



## Telecom Decision CRTC 2025-166

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Reference: Part 1 application posted on 2 July 2019

Gatineau, 2 July 2025

*Public record: 8620-R28-201905077*

### **Rogers Communications Canada Inc. – Application concerning Bell Canada’s billed number screening database services charged to wireless service providers and wireless competitive local exchange carriers**

#### **Summary**

In this decision, the Commission is modernizing its regulatory approach by making changes to its billed number screening (BNS) database framework to reflect how calling has changed in Canada.

BNS databases are used by interexchange service providers during the call-routing process to determine if a telephone number is eligible to receive collect or bill-to-third-party calls (jointly, collect calls). When the BNS database framework was put in place, Canadians primarily used landlines to make their calls and collect calling was an important feature for many Canadians. The BNS database framework was intended to support collect calling while also helping to ensure that Canadians were protected from telephone fraud.

As calling habits have changed over time, and Canadians have moved towards the use of wireless phones, collect calling has become a less used service. Today, a number of alternatives to collect calling are available, such as unlimited national calling on mobile wireless plans, prepaid wireless services, text messages, and Internet applications. In addition, to help reduce the risk of telephone fraud, most wireless carriers do not permit their customers to receive collect calls and there is no requirement for them to do so.

The Commission is therefore modernizing its BNS database framework to help ensure that its policies reflect the current market and reduce regulatory burden on wireless carriers. This includes updating the BNS database framework so that wireless carriers are now only required to enter the few wireless numbers that are allowed to receive collect calls into a BNS database.

## Background

1. Billed number screening (BNS) databases contain lists of telephone numbers and specify whether those numbers are eligible to receive collect or bill-to-third-party calls (jointly, collect calls).<sup>1</sup> When an interexchange service provider (IXSP)<sup>2</sup> receives a collect call, it determines whether to complete the call by querying a BNS database.
2. In Order 2000-858, the Commission required carriers to specify in a BNS database which of their telephone numbers were not permitted to receive collect calls. This was done to help prevent telephone fraud, particularly for collect calling. In that order, the Commission indicated that collect call fraud prevention was the responsibility of the service provider associated with the telephone number in question.
3. To comply with Order 2000-858, some carriers created their own BNS databases, while others opted to use databases created and maintained by other carriers. For example, Rogers Communications Canada Inc. (Rogers) entered into a contract with Bell Canada to use Bell Canada's BNS database. Meanwhile, many wireless carriers decided not to permit their telephone numbers to receive collect calls, mainly due to concerns of non-payment from customers of prepaid services.

## Application

4. On 2 July 2019, Rogers submitted an application requesting that the Commission:
  - confirm that wireless service providers and wireless competitive local exchange carriers (collectively, wireless carriers) are not required to provide billing and collection services to IXSPs; and
  - end the requirement for wireless carriers to enter their telephone numbers in Bell Canada's BNS database.
5. The Commission received interventions from Bell Canada and TELUS Communications Inc. (TELUS).

## Issues

6. The Commission has identified the following issues to be addressed in this decision:
  - Are wireless carriers required to provide billing and collection services to IXSPs?
  - Should the Commission make changes to the BNS database framework?

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<sup>1</sup> A collect call is a telephone call in which the calling party makes a call at the called party's expense. A bill-to-third party call is a call billed to a telephone number other than the called number.

<sup>2</sup> An IXSP facilitates the provision of service between two or more telephone exchanges, enabling competing carriers to provide long-distance services outside their operating territories.

## **Are wireless carriers required to provide billing and collection services to IXSPs?**

### **Positions of parties**

7. As part of its application, Rogers proposed that IXSPs should stop completing collect calls to wireless customers unless the IXSP has a billing and collection agreement with the wireless carrier. As such, the company requested that the Commission confirm that wireless carriers are not required to provide billing and collection services to IXSPs.
8. Rogers submitted that the Commission relieved wireless carriers of their obligation to provide equal access services in Telecom Regulatory Policy 2012-24, and that, as such, wireless carriers are not mandated to offer billing and collection services to IXSPs if they do not have commercial agreements with them. Bell Canada agreed with this position.

### **Commission's analysis**

9. In Telecom Decision 92-12, the Commission put in place a regulatory policy known as equal access to encourage competition in the provision of long-distance telephone services. Under equal access, carriers were required to provide their customers with access to competitors' networks for long-distance calls. The Commission also included a requirement for carriers to have billing and collection agreements with IXSPs. However, in Telecom Regulatory Policy 2012-24, the Commission decided that wireless carriers did not need to meet the obligations related to equal access. As a result, wireless carriers were no longer obligated to have such agreements.
10. The Commission confirms that in Telecom Regulatory Policy 2012-24, it relieved wireless carriers of their obligations related to equal access. Accordingly, wireless carriers are not required to provide billing and collection services to IXSPs.

## **Should the Commission make changes to the BNS database framework?**

### **Positions of parties**

11. Rogers submitted that although it does not permit collect calls to any of its wireless customers, it incurs costs to comply with the Commission's requirement for wireless carriers to enter their telephone numbers into BNS databases.
12. Rogers proposed that the BNS database framework should instead operate on the assumption that IXSPs do not complete collect calls to wireless numbers and that no collect calls should be charged to wireless carriers in the absence of commercial agreements between IXSPs and wireless carriers. As an alternative, Rogers proposed that wireless carriers be allowed to list all their telephone numbers for free in Bell Canada's BNS database, and that Bell Canada be allowed to file a cost study

and subsequently revise its tariffed database access charge.<sup>3</sup> Bell Canada opposed Rogers' proposals.

13. TELUS supported a regime where, by default, wireless numbers are not charged for collect calls and wireless carriers may reject collect call charges to all their customers without liability to the IXSP.
14. Bell Canada and TELUS suggested that broader policy changes would require a policy proceeding and that the Commission should refrain from making such changes based on the specific circumstances of Bell Canada and Rogers. Rogers replied that if the Commission wishes to apply its determinations to other incumbent local exchange carriers, it should first rule on Rogers' application and then follow up with a show cause proceeding.
15. Bell Canada and Rogers agreed that if the Commission were to make changes to the BNS database framework, Bell Canada should be allowed to revise its tariffed database access charge to recover any additional costs.

#### **Commission's analysis**

16. The BNS database framework was put in place prior to the introduction of wireless number portability. This occurred in a very different telecommunications environment, where wireline services were predominant and wireless services were still in their infancy.
17. Today, Canadians have access to many affordable alternatives to collect calling, due to the proliferation of unlimited national calling on mobile wireless plans, prepaid wireless services, text messages, and Internet applications.
18. Meanwhile, BNS database fees have significantly increased over the past two decades. Prior to 2008, Rogers paid a tariffed rate of \$0.34 per transaction to enter or modify numbers in Bell Canada's BNS database. However, in Telecom Decision 2008-17, that rate was forborne from regulation. Confidential data submitted by Rogers shows that the rate is now much higher.
19. Furthermore, the number of transactions required to enter or modify telephone numbers in BNS databases has also increased significantly. Before the introduction of wireless number portability, wireless carriers were able to enter all numbers that have the same central office code<sup>4</sup> into a BNS database as one transaction for a single fee. As such, a carrier could enter 10,000 numbers in a single transaction. However, since the introduction of wireless number portability, which enables customers to keep the same telephone number when changing wireless service providers, a separate fee is

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<sup>3</sup> When IXSPs receive a collect call, they query or "dip into" BNS databases to confirm whether the called number is permitted to receive collect calls. IXSPs who query Bell Canada's BNS database pay a tariffed fee of \$0.0773. See Bell Canada's Access Services Tariff CRTC [7516](#), Item 40.6.(c).

<sup>4</sup> Central office codes, also known as exchanges, prefixes, or simply NXXs, are the fourth, fifth, and sixth digits (the three numbers after the area code) of a ten-digit geographic North American Numbering Plan Administrator telephone number. There are 10,000 telephone numbers in each NXX.

charged for each number or group of numbers entered into, modified in, or removed from the database.

20. Overall, Rogers' confidential submissions show a marked increase in the costs it incurs for BNS database services. The Commission is of the view that it is reasonable to assume that the fees paid by other wireless carriers for BNS database services have seen similar increases.
21. Instances of collect calling to wireless customers have become exceedingly rare because service providers do not generally permit wireless customers to receive collect calls. Therefore, the Commission is of the view that it would be appropriate to make broader changes to the BNS database framework to better align with current market realities.
22. The Commission considers that wireless carriers should no longer be required to enter all the wireless telephone numbers they do not permit to receive collect calls into a BNS database. Instead, wireless carriers should only be required to enter the wireless telephone numbers of customers they do permit to receive collect calls, and to flag those numbers as eligible to receive collect calls. For clarity, no changes to the way wireline telephone numbers are entered into BNS databases or handled by IXSPs are being made as part of this decision.
23. In order to receive payment for their services, IXSPs should continue to complete calls only where they have a billing and collection agreement in place with the wireless carrier. Therefore, the Commission considers that, for wireless customers, IXSPs should complete collect calls only to telephone numbers that are listed in a BNS database and flagged as eligible to receive collect calls.
24. The Commission notes that some IXSPs may need to modify their processes in order to complete collect calls only to telephone numbers that are flagged as eligible to receive them.
25. With respect to whether Bell Canada (and other BNS database operators) should be allowed to revise their tariffed database access charge to recover additional costs, the Commission considers this unnecessary because the modified BNS database framework would not result in additional costs for BNS database operators.
26. With respect to whether a broader policy proceeding would be required to address the policy issues raised in Rogers' application, the Commission considers that interested parties had sufficient notice to intervene in this proceeding. Rogers indicated that its application was served on all Canadian telecommunications service providers, including IXSPs. In addition, the Commission provided an opportunity for new parties to participate during the proceeding. The Commission therefore considers that this proceeding has provided an appropriate forum to address the policy issues raised in the application.
27. While the current proceeding has a narrow focus, it has highlighted broader considerations about collect calling. In that regard, in Telecom Decision 2024-324, the Commission indicated that it will undertake to gather information on calling options in correctional facilities to assess whether further action, including potential regulatory intervention, may be required.

## Conclusion

28. In light of the above, the Commission:

- determines that wireless carriers are no longer required to enter the wireless telephone numbers of customers they do not permit to receive collect calls into a BNS database; they must do so only for wireless numbers which are allowed to receive collect calls;
- directs IXSPs to complete collect calls only to wireless telephone numbers that are listed in a BNS database and flagged as eligible to receive collect calls; and
- clarifies that the changes pertain only to how collect calls are routed by IXSPs to wireless telephone numbers and which wireless numbers are entered into BNS databases. This decision does not impact requirements or practices with respect to wireline numbers.

## Policy Direction

29. The Commission considers that its determinations in this decision align with paragraph 2(b) and section 4 of the 2023 Policy Direction.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, removal of BNS database fees for wireless carriers will (i) reduce costs for service providers and thus promote competition in the wireless market; and (ii) be more proportionate, because only carriers that opt to allow customers to receive collect calls will pay those fees.

Secretary General

## Related documents

- *Applications regarding long-distance calling in Ontario correctional facilities*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2024-324, 11 December 2024
- *Network interconnection for voice services*, Telecom Regulatory Policy CRTC 2012-24, 19 January 2012
- *Revised regulatory framework for wholesale services and definition of essential service*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2008-17, 3 March 2008
- *CRTC sets final rates for payphone access lines*, Order CRTC 2000-858, 15 September 2000
- *Competition in the provision of public long distance voice telephone services and related resale and sharing issues*, Telecom Decision CRTC 92-12, 12 June 1992

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