

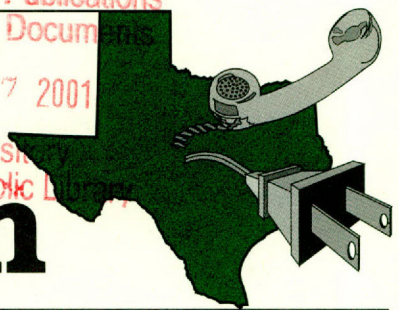
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Public Utility Connection

Volume 4 Issue 2

Public Utility Commission of Texas

Summer 2001

Perry appoints Yzaguirre, Klein to PUC

Texas Gov. Rick Perry announced the appointment of Max Yzaguirre of South Padre Island to the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) on June 13. He named Yzaguirre chairman of the agency on June 26 while announcing the appointment of Rebecca Armendariz Klein of Austin to the three-person panel.

"Max Yzaguirre brings excellent skills and a great background to the PUC," said Commissioner Brett Perlman. "All Texans can depend on Max as a valuable asset in the oversight of the electric and telecommunications industries. I look forward to working with him."

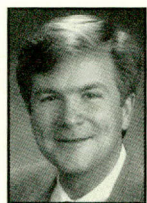
A Brownsville native, Yzaguirre recently resigned as president of Enron de Mexico. He earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Texas at Austin and graduated with Honors from the University of Texas School of Law.

He serves as chairman of the Texas Business Hall of Fame Foundation, belongs to the College of Business Administration Advisory Council of the University of Texas Graduate School of Business, and is on the Mexico Advisory Committee of the University of Texas Institute for Latin American Studies. He

See Perry names p.2

Ex-PUC chairman faces new challenges at FERC

After nearly six years as Chairman of the Public Utility Commission of Texas, Pat Wood, III has taken on the nation's energy challenges in Washington. In June President George W. Bush appointed Wood to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which oversees the nation's electricity and natural gas markets.



Wood

While at the PUC, Wood gained respect and praise from utility companies as well as consumer groups through negotiations

to open the electric and local telephone markets in Texas. He continues to be a fierce believer in the free market, but he understands that government still has a place in ensuring quality service and protecting customers.

His ability to delve into the minute details of utility policy and still get the big picture won the confidence of Texas legislators on both sides of the aisle.

"So I'm thinking, 'How can this guy who looks like a choirboy survive in the contact sport of politics and government?'" recalls

See Wood leaves PUC, p. 3

Letter from the Commissioners

New leadership, same goals *PUC will continue to assist, defend Texans*

Dear Customer:

There is a new team of commissioners now serving you. Most of you may not realize that, and maybe that's the way it should be.

If we are to carry out the laws of the state and ensure fair and reasonable service and rates in electric and telephone service, then you shouldn't notice any change at all. We will simply continue the high standards set by our predecessors.

They have moved on to highly respected and influential positions with the federal government and the private sector. Our governor expects and demands the same high level of performance from our new team.

We realize every Texan can be affected by our actions. Nearly every single household in the state

has an electric bill to pay and at least one telephone bill.

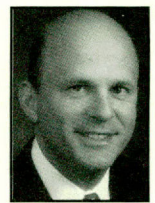
Laws encouraging competition and the customer benefits that result will lessen the need for government intervention, but there is a continued need for government oversight.

If you, the customer, cannot benefit from competition in the electric or telephone industries, then there is no point to the many hours spent in removing the regulatory shackles of monopoly systems.

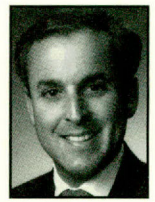
To make sure that happens, we will be increasing our level of customer support at the PUC to make sure your voice will be heard.

Certainly challenges remain. While phone customers have enjoyed sharply lower rates for

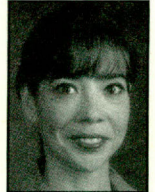
See PUC to move forward p. 2



Yzaguirre



Perlman



Klein



Letter from the Commissioners

PUC to move forward in competitive market

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long distance service, it has been more difficult for competitors to offer lower prices in local phone service. Much of the money invested in telecommunications companies has dried up, making it more difficult for competitors to capture more market share. We will continue to monitor this situation closely.

Anticipated lower costs to come for electric customers have evaporated in the face of rising natural gas fuel costs. But these costs already are coming down. We look forward to full retail competition in Texas this coming January. We are convinced that whatever you pay for electricity, it will be less than it would have been in a regulated market.

More importantly, the process of opening up a competitive market is not an overnight process. We know it will take several years to remove the rigid requirements of the monopoly system. That is why the PUC has employees looking at both the electric and telecommunications industry to see that there is no market manipulation and that every utility has equal access to provide services that can save you money in the long run.

Keep in mind that more choices require that customers be better informed. The PUC is here to help give you that information. Together we can help make the competitive systems being developed in Texas a model for the rest of the nation.

Sincerely,

Chairman Max Yzaguirre

Commissioner Brett Perlman

Commissioner Becky Klein

Slams, Crams and Scams

The National Fraud Information Center offers the following tips and advice to help you recognize slamming, cramming, and telephone scams:

Slamming - when your phone service is changed from your regular provider to another company without your knowledge or consent. While long-distance service is the most common target of slamming, your local service may also be slammed if there is local competition in your area.

If a caller claims to be from your telephone company, don't provide any information or agree to anything in writing. Get the person's name and number, and then call your phone company to confirm that the caller and the purpose of the call are legitimate.

Cramming - when a vendor asks your phone company to bill you for voice mail, paging, Internet access, or other services that you never agreed to purchase. Ask your telephone company if there are any "bill blocking" options available to prevent someone from arranging to bill you for services unless you have confirmed directly with the phone company that it's OK.

Scams - There are many different kinds of scams that involve telephone services.

Here is one to watch out for:

- **Not all 800 numbers are toll-free.** You can be charged for calling an 800 number if you have agreed in advance. But some consumers are tricked into being charged for 800 numbers by following instructions to dial "personal activation codes" that are really access codes linking them to "pay-per-call" numbers, or by other means. You can dispute improper 800 number charges by contacting the billing company.

Public Utility Connection

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1-888-782-8477

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WEB SITE: www.puc.state.tx.us

Texas Electric Choice: 1-866-797-4839

www.powertochoose.org

Perry names new commissioners

continued from page one

also is a member of the Board of Directors of Texas Regional Bancshares and Texas State Bank.

Perlman also welcomed the addition of Armendariz Klein to the PUC, and applauded the selection of Yzaguirre as PUC Chairman.

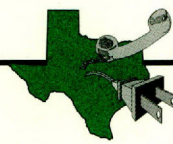
"Becky brings a wealth of experience and a comprehensive background to the PUC to complete our team of commissioners," said Perlman. "Texans can count on her for fair treatment. I look forward to working with Becky and congratulate Max on his selection as chairman."

A Corpus Christi native, Armendariz Klein has a bachelor's degree from

Stanford University and earned a graduate degree from Georgetown University. She has a law degree from St. Mary's Law School in San Antonio.

Armendariz Klein served as a senior attorney for the PUC from 1997 to 1999 before becoming a policy director for former Texas Gov. George W. Bush. She also worked as a telecommunications law analyst for the American Enterprise Institute.

She is a Major in the Air Force Reserves and currently serves as a Staff Judge Advocate General. Armendariz Klein belongs to the State Bar of Texas, the Travis County Bar Association Technology Section and the Reserve Officers Association.



Wood leaves PUC for new challenges at the federal level

continued from page 1

Representative Steve Wolens, a Democrat from Fort Worth. "Just splendidly!"

"Pat has been a consummate utility player—in the baseball sense," Wolens said, "he speaks the law, he has a three dimensional understanding of policy, he acknowledges politics, and he

"Texas will continue to be a national leader and innovator in using market forces to increase the public good, drive technological innovation and expand economic opportunity,"

*Pat Wood, III
FERC Commissioner*

has developed a sophistication in discerning the blurry lines between regulation and legislation, a.k.a. 'the penumbra.' I will miss him."

"I was fortunate to work closely with Pat Wood on both telephone and electric deregulation issues," said Senator David Sibley, a Republican from Waco, "and I found him to be one of the brightest people I have ever met.

"Pat is successful not only because he is smart and understands the law, but because he also understands the legislative process. He helped reshape the utility landscape in Texas, and I know he will have a tremendous, positive impact on the national level," Sibley said.

In 1999 Wolens and Sibley co-authored Senate Bill 7, the electric restructuring law that allows Texans to choose their electric provider beginning January 1, 2002.

Although Wood is widely credited with engineering the details to bring competition to Texas electric and telephone customers, he says his greatest accomplishment was working with the PUC staff.

"Leading a team that confidently and thoughtfully opened monopoly markets to competition, contributing to record levels of job creation and infrastructure investment in Texas," Wood said.

Now Wood has the chance to do for the rest of the country what he has done for Texas. He says he expects Texas to be the model for other states to follow on electric and telecommunications public policy.

"Texas will continue to be a national leader and innovator in using market forces to increase the public good, drive technological innovation and expand economic opportunity," Wood insists.

Then-Governor George W. Bush appointed Wood to the PUC in 1995. Before that, he served on the FERC staff and as legal counsel to the Texas Railroad Commission.

Governor Rick Perry has named two new commissioners to the PUC. Rebecca Armendariz Klein and Mario Max Yzaguirre, who will serve as chairman.

Pat Wood's Parting Words

What was your initial thought your first day on the job at the PUC?

I've got a lot to do, and only 6 years to do it in.

What was your greatest challenge?

Convincing regulated monopolies that supporting a pro-competitive agenda was in their best long-term interests.

What is left to accomplish in telecom?

Opening of GTE and smaller territories to competition and ensuring that residential customers benefit from more choices everywhere in Texas.

What is left to accomplish on the electric front?

Successful cutover of wholesale and retail markets to the competitive world, including outside ERCOT; ensuring that conditions are appropriate for competitive retailers in all customer classes.

What do you think the Texas telecom market will look like in 10 years?

Most customers will be offered bundles of services, including many that haven't been invented yet. The distinction between long distance and local service will disappear, but basic residential dial tone will be price capped for policy reasons; all else will be largely deregulated.

What do you think the Texas electric market will look like in 10 years?

Most ERCOT Megawatt-hours (electric) and MCF (gas) will be provided by companies other than the affiliates of the historic utility. Significant utilization of technology to control consumption, including on-site power sources; decentralized production of power; competitive transmission projects.

What will you miss the most about the PUC?

Our staff. This is the most talented and fun group of people I have ever worked with, and I will miss them a lot.

What advice would you have for our new Commissioners?

Be fair. Listen to all sides. Then be decisive. Speak in one voice.

What advice would you have for customers?

Get educated about your competitive options and be demanding if you aren't satisfied. You are why we have worked so hard for customer choice for Texans -- so you'd have options.

What have you learned most in your tenure?

Hard work pays off.

Do you have a utility complaint?

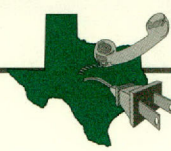
To reach us with a complaint or a question:

Call: 1-888-782-8477, or in Austin 512-936-7120

Fax: 512-936-7003

E-mail: customer@puc.state.tx.us

Write: PUC
Customer Protection
P.O. Box 13326
Austin, TX 78711-3326



Facts label helps Texans with electric choice

Shopping for electricity is a new concept for Texans. So to help consumers with the change, an Electricity Facts Label has been developed that allows an "apples-to-apples" comparison of offers from competing electric providers. The Electricity Facts Label gives helpful information on prices, contract terms, generation sources and emissions in a standardized format.

The Electricity Facts Label is a product of a 1999 state law that restructures Texas' electric industry, allowing most Texans to choose a Retail Electric Provider (REP) - the company that provides their electricity. The Electricity Facts Label, which the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) requires all REPs to provide to consumers upon request, is similar to labels consumers typically see on packaged foods and other items.

Choosing a REP

- **Call/Click:** Call the Texas Electric Choice Answer Center at 1-866-PWR-4-TEX (1-866-797-4839), or visit www.powertochoose.org for a list of REPs and helpful shopping tips.
- **Compare:** Contact one or more of the certified REPs to obtain information on electric rates and services offered during the Pilot Program. You should have your latest electric bill available. Ask each REP for its Electricity Facts Label.
- **Choose:** After you have compared offers, make an informed decision based on your needs and what matters most to you. When you sign up with a REP, it will enroll you in the Pilot Program. You do not need to contact your current electric utility to inform them of your choice.

By comparing prices, generation sources, emissions, and other factors, consumers can make an informed decision about which REP is best for them.

"The Electricity Facts Label helps to make shopping easy," said PUC Commissioner Brett Perlman.

Each REPs' Electricity Facts Label is formatted in a uniform way that allows electric consumers to compare the following factors:

- **Electricity Price:** This provides information on how the REP will charge customers for electricity. It includes the average cost of electricity in cents per kilowatt-hour at various usage levels. This average price must include all charges assessed by the REP in selling

electricity to consumers.






- **Contract Term:** This provides specific information on the REP's contract terms and conditions.

- **Sources of Power Generation:** This provides a listing, on a percentage basis, of the fuel mix, such as coal, natural gas, nuclear energy, renewable energy and others, used to produce electricity for a REP's customers.

- **Emissions:** Provides information on the amount of emissions attributable to the sources of generation used to produce power.

The price comparison represented on the Electricity Facts Label is adjusted to include all promotions, discounts or incentives offered by the REP. For example, a REP offering customers one month of free electricity must include this incentive in its price per kilowatt-hour to reflect the free month.

This summer, under the Texas Electric Choice Pilot Program, up to 5 percent of the state's electric customers served by investor-

Electricity Facts			
[Name of REP], [Name of Product][Service area (if applicable)]			
[Date]			
Electricity price	Average monthly use	500kWh	1,000kWh
	Average price per kilowatt-hour:	(¢)	(¢)
Contract	Minimum term: (months)	Penalty for early cancellation (\$)	
	See Terms of Service statement for a full listing of fees, deposit policy, and other terms.		
Sources of power generation		<i>This product</i>	<i>Texas (for comparison)</i>
	Coal and lignite	__%	__%
	Natural gas	__%	__%
	Nuclear	__%	__%
	Renewable energy	__%	__%
	Other	__%	__%
	Total	100%	100%
Emissions and waste per kWh generated	Carbon dioxide		
	Nitrogen oxides		
	Particulates		
	Sulfur dioxide		
	Nuclear waste		
			Better than Texas average

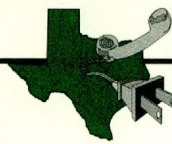
owned electric utilities can choose their own REP. Most customers currently served by those utilities will have a choice of REPs next January, when Texas Electric Choice is fully implemented. Residential and small business customers interested in enrolling in the Pilot Program can visit the Texas Electric Choice Web site at www.powertochoose.org for more information.

Competition is expected to result in electric rates lower than they would have been under a regulated system, and should speed the development of new products and services.

Lawmakers gave cities that own their electric systems and member-owned electric cooperatives an option of allowing REPs to compete for their customers, or keeping things the way they are today.

While the Pilot Program began in July, it is important to remember that competition takes time to develop, and some areas of Texas may not yet have active REPs serving their market.

The Texas restructuring plan provides measures to ensure an ample supply of power to meet the demands of Texas homes and businesses. First, Texas has encouraged the construction of new power plants - more than 50 power plants have been built or are being built since 1995. Texas has expedited the time it takes to build a power plant to about two years. Additionally, Texas has diversity in its generation of power, using natural gas, coal, nuclear energy, and renewable sources such as water, wind and solar energy.



A test run

Slots available in Electric Choice Pilot Program

Some customers of investor-owned utilities still have the opportunity to choose a new Retail Electric Provider (REP) through the Texas Electric Choice Pilot Program. In preparation for the Pilot Program, several new REPs are marketing electricity at discounted prices to both residential and commercial customers.

So far more than 92,000 residential customers have signed up for the Pilot Program. While commercial and industrial customers have filled up many of the available slots in the Pilot Program, plenty of room remains for residential and small commercial customers to enroll.

The Pilot Program is designed to test the compatibility of communications and computer systems. Through the Pilot Program, five percent of the state's electric customers of investor-owned utilities will have the opportunity to choose a REP before competition begins in January 2002. State lawmakers gave city-owned utilities and electric cooperatives the option of entering the competitive market or keeping things the way they are today.

Customers enrolled in the Pilot Program should be switched to a new REP by the end of the summer. The change will be overseen by the PUC and the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), the entity responsible for managing the state's electric grid. Switches will be processed at a more gradual pace than previously anticipated to ensure system readiness and a smooth transition to full retail competition, and will occur on a customer's regularly scheduled meter-reading cycle. Most Pilot Program customers should get a bill from their new REP a month after the switch is completed.

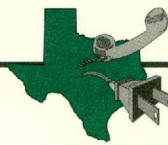
"The PUC is working closely with ERCOT to ensure all systems are ready to go before full launch of the program," said PUC Chairman Max Yzaguirre. "This helps to ensure reliability as we move to an open market so that the only change noticed by customers is the name of their new REP and a new price."

To find out how to enroll in the Pilot Program call the Texas Electric Choice Answer center toll-free at 1-866-797-4839 or visit www.powertochoose.org.

Shop for a REP

Shopping for a Retail Electric Provider (REP) should be easy. To help make a decision that fits your needs and is right for you, have your most recent electric bill handy. Contact individual REPs to obtain the following information:

Comparing REPs	REP A	REP B
Name of REP	_____	_____
What is the total price per kilowatt hour?	_____	_____
Is the price fixed or does it change?	_____	_____
Is the price per kilowatt hour affected by how much electricity I use and when I use it?	_____	_____
Will I be required to sign a contract? If so, for how long?	_____	_____
Will there be a switching or meter reading fee?	_____	_____
Is there a membership fee or any other fee?	_____	_____
Is there a cancellation fee if I change my mind?	_____	_____
Is there a customer incentive for signing up?	_____	_____
Are there any other services offered in addition to electric service?	_____	_____
What happens when my contract expires?	_____	_____
Is there an average payment plan?	_____	_____



Texas powers up for summer's demand

Summer is officially here, and the Public Utility Commission (PUC) is ready!

Thanks to good planning by state lawmakers and the PUC - and significant investments made by in-state and out-of-state power-producing companies - Texas doesn't have to worry about having enough power as temperatures continue to rise.

In fact, Texas has far more reserve capacity than what it will need, even on the hottest day this summer.

During the month of June alone, four new power plants came on line: Lost Pines (Bastrop County), Sand Hill (Travis County), Ray Olinger plant addition (Collin County), and Odessa-Ector (Ector County). Gateway (Rusk County) is still in the testing stage and will be on line soon. All told, these five new generating facilities will add 2,120 MW to Texas' capacity - enough electricity to power more than half a million homes during peak demand.

These new plants are the latest in a growing list of facilities that will provide a 23 percent reserve margin of supply over demand. That means on the hottest, muggiest day of the year, the state's total projected peak demand will be approximately 67,000 megawatts (MW) - and statewide capacity will be at least 83,000 MW.

Having a healthy reserve margin didn't just happen overnight, and it's anything but a coincidence. Since 1995, 54 new power plants have been completed or are under construction, and another 31 plants are in the planning stages. The PUC has required electric utilities to make significant investments in the transmission system, so that we can ensure the safe and reliable delivery of that power to homes and businesses across the state.

All this planning comes from a fundamental understanding that in order to have a real, truly competitive market for electric service, first you must have lots of power.

Unfortunately, California's experience with restructuring has not been as positive. As you no doubt have heard on the news recently, customers in the Golden State have had to put up with rolling blackouts, power outages, and outrageous electric bills.

Summer Energy Savings

Air conditioning - Operate on a medium setting and use a thermometer to see that it's no lower than 78 degrees. Maintain a clean filter.

Lights - Replace old incandescent bulbs with new compact fluorescent bulbs. You will get the same amount of light for 1/4 of the cost. Turn off unneeded lights, even when leaving the room for a short time.

Refrigerator - Keep it operating efficiently. Clean the condenser coils, make sure the rubber gasket on the door provides a tight seal.

Windows and doors - Storm windows and doors can reduce the amount of cooling or heating through single pane glass by 50%. Keep blinds and drapes closed to keep your home cool. Drapes block out sunlight and heat better than blinds. Caulk around windows and door frames to stop air leaks.

Why is California experiencing such problems? They simply do not have enough supply to meet an ever-growing demand for power.

Incredible as it may seem, California has built only two power plants since 1995. What's more, they rely on hydroelectric power for up to 25% of their electricity needs. That's great when it rains, but not so great when it doesn't.

In contrast, Texas has a diverse range of generation sources. About 45 percent of our power is generated from natural gas, roughly 40 percent comes from coal or lignite, and 14 percent from nuclear power. About 1 percent of our power comes from wind, solar, and other renewable sources of energy.

As a result of new power plant construction and other infrastructure investments, Texas is well positioned to open the state's electric utility market to competition. Beginning with the Texas Electric Choice Pilot Program this summer, up to 5

percent of customers served by the state's investor-owned electric utilities can now choose the company that provides their electricity.

Competition is expected to result in lower prices over time, as well as speed the development of new products and services, just as we've seen in other recently deregulated industries.

While Texas will not have a shortage of electricity, Texans may end up paying more for our electricity this summer than we did last year because of unusually high natural gas prices.

In response, the PUC has come up with some ways to help ease the higher electric bills that result.

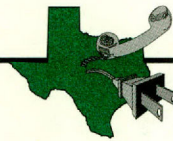
First, there's what economists like to call "demand-side management." That's a fancy way of saying that you, as a consumer, have the most direct control over your electricity bill. For example, set your thermostat at 78 degrees instead of 73 or 74. Make sure your curtains are drawn during the hottest part of the day. And when you leave town for vacation, turn the air conditioner off altogether.

Another way you might save money this summer is by switching to a new Retail Electric Provider (REP) under the Texas Electric Choice Pilot Program. There's still plenty of room in the Pilot Program for residential customers, and, depending on the offers being made by REPs serving your area, you might be able to shave 10 percent or more off of your electricity bills.

To further protect customers who get behind on their electricity bill payments, the PUC has adopted a rule prohibiting utilities from disconnecting service for at least two days after the National Weather Service has issued a heat advisory within the utility's service area. Customers can call their utility to make arrangements to pay the bill at a later date.

For more information about the Pilot Program, or to obtain a list of REPs in your area, check out the Texas Electric Choice web site, www.powertochoose.org. Or, call our toll-free Answer Center at 1-866-PWR-4-TEX (1-866-797-4839).

Summer's here, all right, but Texas is ready for the heat.



PUC gets input on new area code possibility in 903

Public Utility Commission (PUC) staff members Alyssa Eacono and Jennifer Fagan hosted four public meetings in June to receive comments on the PUC's four plans to introduce a new area code in the 903 region in northeast Texas.

Fagan reported a decent turnout at the meetings in her report to commissioners during the June 28 Open Meeting.

"We informed the media and consumers that we would hope to receive comments up to Aug. 1 on this issue and on the various options," Fagan told commissioners. "People asked questions mostly, but no one really expressed a preference to one of the options over the others."

Option 1 involves a two-way geographic split with the boundary between the 552 and 554 prefix Local Access Transport Areas (LATA) along the LATA line. This option splits the current 903 service area vertically. One side of the 903 service area (east or west) would keep the 903 area code and the other would be assigned a new area code. This option preserves seven-digit dialing in one portion for an estimated nine years and the other portion for an estimated six years.

Option 2 involves a two-way geographic split with the boundary dividing the Longview and Tyler rate centers and the rate centers within the local calling area from the remaining 903 rate centers. This option preserves seven-digit dialing within each split area for an estimated seven to eight years.

Option 3 is called an all-services overlay in which the entire 903 region is assigned an additional area code. All customers would be required to dial 10 digits to complete a local call. Existing customers would keep their original number and new customers could be assigned either area code.

Option 4 involves a concentrated growth overlay over the central and southeastern portions of the current 903 service area. A concentrated overlay requires that customers within the overlay area dial 10 digits for all local calls and 11 digits for long distance. The overlay area could sustain this dialing pattern for an estimated two years before it ran out of numbers. The outside area not covered in the overlay would keep seven-digit dialing for an estimated eight years.

Area code 903 serves all of Anderson, Bowie, Camp, Cass, Cherokee, Delta, Franklin, Gregg, Harrison, Hopkins, Lamar, Marion, Morris, Panola, Rains, Red River, Rusk, Smith, Titus, Upshur and Wood counties, as well as portions of Fannin, Freestone, Henderson, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, Leon, Navarro and Van Zandt Counties.

Maps of the proposed plans are posted on the PUC Web site in the full petition at:

www.puc.state.tx.us/telecomm/projects/22749/22749.cfm

711 rollout successful, 'glitches' worked out

The 711 rollout began October 2000 in Texas and by February 2001, nearly all Texans were able to dial 711 and reach Relay Texas. 711 is a short-cut alternative to dialing traditional 10-digit 1-800 relay numbers to call Relay Texas. The PUC has received hundreds of positive comments on the ease of dialing 711 from both hearing and deaf relay users, but some minor glitches persist. The Public Utility Commission (PUC) and Sprint have found a solution that addresses these problems.

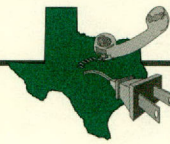
The current 711 platform recognizes what "kind" of call type (TTY, Voice) was last made from the phone number so that the next call from that number will be answered the same way by Relay Texas. This works well with residential phone lines.

On other hand, when dialing 711 from a business or agency that has a PBX, the system doesn't recognize the individuals' phone number (extension number). It only recognizes the main (trunk) number(s) of the PBX system. For example, if a hearing person dials 711 from a place that uses a PBX, it is possible that they will get the TTY tones if a deaf person using the same PBX had called Relay Texas previous to that. The call will eventually be answered in voice, but some hearing callers have assumed, after hearing the TTY tones, that 711 only answers in TTY and hang up. This is a common problem at large state agencies, universities, hospitals, hotels, large businesses and so forth.

Another dilemma with 711 is that there have been hundreds of thousands of misdials made to the Houston area that ended up at Relay Texas. The Houston area code is 713, and if people mistakenly dialed 711, their call ended up at Relay Texas, disrupting normal call traffic patterns. Relay Texas has received at least 600,000 misdials from the 713 area since February 2001. In addition, the Houston area has 3 area codes (713, 281, 832) requiring all Houstonians to use 10 digits to make local calls, meaning that every caller will need to dial the full 10 digit number (713-xxx-xxxx) to complete their calls, be it local or long distance. This increases the chance of misdials.

The PUC and Sprint have a solution for these problems. Beginning July 2001, Relay Texas began using a Voice Response Unit (VRU) to handle calls to 7-1-1. When someone dials 7-1-1, it will be answered by a VRU asking the caller to "press 1" to connect to Relay Texas. If no response is detected, then the response will roll over to TTY and then to ASCII. This will prevent incoming misdialled numbers as hearing callers will realize this is not the number they want and hang up without connecting to the relay center. This helps Relay Texas stay true to normal traffic patterns. This also eliminates the inconsistency of call types for PBX users. The PUC and Sprint feel this is a win-win situation for all concerned.

Relay users who use a TTY or computer may experience a slightly longer wait time (3 to 5 seconds - probably will first see flickering lights on TTY or computer which indicate voice) using the new system, but Sprint and PUC believe this is the best solution for this issue.



PUC to enforce service quality rules

The four largest local telephone service providers in Texas continue to miss customer service quality standards in certain areas of the state, the Public Utility Commission of Texas determined in April.

In response, the Commission is starting the administrative process necessary to penalize repeat offenders. Administrative enforcement actions could result in penalties as high as \$5,000 per day per violation.

"The goal is to improve phone service, not generate fines," former Chairman Pat Wood III said in April. "We will stay focused on this issue until these service problems go away."

Currently, PUC staff is setting up meet-

ings with the companies in question to discuss the service quality issues and solutions. Charles Johnson, Director of Enforcement, is a part of this process.

The PUC requires the four companies—Southwestern Bell Telephone Company (SWBT), Verizon Communications, Valor Telecommunications of Texas and Sprint/United-Sprint-Centel to comply with service quality rules and to report on their efforts to meet those standards.

Reports for the fourth quarter of 2000 showed performance standards primarily in rural areas has lagged and these standards in certain exchange areas have been missed for six consecutive months.

Free Directory Assistance

Many local telephone companies now provide electronic versions of the White and Yellow Pages on the Internet. To look up local and long distance numbers via the Internet, try one of these Web sites:

www.anywho.com

www.555-1212.com

www.altavista.com

www.bigbook.com

www.people.yahoo.com

www.switchboard.com

www.whowhere.lycos.com

www.worldpages.com

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