



Telecom Order CRTC 2026-28

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Gatineau, 6 February 2026

Public records: Tariff Notices 93, 104, 559, 590, 873, 1258, and 7719

Bell Canada et al. – Withdrawal of Call Break-in service

Summary

The Commission received applications from Bell Canada and its affiliates, Bell Aliant Regional Communications, Limited Partnership; Bell MTS Inc.; DMTS, a division of Bell Canada; KMTS, a division of Bell Canada; Northwestel Inc.; and Télébec, Société en commandite (collectively, Bell Canada et al.) proposing to withdraw the Call Break-in service from multiple tariffs.

This service enables customers to obtain operator assistance to verify if a called line is actually in use or busy and operator interruption of a conversation in progress on a called line. Bell Canada et al. proposed to withdraw the Call Break-in service because it is based on use of a landline as the target line, which is declining, and because there has been an extremely low number of service activations in recent years. Moreover, the service relies on legacy copper infrastructure, which is being replaced with new fibre-based infrastructure.

Accordingly, the Commission considers that Bell Canada et al.'s applications are reasonable and approves the applications.

A dissenting opinion by Commissioner Bram Abramson is attached to this order.

Applications

1. On 2 July 2025, the Commission received applications from Bell Canada and its affiliates, Bell Aliant Regional Communications, Limited Partnership (Bell Aliant); Bell MTS Inc. (Bell MTS); DMTS, a division of Bell Canada (DMTS); KMTS, a division of Bell Canada (KMTS); Northwestel Inc. (Northwestel); and Télébec, Société en commandite (Télébec) [collectively, Bell Canada et al.] proposing changes to the following tariffs:
 - Bell Canada Access Services Tariff, Section 2 – CAT – Access Arrangements, Item 41 – Operator Services;
 - Bell Aliant General Tariff, Section 1 – General, Item 130 – Operator Services and Consumer Safeguards;
 - Bell MTS General Tariff, Section 2 – Exchange Service, Item 1610 – Operator Services;

- DMTS General Tariff, Section 490 – Miscellaneous Equipment, Item 13 – Busy Line Verification/Interruption;
 - KMTS General Tariff, Section 490 – Miscellaneous Equipment, Item 4 – Busy Line Verification/Interruption;
 - Northwestel Access Services Tariff, Section 2 – Carrier Access Tariff, Item 41.2 – Emergency Busy Line Verification/Interruption Service; and
 - Télébec General Tariff, Section 2 – Service de Circonscription, Item 2.7.5 – Service de vérification d’occupation de ligne et service d’interruption de communication; and Section 2 – Service de Circonscription, Item 7.1.2 – Définition, Service de téléphoniste.
2. Specifically, Bell Canada et al. are proposing to withdraw the Call Break-in service. This service enables customers to obtain operator assistance to verify if a called line is actually in use or busy and operator interruption of a conversation in progress on a called line. Bell Canada et al. noted that it is only possible to verify if a called line is actually in use, or to interrupt a conversation, when the target line is served by legacy copper infrastructure.
 3. Bell Canada et al. indicated that there has been a significant decline in the number of requests for Call Break-in in recent years, and that this decline is associated with their ongoing efforts to modernize their network by replacing trouble-prone copper facilities with new fibre-based infrastructure. Bell Canada et al. also submitted that this declining usage trend for Call Break-in will likely continue because the network modernization work is ongoing.
 4. Bell Canada et al. submitted that it was not possible to provide usage details specific to each of their affiliates’ operating territories given the age of the platform that is used to provide Call Break-in and submitted only cumulative usage, which was extremely low.
 5. Regarding customer notification, Bell Canada et al. noted that Call Break-in is a pay-as-you-go operator service that is provided on a charge-per-use basis without any need to enroll, subscribe, or incur a recurring charge. As a result, the service does not have subscribers. All of Bell Canada et al.’s voice service customers, regardless of what infrastructure they are on, can use the service by dialling “0” for the operator and asking to use Call Break-in on a target landline. Bell Canada et al. submitted that if they were to send a notice to every customer with access to this service, of which there are millions, it would cost several million dollars and would likely not be useful or would be confusing to the vast majority of customers. Bell Canada et al. submitted that they would notify anyone who called the operator asking to use the Call Break-in service of the impending withdrawal, first until 18 August 2025 and then, in response to a Commission staff request for information, to the extended date of 29 September 2025.

6. Bell Canada et al. also offered to post a notice on their websites, similar to what would normally be sent to customers for a subscription service proposed for withdrawal, including all the required information set out in Telecom Information Bulletin 2010-455-1, paragraph 39. Due to the number of websites affected, Bell Canada et al. proposed to delay the withdrawal of Call Break-in to 14 October 2025. Commission staff accepted these extension requests via [letter](#) dated 11 August 2025.
7. Bell Canada et al. also identified potential substitutes, indicating that there are several options available for customers to reach one another on an urgent basis if a landline is busy, most of which are free or very low cost. These options include mobile wireless texting and social media. Bell Canada et al. also submitted that customers can use email to contact the person they are trying to reach, which can be delivered directly to both wireline and wireless devices. Bell Canada et al. added that the decreasing number of requests despite the service being available to millions of subscribers makes it clear that customers are already successfully using alternative measures to reach each other when a landline is busy.
8. Bell Canada et al. initially proposed an effective date of 31 August 2025. However, on 1 August 2025, in response to the above-mentioned Commission staff request for information, Bell Canada et al. proposed an extension of the comment period to 29 September 2025. Consequently, Bell Canada et al. proposed a new effective date of 14 October 2025.
9. The Commission did not receive any interventions with regard to the applications.

Commission's analysis

10. In compliance with the procedure set out in Telecom Information Bulletin 2010-455-1, Bell Canada et al. provided the Commission with (i) a description of the service proposed to be withdrawn, (ii) the proposed withdrawal date, and (iii) rationale for the withdrawal.
11. With respect to the requirement to provide the number of customers affected, Bell Canada et al. noted that the Call Break-in service is provided on a charge-per-use basis without a recurring charge and provided service usage information illustrating the decline in activations from 2017 to 2024. The Commission considers this approach to be acceptable.
12. With respect to the requirement to provide a copy of the notice to affected customers, Bell Canada et al. indicated that until the end of the comment period on 29 September 2025, their customer service representatives advised Call Break-in service users of the proposed withdrawal. Representatives also provided guidance to users on how to comment to the Commission on these applications, should they wish to do so. Bell Canada et al. also posted a notice of the proposed withdrawal on their respective websites. The Commission considers that this approach is acceptable and prevents confusion from contacting all customers, the vast majority of whom do not use, or may not even be aware of, Call Break-in.

13. Bell Canada et al. proposed to withdraw the Call Break-in service because it is based on use of a landline as the target line, which is declining. This is demonstrated by the low number of service activations in 2024 over millions of subscribers. That low number also demonstrates that customers are already successfully using alternative measures to reach each other when a landline is busy. Bell Canada et al. indicated that their copper facilities are frequently trouble-prone and that they are making ongoing efforts to replace those facilities with new fibre-based infrastructure. They proposed the withdrawal as part of this transition.
14. In light of the above, the Commission considers that Bell Canada et al.'s request is reasonable and complies with the associated regulatory policies.
15. The Commission considers that approval of these applications advances the policy objectives set out in paragraphs 7(c) and (f) of the *Telecommunications Act*.¹

Conclusion

16. In light of all of the above, the Commission approves, by majority decision, Bell Canada et al.'s applications.
17. 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 documents

- *Bell Canada – Application requesting forbearance from the regulation of Digital Exchange Access Service*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2025-310, 20 November 2025
- *Bell Canada – Tariff Notice 7716 – Destandardization of DS-1 Access services*, Telecom Order CRTC 2025-282, 30 October 2025
- *Northwestel Inc. – Introduction of Winback Discount for Residential Unlimited Internet Packages*, Telecom Order CRTC 2025-74, 10 March 2025
- *Approval processes for tariff applications and intercarrier agreements*, Telecom Information Bulletin CRTC 2010-455-1, 19 February 2016

¹ The cited policy objectives are 7(c) to enhance the efficiency and competitiveness, at the national and international levels, of Canadian telecommunications; and (f) to foster increased reliance on market forces for the provision of telecommunications services and to ensure that regulation, where required, is efficient and effective.

Dissenting opinion of Commissioner Bram Abramson

1. Busy Line Verification/Interruption, or Call Break-in, is not an ordinary retail feature. One does not browse for it while shopping for a phone plan. Rather, it is an operator-assisted emergency landline override, designed to force reachability. In the past, the North American Emergency Number Association (NENA) has defined it as the “[a]bility of an operator in special circumstances or emergency situations to interrupt a conversation, if necessary at the request of a P[ublic] S[afety] A[nswering] P[oint]”.¹
2. The question on this application is not whether Call Break-in is used often by callers to Bell Canada lines or the lines of its affiliates. Nor is it whether regulators in other jurisdictions have approved its removal. It is whether eliminating a last-resort emergency capability is justified on the record before the Commission.
3. On this record, it is not. If Call Break-in disappears without an equivalent replacement, the system loses a last-tier resilience mechanism. The standard for withdrawing it should therefore be more than cursory. Respectfully, there are four reasons why this record does not meet that standard.

Taking charge and seeing large

4. First, Bell Canada and its affiliates, Bell Aliant Regional Communications, Limited Partnership; Bell MTS Inc.; DMTS, a division of Bell Canada; KMTS, a division of Bell Canada; Northwestel Inc.; and Télébec, Société en commandite (collectively, Bell Canada et al.) point to copper decline as the key reason to withdraw Call Break-in. The record suggests that the service functions only on copper lines and that fibre networks do not support it. From this, Bell Canada et al. argue that the service should be withdrawn as fibre continues to spread. A majority of the Telecommunications Committee² accepts this logic, now a steady drumbeat across tariff applications.
5. But tariffed obligations are, and ought to be, defined by the functions meaningful to users, not the technology that happens to carry them. The public interest sits with deliberate, accountable decisions about when those functions may be retired, not their quiet attrition as an evergreen but automatic by-product of network upgrades. Addressing each loss piecemeal is ineffective. The Commission should see larger: a modernization proceeding which clearly identifies what services

¹ *NENA Master Glossary of 9-1-1 Terminology*, NENA-01-002, updated February 2005, retrieved from the [FCC website](#).

² On behalf of the Commission: *Telecommunications Committee*, By-Law No. 10 (CRTC), paragraph (e) (“[a]ny act or thing done by the Telecommunications Committee shall be deemed to be an act or thing done by the members [...]”), pursuant to paragraph 11(1)(b) and subsection 12(3) of the *Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act* (duties delegated to standing committees by by-law. As distinguished from assigning a particular file to a panel: *Shoan v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2016 FCA 261, para 6).

modern networks cannot deliver; sets timelines; and establishes such mitigations or successor arrangements as appropriate.

6. A coordinated proceeding would let stakeholders see the full scope of change. Copper networks remain heavily relied on, especially in rural and remote areas, even as tariff applications flag unsupported equipment, waning reliability, and receding functionality. Yet we continue to depend on these same networks for services central to our public policy obligations.³ That dissonance, which should ring alarm bells, demands regulatory oversight.⁴ Leaving the matter to one-off, tariff-specific, hard-to-navigate proceedings⁵ amounts to drip regulation, loss without poor visibility, change with little accountability.
7. A coordinated proceeding would also let the Commission consider what additional regulatory rails modernization requires, like transitional requirements, broader user notice, and targeted retention of high-consequence functions. It would encourage more deliberate instrument choice. Withdrawal traps in amber a service's regulatory status, removing the serving carrier's option even to offer it. Policy-based forbearance,⁶ as the majority acknowledged for different reasons in the Bell Canada Kuujjuaq matter, preserves the flexibility to continue to offer it.⁷
8. For these reasons, copper-to-fibre withdrawals like this one should be addressed together through a modernization proceeding that engages all stakeholders. In contrast to the majority, I would have consolidated the former into the latter. Absent that, I would have preferred policy-based forbearance, retaining oversight powers under the *Telecommunications Act's* undue preference provision,⁸ to withdrawal.

Functional substitution in dangerous times

9. Second, Bell Canada et al. advance parallel non-telephone channels as an effective substitute for Call Break-in. The record shows that Call Break-in is a legacy service and infrequently used, but does not address the landline-dependent individuals and institutions least reachable on alternative

³ Dissent to Telecom Order 2025-282, paragraphs 6-9.

⁴ Dissents to Telecom Order 2025-282, paragraphs 13-17, and Telecom Decision 2025-310, paragraph 18.

⁵ Dissents to Telecom Orders 2025-74 and 2025-282.

⁶ Pursuant to subsection 34(1) of the *Telecommunications Act*, as distinguished from the competition-based forbearance set out at subsection 34(2).

⁷ In Telecom Decision 2025-310, the Telecommunications Committee, by majority decision, granted unconditional policy-based forbearance of Digital Exchange Access to a power plant in Kuujjuaq, Nunavik. I dissented, arguing that without retaining *ex post* undue preference review powers, policy-based forbearance was not the appropriate tool for breaking a negotiating impasse over an essential service required by critical infrastructure in a remote community: in such a context, Commission oversight, not abandoning to the market negotiations in the presence of unequal bargaining power, best serves public policy goals. In the contexts raised here, by contrast, preserving the ability to offer a service rather than withdrawing it completely is likely the more policy-consistent approach.

⁸ Subsections 27(2) and (4).

platforms. The majority nevertheless accepts that largely asynchronous alternatives like mobile texting, email, and number-independent interpersonal platform services (Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp) are adequate substitutes.

10. But that overlooks what Call Break-in uniquely provides: operator-mediated verification, forced interruption of an active call, and immediate connection on the same medium. These features enable a kind of reachability that does not depend on application adoption, user behaviour, or the recipient noticing a message. Among the population segments least likely to use online platforms persistently, and in homes and communities least served by in-home mobile and broadband, we cannot assume that asynchronous, platform-dependent forms of communication are functional substitutes.
11. All the less so when these forms of communication depend on the very mobile or broadband connectivity such homes are least likely to have. Picture a grandparent chatting away with distant family while a local wildfire brews. Imagine a dispatcher trying to break through to a clinic after-hours where the line is busy and time is short. When the line is dark, the system must be able to kick at the darkness until it answers.
12. Put simply, those most likely to need Call Break-in to be reached are often those least likely to be reached by the suggested alternatives. Substitutability must be judged against the job the service performs, not against broad claims of availability made from places of ease and choice. Call Break-in operates entirely within the voice network and remains effective even when Internet Protocol-based services are congested, unavailable, or inaccessible. Technological substitution is not uniform. It lands unevenly across distance and across lives. Rural, remote, and transition-dependent users experience those shifts most sharply, often at the edge of risk. We have learned this most clearly, and most painfully, in the context of emergency services. In such circumstances, resilience depends on keeping the few functions that still cut through when everything else is busy.
13. Ignoring these differences in favour of a one-size-fits-all approach to substitutability transforms efficiency gains into social costs. Evidence that attended to these differences, for instance by showing who actually uses Call Break-in and for what purposes, or by hearing from those charged with public safety and service continuity, would have produced a fuller and more reliable record.

Like antennas to interveners

14. Third, the record does not identify the types of customers that Bell Canada et al. have billed for the service in the past, nor the types of users whose calls those customers, with operator assistance, interrupted.
15. Low usage is not dispositive of risk: it can conceal it. Services designed for emergency or contingency use are, by their nature, low-frequency, while the consequences of error are

asymmetric and potentially severe. As numbers decline, the service's criticality to each subscriber reached can only be presumed to increase.

16. Evidence characterizing customer types, by contrast, could have clarified whether Call Break-in continues to serve emergency, institutional, or public-safety functions. Bell Canada et al. note that as a non-subscription service there are fewer direct avenues to reach users about their proposed withdrawal. Even so, a straightforward review of billing records to determine whether use clustered around PSAPs, healthcare providers, or other institutional users would have filled an evidentiary gap. Given the applicants' incentive to assemble a sufficient record to ensure expeditious processing, it is difficult to draw a favourable inference from their failure to do so.
17. Fourth, and relatedly, the record shows little effort to notify the rural and remote PSAPs or emergency services communities whose operational responsibilities make them obvious stakeholders. Their absence from the service list and record is therefore notable. Website notices and in-service mentions by agents are salutary but limited, and no substitute for direct outreach to those most engaged with such matters.
18. In short, the record contains neither a clear signal of who relies on the service, nor evidence that those most logically engaged were asked. Where a function is designed for contingency use and carries high-consequence risk, the Commission should expect more: targeted outreach, concrete data, and direct input from those who depend on it. Without that foundation, conclusions about substitutability rest on assumption rather than evidence.
19. Rather than write a minority opinion, I would have preferred a record built on direct evidence and meaningful notice to those most engaged and affected. Carriers have both the opportunity and incentive to assemble such a record, particularly given the goal of expeditious review. On the record before us, they did not. For a safety-adjacent service likely relied on, in the absence of contrary evidence, by landline-dependent and less technologically sophisticated populations, the assumptions required to approve withdrawal are not justified. Even on a stronger record, I would have preferred policy-based forbearance, leavened by the power to review undue preference, in order to preserve continued availability. I therefore respectfully dissent.