



July 7, 2021

Dexter Goei, Chief Executive Officer,
Hakim Boubazine, President of Telecommunications & Chief Operating Officer
Robert Hoch, Senior Counsel, Government Affairs
Brad Ayers, Senior Director of Government Affairs
Altice USA/Suddenlink

Re: REQUEST FOR FURTHER ACTION TO ADDRESS SERVICE SHORTFALLS

Dear Messrs. Goei, Boubazine, Ayres and Hoch:

The Counties of Mono, Placer and Nevada, and the Towns of Mammoth Lakes and Truckee, in the Sierra Nevada region of California, collectively write this letter to summarize issues related to Altice/Suddenlink's ("Suddenlink") broadband service in our region which require attention and resolution. Each of these issues has been discussed between our agencies' staff and representatives of Suddenlink over the past 4-5 years, including most recently in online meetings organized by the County of Placer and attended by representatives of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and Suddenlink.

We appreciate the time that Suddenlink representatives have spent listening to and attempting to address service and infrastructure issues, but believe that it is important to memorialize our concerns in writing, with background where possible, and to also share this information with State of California representatives responsible for regulating and legislating broadband service so that solutions can be identified and implemented. The issues we seek to have resolved can generally be broken down into two categories: customer service and infrastructure.

1. CUSTOMER SERVICE ISSUES

- Inadequate call center – lack of knowledge over local circumstances: Suddenlink customers in our region experience significant issues when calling the customer service center which has been centralized, rather than having local representatives. The result is long wait times before being able to speak to a representative who typically lacks awareness of the local network environment and generally is unable to assist. Many customers complain of rude customer service technicians.
- Inadequate capacity to provide on-site service: Suddenlink reduced the number of technicians in the field and stratified teams based on knowledge or capacity. As a result, customers experience long lead-times (sometimes as long as two weeks) for issues requiring

in-person support. Often when technicians do arrive, they are incapable of resolving customer issues, frequently pointing to larger or more systemic outside plant issues which require support from a different SuddenLink team (requiring another long wait).

- Failure to appear when scheduled: Customers regularly report that Suddenlink provides large time windows (sometimes up to 8 hours in length) during which their techs may arrive. Despite customers arranging their day around the need to meet a tech, often the tech will not arrive. This can happen multiple times, resulting in significant inconvenience and frustration for the customer and a longer wait time for an issue to be fixed.
- Lack of in-person Customer Service Centers: Suddenlink made the decision to close Customer Service Centers in Mammoth Lakes and Bishop which were used by individuals to receive equipment and make payments – this was particularly important for low-income customers who often do not have access to credit or online banking. Though the Bishop Customer Care Center has re-opened, the Mammoth Lakes branch remains closed requiring a 90-120-mile round-trip (depending on where the customer lives) drive to Bishop for Mono County residents.
- Rate increases: Despite all of the issues identified above, Suddenlink continues to increase rates. The company offers low rates to get new customers in the door, then raises them annually unless/until the customer complains. Despite the raised rates, little investment is being made back into the local network, technicians, or customer care creating a cascading set of issues.
- Inability to deliver on Service Level Agreement (SLA) for business customers: Business owners are encouraged or required to sign up for a commercial Suddenlink account in order to access appropriate plans and have assurances tied to a Service Level Agreement. However, Suddenlink is unable to comply with its own obligations under the SLA which, among other things, provides for same-day resolution of issues. Many businesses complain of having to wait more than a full day for issue resolution, resulting in loss of sales and other financial impacts. There is no remediation by Suddenlink for these damages.
- No Customer Service Standards: Staff from all five agencies have been requesting copies of Suddenlink's customer service standards for more than four years and have not yet received them. Customer service standards are required under California's Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006 (DIVCA) of all franchised providers and should have been provided at the time the state franchise was issued. (Cal. Pub. Util. Code § 5900 and Cal. Gov. Code § 53055).
- Proposed reduction in upload speed. The agencies have also recently become aware Altice may be considering cutting upload speeds for Suddenlink cable internet plans. We sincerely hope that this news has been mis-reported by the media. (See https://www-cnet-com.cdn.ampproject.org/v/s/www.cnet.com/google-amp/news/altice-plans-to-cut-upload-speeds-for-its-optimum-and-suddenlink-cable-internet-plans/?amp_gsa=1&_js_v=a6&usqp=mq331AQIKAGwASCAAgM%3D#ampshare=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cnet.com%2Fhome%2Finternet%2Faltice-plans-to-cut-upload-speeds-for-its-optimum-and-suddenlink-cable-internet-plans%2F)

2. INFRASTRUCTURE ISSUES

- Failure to deal with system-wide issues: Rather than invest in the network and perform necessary work that would resolve system-wide issues for the longer term and otherwise improve the network, it is common for quick and inexpensive fixes (“band-aid solutions”) to be made. This results in the same issue recurring and requiring additional time and expense, or pushing that issue from one household or neighborhood to another, causing more issues down the line.
- Substandard repairs: Repairs are often made in a poor/sub-standard manner leaving them susceptible to future impacts and issues. Examples include the placement of temporary lines to alleviate an issue which are left in place for months or years rather than days or weeks. In places where underground lines exist, often Suddenlink technicians will simply lay new lines on top of the ground and leave them exposed resulting in various customer and environmental issues. Customers complain of the wrong modems or other customer premise equipment being deployed resulting in lack of capacity or poor performance.
- Lesser service than what the customer pays for: Although the infrastructure exists in Mono County and Mammoth Lakes for “Gigabit” Internet service (i.e. service at a speed of 1,000 megabits per second [mbps]), some customers in those areas are receiving 15-25% of what they pay for in a circuit. Most customers who purchase 400mbps circuits barely receive 100mbps, while Gigabit customers rarely see much better than 400mbps.
- Network congestion: As a result of the issues mentioned above (including Suddenlink’s unwillingness to upgrade electronics or perform necessary node splits), certain neighborhoods experience significant network congestion issues. While these issues have existed for quite some time, they have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic when more people worked from home and placed a heavier demand on the network (due to video conferencing, etc.).
- Aging infrastructure: Network electronics and copper plant are aging/degrading resulting in a higher frequency and severity of network outages, as well as service quality issues.

We would like to emphasize that our organizations have worked closely (and effectively) with Suddenlink in the past. We have endeavored to treat Suddenlink as a partner, and Mono County and the Town of Mammoth Lakes in particular have been appreciative of Suddenlink’s substantial investment to bring Gigabit service to our communities. However, our continued efforts to work with Suddenlink have been frustrated by a lack of local staff, Suddenlink’s unwillingness to commit to specific steps to improve its service or to provide a specific timetable for improvements, Suddenlink’s failure to provide basic information such as customer service standards, and the ongoing volume of complaints received from the public regarding Suddenlink’s customer service.

By copy of this letter, we are urging the California Public Utilities Commission to explore using its regulatory authority to compel Suddenlink to improve its service and our State Legislators to investigate legislative fixes. For example, the CPUC could issue an order requiring Suddenlink to establish customer service standards, which is required of all state video franchisees under current law. The CPUC could also convene hearings on Suddenlink’s compliance with its state franchise, seeking testimony from members of the public regarding their experiences with Suddenlink and conducting its own inquiry

regarding compliance. Likewise, our State Assembly Members and Senators could explore legislation with specific service standards and substantial enforcement tools for use by local governments and the public generally. We hope that our State leaders will consider taking these or other steps, in order to protect customers and assure Californians' access to safe and reliable utility infrastructure and services.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these significant issues and please also look for additional materials to be sent individually by customers and agencies within our jurisdictions further outlining individual experiences.

Sincerely,

Robert Weygandt, Chair
Placer County Board of Supervisors

Jennifer Kreitz, Chair
Mono County Board of Supervisors

Dan Miller, Chair
Nevada County Board of Supervisors

Bill Sauser, Mayor
Town of Mammoth Lakes

Anna Klovstad, Mayor
Town of Truckee

Cc: Marybel Batjer, CPUC President
Martha Guzman Aceves, CPUC Commissioner
Genevieve Shiroma, CPUC Commissioner
Clifford Rechtschaffen, CPUC Commissioner
Darcie L. Houck, CPUC Commissioner
State Assembly Member Frank Bigelow
State Senator Andreas Borgeas
State Assembly Member Megan Dahle
State Assembly Member Kevin Kiley
State Senator Brian Dahle

State Senator Jim Nielson