



## Telecom Decision CRTC 2026-89

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Reference: Part 1 application posted on 21 May 2025

Gatineau, 14 May 2026

*Public record: 8640-B2-202502476*

### **Bell Canada – Application for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in nine exchanges in Manitoba**

#### **Summary**

The Commission is working to promote competition for telecommunications services and streamlining regulations where appropriate while maintaining strong consumer protections for Canadians. To streamline regulations, the Commission approves applications for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services after determining whether there is sufficient competition in the affected exchanges. Residential local exchange services refer to what are more commonly called landline or home phone services.

Bell Canada requested forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in nine exchanges in Manitoba: Altona, Carman, Lockport, Morden, Selkirk, Steinbach, Swan River, Thompson, and Winkler.

The Commission received a range of submissions on Bell Canada’s application. The Commission considers that Bell Canada provided sufficient evidence to support its request for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in five of these exchanges and that Bell Canada’s draft customer communications plan meets the Commission’s expectations. However, the Commission does not consider that the competitor presence test is met in Altona and Carman, or that competitive services are widely or robustly available in Morden and Winkler.

The Commission therefore approves Bell Canada’s application for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in Lockport, Selkirk, Steinbach, Swan River, and Thompson, but denies forbearance in the exchanges of Altona, Carman, Morden, and Winkler.

#### **Application**

1. The Commission received an application from Bell Canada, dated 9 April 2025, requesting forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services<sup>1</sup> in nine exchanges in

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<sup>1</sup> In this decision, “residential local exchange services” refers to local exchange services used by residential customers to access the public switched telephone network and any associated service charges, features, and ancillary services.

Manitoba: Altona, Carman, Lockport, Morden, Selkirk, Steinbach, Swan River, Thompson, and Winkler. Bell Canada, through its Bell MTS Inc. (Bell MTS) division, is the incumbent local exchange carrier in these exchanges.

2. Pursuant to the Commission's requirements in Telecom Decision 2006-15 and Telecom Regulatory Policy 2020-40, Bell Canada provided documents to support its forbearance request, including competitor presence data and a draft customer communications plan for the Commission's review. Bell Canada also submitted the following evidence to demonstrate that the nine exchanges meet the competitor presence test:
  - serviceability data for facilities-based wireline competitors at the postal code level;
  - long-term evolution (LTE) wireless coverage maps for facilities-based wireless competitors, namely TELUS Communications Inc. (TELUS) and Rogers Communications Canada Inc. (Rogers); and
  - data from July 2024 produced by Mediastats Inc., a third-party telecommunications data aggregator that provides residential serviceability analyses.
3. Bell Canada filed a draft customer communications plan and indicated in its application that it would begin notifying affected customers on 9 April 2025 and complete notifications by 11 April 2025. These notices were to explain the implications of forbearance, confirm service continuity under Bell Canada's Unregulated Terms of Service, and provide contact information for the Commission, the Commission for Complaints for Telecom-television Services Inc. (CCTS),<sup>2</sup> the Competition Bureau, the Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA), and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (OPC).
4. The Commission received a total of eight interventions consisting of six from individual residents, one from a municipal government, and another from TELUS. Bell Canada filed a reply on 30 June 2025.

## **Positions of parties**

5. Intervenors raised several issues regarding Bell Canada's application. They identified the absence of fibre Internet service and poor wireless signal quality in their areas, the alleged omissions of residential postal codes from Bell Canada's coverage data, and concerns about the reliability of access to emergency services in the event of deregulation. Most of the intervenors' comments were specific to the Morden and Winkler exchanges and challenged the adequacy and credibility of Bell Canada's evidence.

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<sup>2</sup> The CCTS is an independent body that assists Canadians who have been unable to resolve disputes regarding forborne telecommunications services with their telecommunications service providers.

6. Specifically, with respect to Morden and Winkler, four individual residents stated that neither Bell MTS nor Valley Fiber Ltd (Valley Fiber) is able to provide fibre Internet services to their residences and that Bell MTS, TELUS, Rogers, and Freedom Mobile Inc. are not able to provide high-quality cellular voice service in those exchanges. A fifth resident submitted a screenshot of an LTE signal strength reading to further demonstrate the inadequacy of wireless coverage in the area. That same resident and a municipal government submitted address and postal code data that was excluded from Bell Canada's coverage maps. Interveners therefore requested that the Commission not forbear from regulating Bell Canada's residential local exchange services in Morden and Winkler.
7. Bell Canada replied that, regardless of the postal code and address data that was submitted and the issues reported around fibre Internet and cellphone services, the competitor presence test was met. Bell Canada maintained that that test does not require universal service availability and that all affected customers would continue to have access to standalone local exchange services at regulated rates. Bell Canada also asserted that competitor residential local exchange service coverage would continue to meet or exceed 75% in all exchanges, even with the addition of the allegedly omitted postal codes.

### **Commission's analysis**

8. The Commission assessed Bell Canada's application on the basis of the local forbearance test set out in Telecom Decision 2006-15 and modified in Telecom Regulatory Policy 2020-40. This test requires the Commission to consider service definition and product and geographic markets, evidence of a competitive market, the adequacy and transparency of any associated customer communications plan, and the application's procedural compliance and public record.

### **Service definition and product and geographic markets**

9. Bell Canada is seeking forbearance from the regulation of tariffed residential local exchange services in nine Manitoba exchanges. A list of these services is set out in the appendix to this decision. In Telecom Decision 2006-15, the Commission found that all of these services are eligible to be considered for forbearance.
10. Bell Canada defined the product market as residential local exchange services and the geographic market as each individual exchange. The Commission considers that Bell Canada's product and geographic market definitions are reasonable.

### **Evidence of a competitive market**

11. Bell Canada submitted that each of the nine exchanges is served by at least one facilities-based wireline competitor and one or more facilities-based wireless competitors, each covering at least 75% of residential households.

12. In each of the nine exchanges for which Bell Canada is seeking forbearance, the facilities-based competitors are:

<b>Exchange</b>	<b>Wireline competitor</b>	<b>Wireless competitor</b>
Altona	Valley Fiber	TELUS and Rogers
Carman	Valley Fiber	TELUS and Rogers
Lockport	Rogers, including Shaw Cablesystems G.P. (Rogers, including Shaw)	TELUS and Rogers
Morden	Valley Fiber	TELUS and Rogers
Selkirk	Rogers, including Shaw	TELUS and Rogers
Steinbach	Rogers, including Shaw	TELUS and Rogers
Swan River	Westman Communications Group (Westman Group)	TELUS and Rogers
Thompson	Rogers, including Shaw	TELUS and Rogers
Winkler	Valley Fiber	TELUS and Rogers

13. The Commission considers that Bell Canada sufficiently demonstrated the presence of at least one facilities-based wireline and at least one facilities-based wireless competitor serving at least 75% of residential households in five exchanges, namely Lockport, Selkirk, Steinbach, Swan River, and Thompson.
14. In those five exchanges, two of the wireline competitors submitted by Bell Canada are registered competitive local exchange carriers (CLECs), namely Rogers, including Shaw, and Westman Group, and their household coverage exceeds the 75% threshold. Bell Canada also demonstrated that wireless service in each of these exchanges covers at least 75% of locations where residential local exchange service lines exist, as confirmed by TELUS's intervention. The Commission therefore considers that Bell Canada submitted adequate data to demonstrate that the competitor presence test is met in these five exchanges.
15. In the Altona and Carman exchanges, however, Bell Canada identified Valley Fiber as the principal wireline competitor. Valley Fiber has not received Commission approval to operate as a CLEC and is no longer a proposed CLEC. As a result, Valley Fiber cannot be considered a facilities-based wireline competitor for the purpose of the competitor presence test. In the

absence of authorization for Valley Fiber to operate as a CLEC and provide local exchange services in compliance with Commission requirements, including vital services such as 9-1-1 and local number portability, the Commission considers that Bell Canada has not demonstrated that the competitor presence test is met in Altona and Carman.

16. For the exchanges of Morden and Winkler, an individual resident and a municipal government submitted technical evidence, namely maps and lists of omitted postal codes. That same individual resident also submitted an LTE signal strength reading<sup>3</sup> for the exchanges, and six other interveners submitted statements regarding their individual experiences with poor wireless coverage. In light of Valley Fiber's status, the Commission considers that this evidence demonstrates that wireless coverage in several zones within those exchanges, including rural areas such as Glencross, is weak or functionally absent. The evidence raises concerns about sufficient competition and, when compounded with Valley Fiber's status, raises doubts about whether LTE coverage is widespread and reliable. The Commission considers that the coverage maps submitted by Bell Canada depicting Valley Fiber's coverage were approximate and subject to change without notice, and that maps with up-to-date and precise data are required.
17. Consequently, the Commission finds that the competitor presence test is not met in the Morden and Winkler exchanges and that they cannot be forborne from regulation.

#### **Customer communications plan and transparency**

18. The Commission reviewed Bell Canada's draft customer communications plan for the remaining exchanges of Lockport, Selkirk, Steinbach, Swan River, and Thompson, and found it to be procedurally compliant and substantively sufficient. The Commission is of the view that the draft plan ensures that customers receive timely, clear, and actionable information about the impact of forbearance.
19. The Commission considers the references to Bell Canada's Unregulated Terms of Service and the inclusion of complaint and oversight bodies, namely the Commission, the CCTS, the Competition Bureau, the OCA, and the OPC, to be key elements that will help ensure customer protection during the transition. The Commission is of the view that the draft plan also supports service continuity and regulatory transparency.

#### **Procedural compliance and public record**

20. The application was filed, published, and processed in accordance with the Commission's procedural requirements. Six individual residents, one municipal government, and TELUS submitted interventions.

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<sup>3</sup> The readings provided were low Reference Signal Received Power (RSRP) LTE signal strength measurements. RSRP is a standard LTE performance metric used to measure the strength of a received reference signal, expressed in decibels referenced to one milliwatt.

## Conclusion

21. In light of all of the above, the Commission is satisfied that Bell Canada's application for forbearance from the regulation of local exchange services in five of the nine exchanges, namely Lockport, Selkirk, Steinbach, Swan River, and Thompson, meets the criteria established in Telecom Decision 2006-15 and Telecom Regulatory Policy 2020-40. The Commission therefore approves Bell Canada's application for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in those five exchanges.
22. The Commission denies Bell Canada's application for forbearance from the regulation of residential local exchange services in the Altona, Carman, Morden, and Winkler exchanges, because it is not satisfied that there is sufficient competition in these exchanges, given the concerns regarding the accuracy of the coverage maps, the adequacy of wireless coverage, and Valley Fiber's lack of CLEC status.
23. The Commission considers that granting forbearance in these five exchanges supports the policy objectives set out in paragraphs 7(c) and (f) of the *Telecommunications Act*.<sup>4</sup> This approval is also consistent with the 2023 Policy Direction,<sup>5</sup> which instructs the Commission to encourage competition, ensure affordable and high-quality telecommunications services, and reduce regulatory barriers.

Secretary General

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<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> *Order Issuing a Direction to the CRTC on a Renewed Approach to Telecommunications Policy*, SOR/2023-23, 10 February 2023.

## Appendix to Telecom Decision CRTC 2026-89

### Local exchange services eligible to be considered for forbearance from regulation in this decision (for residential customers only)

<b>Tariff</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>List of services</b>
24001	475	Rate Schedule for Primary Exchange Service
24001	480	Community Calling Service
24001	490	Urban Unlimited Service
24001	510	Service Charges
24001	720	Premium Exchange Service (Residential)
24001	800	Suspension of Service
24001	1000	Joint User Service (Residential)
24001	1600	Directory Listings
24001	2126	Label Service
24001	2135	Custom Telephone Number Service
24001	2136	Rotary Service (Residential)
24001	2142	Calling Features
24001	2145	900 Call Denial/Blocking Service
24001	2250	Voice and Feature Bundle (Residential)
24001	2251	Voice and Feature Bundle Lite (Residential)
24001	2260	Messaging Bundle
24001	2261	Mini Calling Features Value Pack
24001	2263	Calling Feature Flex Packs
24001	2265	Fibre to the Home (FTTH) Service
24001	2450	Remote Call Forwarding

## Related documents

- *Review of the price cap and local forbearance regimes*, Telecom Regulatory Policy CRTC 2020-40, 4 February 2020
- *Forbearance from the regulation of retail local exchange services*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2006-15, 6 April 2006, as amended by Order in Council P.C. 2007-532, 4 April 2007