12 months, which it expects will lead to increasingly frequent and unresolved service outages.

10. Bell Canada identified alternative Internet Protocol (IP) services offered both by it and other telecommunications service providers (TSPs), which are similar to the Channels for Program Transmission service. Bell Canada's alternative services are largely provided over its newer and more reliable fibre networks. It added that redundancy can be provided through a wireless backup service or a secondary Internet connection from an alternate Internet service provider. Bell Canada noted that the appropriateness of alternative services may depend on a customer's specific technical needs and installation timelines.

11. Bell Canada provided a table detailing representative pricing for the alternative services it proposed in its application. The monthly rate varies depending on the service and whether the customer has a contract in place for the service.[1] The rates can therefore vary from $100/month for Internet service with a static IP address with a five-year contract to $3,100/month for broadcast Ethernet with no contract.

12. Bell Canada provided information on the various ways in which it engaged with customers of its Channels for Program Transmission service to identify possible alternative services. Bell Canada highlighted that every customer's monthly bill for the Channels for Program Transmission service features an up-to-date list of affected circuits. Bell Canada added that the notices it sent to customers invited them to contact it to discuss their options.

[1] Bell Canada's RFI responses indicate that Ethernet, Internet, and IP-VPN are only available under contract. Broadcast Ethernet and Internet services with a static IP address are offered both on a contract and non-contract basis.

Issues

13. Interveners raised several issues regarding Bell Canada's proposal. The Commission has broadly categorized these issues as follows:

- the time customers will require to transition to an alternative service;
- the reliability of alternative services;
- the cost of alternative services; and
- other issues.

14. The Commission has considered each of these below to arrive at its final determinations.

The time customers will require to transition to an alternative service

Positions of parties

15. All interveners[2] explained that the 1 March 2026 withdrawal date would not provide sufficient time for them to (i) allocate the budget to pay for new equipment and the increased monthly rate of the proposed alternative services; and (ii) work out issues regarding site access coordination, technical integration, and circuit-specific customization. All interveners proposed different timelines they considered appropriate.

16. The NCRA/ANREC submitted that it opposed Bell Canada's application and that, if the Commission approves the application, the withdrawal date should be extended to 1 March 2027 so that its members would have more time to budget and fundraise for new capital expenses and to implement any necessary changes.

17. The ARCQ submitted that service withdrawal should be delayed to at least 1 September 2027 to provide sufficient time to plan and implement an alternative option while avoiding cutting off service to its listeners. It indicated that the digital infrastructure in rural Quebec is inadequate, making the transition complex, costly, and uncertain.

18. Corus submitted that the final withdrawal date should be extended so that alternatives could be implemented in an orderly fashion. It added that, in its recent experience, other circuit installations took longer than expected.

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[2] CKUT and Leclerc were among the five interveners that submitted that the 1 March 2026 withdrawal date did not allow sufficient time to transition to other services. Their interventions regarding the withdrawal date included other considerations and will therefore be analyzed later in this order.

Bell Canada’s reply

19. Bell Canada noted that several parties expressed concern about the potentially complex and time-consuming task of transitioning away from the Channels for Program Transmission service. Bell Canada also noted that some parties requested additional time for the transition, and it proposed to extend the effective withdrawal date to 1 December 2026 on a best-efforts basis. Bell Canada highlighted that this would provide customers with more than 14 months’ notice from the date on which the application was filed.

20. Bell Canada submitted that any further extension to the withdrawal date must be considered in light of the practical realities of providing the service, including the service’s end-of-life status, and the existing availability of alternatives. Given these factors, Bell Canada proposed to provide its Channels for Program Transmission service on a best-efforts basis between 1 March 2026 and 1 December 2026, adding that customers would need to recognize that Bell Canada may not be able to restore service quickly, or at all, in the event of service failure during that period. Bell Canada submitted that it would be unjust for the Commission to order it to continue providing the Channels for Program Transmission service after the extended deadline of 1 December 2026.

Commission’s analysis

21. The Commission notes that, in response to interveners’ submissions stating that they would face challenges in transitioning to an alternative service by 1 March 2026, Bell Canada proposed to formally withdraw the Channels for Program Transmission service on 1 December 2026, and to continue offering it on a best-efforts basis from 1 March 2026 to 1 December 2026. The Commission considers it must take into account the possibility that Bell Canada may, at any time, become unable to provide the service due to lack of suitable parts, when considering the effective date of withdrawal for the service.

22. The Commission considers that interveners’ concerns regarding the amount of time required to transition to an alternative service must be analyzed in light of the expected reliability of the infrastructure used to provide the Channels for Program Transmission service.

The reliability of alternative services

Positions of parties

23. Leclerc and CKUT submitted that withdrawing the Channels for Program Transmission service would compromise the continuity and reliability of their radio broadcasting, and that equivalent alternative solutions are not available. CKUT noted that other campus/community radio stations that recently switched services experienced challenges that required considerable attention from staff and resulted in a noticeable deterioration of service.

24. CKUT and the NCRA/ANREC indicated that Bell Canada’s copper lines are reliable in all weather conditions and transmit data without delay. The NCRA/ANREC further indicated that

alternative services that rely on Internet connections can be less reliable due to Internet outages. CKUT indicated that analog lines are better insulated against these outages.

Bell Canada's reply

25. Bell Canada reiterated that the Channels for Program Transmission service is a mature service and that demand for it has fallen. Bell Canada added that the service is provided over old and increasingly unreliable legacy copper facilities, which provide much lower bandwidth compared to the fibre data services that are commercially available. Bell Canada reiterated its concern regarding its ability to provide reliable service, given that much of the infrastructure for the Channels for Program Transmission service is old, manufacturer support was withdrawn many years ago, spare parts are difficult to obtain, and the test sets required to diagnose service issues are also old and deteriorating quickly.

26. Bell Canada disagreed with comments that its proposed alternatives may not meet the needs of its customers. Its technical staff reviewed the concerns expressed and indicated that the proposed alternatives could effectively replace the Channels for Program Transmission service. Bell Canada noted that while CKUT's intervention indicates that some broadcasting stations using alternative services have identified certain reliability issues, other broadcasters are already using these services successfully. Bell Media Inc., which is also impacted by the withdrawal of the Channels for Program Transmission service, plans to fully transition to these alternative services.

27. Bell Canada submitted that the proposed alternatives to the Channels for Program Transmission service are significantly more reliable than the legacy, copper-based service. It further submitted that, as time goes on, the risk increases of a service failure that cannot be corrected promptly, or at all. Bell Canada also noted CKUT's concerns regarding reliable communication with its listeners and responded that these factors make it inappropriate for any customer to continue to rely on the Channels for Program Transmission service after having been made aware of the reliability issues reported in Bell Canada's application.

Commission's analysis

28. The Commission notes several interveners' statements that the Channels for Program Transmission service is reliable for day-to-day operations and that issues such as Internet outages could potentially affect IP alternatives.

29. However, the Commission is of the view that the Channels for Program Transmission service will likely experience increasingly frequent and unresolved service outages. This is because the equipment for the Channels for Program Transmission service is no longer being manufactured and spare parts for the service's legacy copper infrastructure are increasingly difficult to source. Furthermore, test sets used to diagnose service outages are old and deteriorating quickly.

30. The Commission notes Bell Canada's view that the only practical way to encourage customers to move away from the Channels for Program Transmission service is to propose its withdrawal.

The Commission considers that withdrawing this service, while providing customers with additional time to transition to alternative services, will help facilitate a transition to alternative services and will help Canadian broadcasting services to be offered with the same quality that Canadians currently enjoy, while ensuring they remain reliable and serviceable in the long run.

The cost of the alternative services proposed by Bell Canada

Positions of parties

31. CKUT and Leclerc submitted that the alternative solution that Bell Canada recommended was quoted at $3,100 per month,[3] which represents a rate increase of over $30,000 per year. Both interveners submitted that such an increase is prohibitive and is likely to undermine the quality of their operations and the content they offer. CKUT also indicated that it may need to lay off staff to cover the cost of the alternative service, placing additional strain on the organization.

32. The NCRA/ANREC submitted that Bell Canada's initially-proposed 1 March 2026 withdrawal date does not necessarily fall within member stations' current budgets because these were drafted before Bell Canada filed its application. Additionally, the NCRA/ANREC noted that, to meet the 1 March 2026 withdrawal date, radio stations would have to install alternative transmission systems during the winter months, which would be challenging given the cold weather, snow, and reduced daylight hours.

33. Leclerc requested that the Commission deny Bell Canada's request to withdraw the Channels for Program Transmission service until an economically viable and technically proven alternative becomes available in the locations where it operates. Leclerc added that if the Commission approves the withdrawal request with Bell Canada's proposed deadline, it should do so on the condition that:

   - service for existing customers be maintained until an equally reliable and similarly priced alternative takes its place;
   - Bell Canada provide a transition credit of at least 60 months covering all non-recurring costs to offset the difference between the current service rate and the higher IP service rate;
   - Bell Canada commit to service quality that is tailored to audio uses and continuity in the event of service failure and transmission delays;
   - a detailed and individualized migration plan be prepared; and

[3] This is the non-contract rate for the broadcast Ethernet service.

- Bell Canada provide a technical report and a cost study demonstrating the functional equivalence for each of its proposed alternatives.

34. According to CKUT, Bell Canada's proposal does not provide sufficient time for the financial and technical planning required to move to an alternative service, given CKUT's concerns about the technical reliability and costs of IP alternatives. CKUT therefore requested that the Commission deny Bell Canada's application.

Bell Canada's reply

35. Bell Canada noted that the rates cited by interveners appear to be based on non-contractual rates, which are higher than contractual rates. Bell Canada submitted that, given that its proposed alternatives are established services with a significant customer base, these services can be considered reasonably priced. Additionally, Bell Canada noted that these alternatives are forborne from regulation, which indicates that there is sufficient competition for customers to be free to choose an alternative that best meets their needs, including those offered by other service providers.

Commission's analysis

36. In its RFI response, Bell Canada submitted that other TSPs offer alternative services and some customers will likely choose them. The Commission notes that other TSPs could also offer solutions similar to those suggested in Bell Canada's application, and given that those solutions are forborne from regulation, they would likely be similar in price and quality to Bell Canada's solutions. Therefore, the Commission considers that Bell Canada's proposed alternatives are likely to be priced comparably to other service offerings that are currently available.

37. Regarding Leclerc's requests and concerns regarding the rates of alternative services, the Commission considers that these must be assessed within the broader context of the Channels for Program Transmission service and its identified alternatives. In this case, the alternatives to the Channels for Program Transmission service are forborne services. Forborne services are those for which the Commission has previously determined there is sufficient market competition provided by other TSPs. These services can act as effective substitutes for the Channels for Program Transmission service at competitive rates.

Other issues

Positions of parties

38. Corus requested that the Commission require Bell Canada to provide detailed, circuit-specific notices to all affected customers prior to service withdrawal that outline what services are available to replace the Channels for Program Transmission service, and at what rates. Corus submitted that Bell Canada's application lacks sufficient detail, making it difficult for customers to identify which of their operations and sites will be impacted. It added that circuit-level notification, which includes detailed information about affected locations and services, is

necessary to ensure a smooth and orderly transition. Corus further submitted that, while Bell Canada listed certain potential service alternatives, it is unclear whether those alternatives will be available for sites that are impacted by the withdrawal.

Bell Canada’s reply

39. Regarding Corus’s request that Bell Canada provide detailed, circuit-specific notices to all affected customers prior to service withdrawal and to list alternative services and their rates, Bell Canada submitted that it is prepared to work directly with its customers to provide information on the specific circuits, customer sites, and services that will be impacted by the withdrawal. In particular, Bell Canada noted that it already provided circuit-specific information to Corus by email on 3 November 2025. In addition, Bell Canada submitted that it was providing circuit-specific information to CKUT and Leclerc on the date of Bell Canada’s reply. Bell Canada noted that circuit information can typically be provided within a week of being requested.

Commission’s analysis

40. In compliance with the procedure set out in Telecom Information Bulletin 2010-455-1, Bell Canada provided the Commission with (i) a description of the service proposed to be withdrawn, (ii) a date for the withdrawal, (iii) rationale for the withdrawal, (iv) the number of customers affected, and (v) a copy of the notice to affected customers.

41. In addition, the Commission notes that Bell Canada submitted in its RFI response that an up-to-date list of the affected circuits is provided in each customer’s monthly bill for the Channels for Program Transmission service. Bell Canada also provided customers with the information to contact it to discuss alternative services. The Commission considers that these measures provide customers with appropriate information regarding the Channels for Program Transmission service’s withdrawal and their alternatives.

Conclusion

42. In light of the above, the Commission approves Bell Canada’s proposal to withdraw its Channels for Program Transmission service, effective 1 December 2026, subject to situations that may arise before that date where it is no longer possible for Bell Canada to provide the service due to a lack of suitable parts. Through this decision, the Commission is working to help facilitate a transition to alternative services that will allow Canadian broadcasting services to be offered with the same quality that Canadians currently enjoy, while ensuring they remain reliable and serviceable in the long run.

43. Bell Canada is required to provide the Commission with a list of customers that are currently subscribed to the Channels for Program Transmission service within **15 calendar days** of the date of this decision. Bell Canada must keep these customers informed about the withdrawal and coordinate efforts to replace this service in a seamless way.

44. Revised tariff pages are to be issued within 10 calendar days of the date of this order. Revised tariff pages can be submitted to the Commission without a description page or a request for approval; a tariff application is not required.

Secretary General

Related document

- *Approval processes for tariff applications and intercarrier agreements*, Telecom Information Bulletin CRTC 2010-455-1, 19 February 2016