

STATE OF MICHIGAN

BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

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In the Matter of an Application of )  
MEI Telecom, Inc. ) Case No. U- 20952-0001  
for Grant of a Designation as a high-cost )  
Eligible Telecommunications Carrier )  
Within Certain Areas in Michigan )

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APPLICATION

**I. INTRODUCTION**

MEI Telecom, Inc. (“MEI” or “Applicant”), through its undersigned counsel and pursuant to Section 214(e)(2) of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended (the “Act”)<sup>1</sup>, Sections 54.101 through 54.321 of the Rules of the Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”)<sup>2</sup>, and the Michigan Public Service Commission’s (the “Commission”) order dated December 20, 2012 in Case Nos. U-14535, U-16959, and U-17182<sup>3</sup> (“Commission ETC Order”), hereby requests a designation as a high-cost Eligible Telecommunications Carrier (“ETC”) within Barry County, Michigan. In accordance with applicable law, the Commission has authority to designate ETCs under Section 214(e)(1), 47 C.F.R. § 54.201(d), and the

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<sup>1</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(2).

<sup>2</sup> 47 C.F.R. §§ 54.101-54.321.

<sup>3</sup> *On the Commission’s Own Motion, to Conform Lifeline/link-Up Programs to New Federal Requirements Adopted in 47 CFR 54.410 and 54.417*, Case No. U-14535 (order December 20, 2012); *On the Commission’s Own Motion to Implement the Federal Communications Commission Order 11-161 with Regard to Eligible Telecommunications Carriers for Universal Service Fund Support*; Case No. U-16959 (order December 20, 2012); and *On the Commission’s Own Motion to Receive Eligible Telecommunications Carrier Filings for 2013*, Case No. U-17182 (December 20, 2012).

Commission ETC Orders. MEI requests that the Commission issue such a high cost ETC designation as soon possible but no later than July 7, 2020.<sup>4</sup>

Applicant submits the following information in support of this Application:

## **II. DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICANT**

MEI Telecom, Inc. was founded in 2013 and is incorporated under the laws of the State of Michigan. MEI has a permanent license to provide basic local exchange services in Michigan pursuant to Case No. U-17431. MEI currently provides data services to approximately 800 subscribers through its wireless network, as well as communications services to 214 voice and 61 business data customers through MEI's its fiber network. MEI is headquartered at 123 W. Orchard Street, Box 127, Delton, Michigan 49046.

MEI is a wholly owned subsidiary of Barry County Services Company ("BCSC"), a C-corporation incorporated under the laws of the State of Michigan in 1991. BCSC has approximately 250 shareholders, 30 employees, and a formally elected Board of Directors. MEI's sister corporation, Barry County Telephone Company ("BCTC") is a rural incumbent local exchange carrier ("ILEC") that was founded in 1917 and has been the provider of telephone and Internet services to Delton and surrounding communities including but not limited to Barry Township, Dowling, Hope Township, Johnstown Township, Pine Lake, and Lake Doster Michigan. BCTC provides service to 13 community facilities and 10 anchor institutions including several Township fire departments, Township halls, schools and libraries. BCTC currently holds ETC authority in Michigan.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> As part of the RDOF support process, winning bidders have until June 7, 2020 to provide evidence of high-cost ETC designation in areas where they have been designated as the winning bidder. We therefore ask the Commission to grant this designation prior to that date.

<sup>5</sup> See Case No. U-20673. Service Area Code 310676.

MEI is well qualified to be designated as an ETC. MEI holds core competencies in the design, deployment and operation of high capacity access solutions that provide private, residential and enterprise broadband services. MEI has operated as an Internet Service Provider (“ISP”) since 1992. In 2014, MEI became certificated as a competitive local exchange carrier (“CLEC”) in order to expand its service area to communities that were not well served by other providers.<sup>6</sup> Since that time, MEI has proactively built fiber networks to serve Michigan communities and to provide economic opportunity through access to affordable and competitive broadband speeds.

MEI has been able to connect businesses and residential communities with fiber optic and wireless technologies. Currently MEI provides an option for rural subscribers to access to a modern broadband Internet experience throughout Hastings, Gun Lake, Nashville, Oshtemo Township, Rutland Township, Shelbyville, Wayland Township, and Vermontville, Michigan. MEI provides services to 16 community facilities and 14 anchor institutions including but not limited to Barry County Sheriff, Barry County e911, The County of Barry (County seat offices), Hastings Public Library, Village of Nashville Municipal offices, Public Works, and Public Safety, Village of Vermontville Municipal offices and Public works facilities, St. Rose of Lima School as well as providing service to many rural businesses.

MEI has also recently been designated as a winning bidder by the Federal Communication Commission (“FCC”) Office of Economics and Analytics and the Wireline Competition Bureau in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (“RDOF”) Phase 1 Reverse Auction (Auction 904) whereby the FCC is offering support for successful bidders to expand their

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<sup>6</sup> See Basic Local Exchange Service License issued on October 4, 2013 in Case No. U-17431.

networks so as to provide high speed fixed broadband service to rural homes and small businesses that lack it.

MEI is led by a well-qualified management team that has many decades of experience developing, deploying and operating telecom infrastructure. Additional information concerning MEI's management team is attached hereto as **Exhibit A**.

### **III. DESIGNATED CONTACTS**

Inquiries or copies of any correspondence, orders, or other materials pertaining to this Application should be directed to:

David Stoll  
MEI Telecom, Inc.  
123 W. Orchard  
Delton, Michigan 49046  
execadmin@mei.net  
Tel: (269) 623-9999

With a copy to:

Brian McDermott  
Strategies Law Group, PLLC  
1002 Parker Street  
Falls Church, VA 22046  
bmcdermott@stratlg.com  
Tel: (571) 730-4970

### **IV. DESIGNATED SERVICE AREA AND MAP**

Applicant seeks designation as an ETC in Barry County, Michigan. MEI has recently been awarded support in the RDOF Reverse Auction to expand service into certain designated census blocks in Barry County, Michigan. Therefore, MEI seeks high costs ETC designation throughout Barry County in order to further promote and strengthen its ability to provide services in Barry County. Accordingly, MEI's request for ETC designation is narrowly tailored to its

intended area of focus. MEI is submitting as **Exhibit B** a map of MEI's proposed service area for ETC designation.

## **V. MEI MEETS THE APPLICABLE REQUIREMENTS FOR ETC DESIGNATION**

### **A. General Network Overview**

In accordance with the ETC requirements of the Federal Communications Act,<sup>7</sup> MEI provisions services through its own facilities-based network. MEI's current network consists of both fixed wireless and fiber optic components, including wireless towers for residential and fiber to business customers. MEI's fiber network consists of 100% buried fiber optic cable over which MEI offers speeds up to 1 Gb. MEI's fixed wireless network serves primarily rural residential areas and is fed by MEI's fiber optic network in redundant locations. The fixed wireless network uses microwave backhaul between towers and is redundant in many cases.

MEI's currently provides fixed wireless services, including data and voice, to 800+ residential and business customers. The network is designed with redundancy and growth in mind. It utilizes fiber and licensed microwave backhaul for the middle mile solution. MEI uses licensed LTE technology for last mile connectivity to customers in a point to multi point configuration. MEI currently has 26 base stations deployed delivering service spanning four counties in Southwest Michigan (Barry, Kalamazoo, Van Buren, and Eaton). The majority of base stations are deployed on MEI owned towers, micro sites, or municipal infrastructure. MEI currently offers residential speeds up to 30 Mbps down/4 Mbps up and business services up to 1Gbps (one gigabit per second) symmetrical.

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<sup>7</sup> See 47 U.S.C. §214(e)(1)(A).

With respect to any new RDOF services areas, MEI is proposing to deploy an all-fiber-optic network comprised of Optical Line Terminal (OLT) nodes providing Fiber to the Premise (FTTP) service within the proposed funded service areas. The FTTP service will primarily utilize Gigabit Passive Optical Network (GPON) technology, with the option of Active Ethernet FTTP technology where higher bandwidth speeds, dedicated bandwidth, guaranteed low latency, or greater distance is a factor for service to individual sites. GPON bandwidth is comprised of 2.4Gb/s downstream and 1.2Gb/s upstream, which is shared by up to 32 subscribers connected to one feeding optical fiber and splitter (one PON, basically) via a passive optical splitter fed from a GPON OLT port. MEI utilize numerous monitoring and management tools to respond to any service outages and to pro-actively anticipate any bottlenecks or developing network issues. MEI intends to continually upgrade its capabilities (tools and training) to troubleshoot the network, to the subscribers and upstream.

**B. ETC Qualifications**

MEI provides the following information in response to the Commission ETC Order for new ETC applicants.

**(1) Certification regarding service requirements.** Though this Application, MEI certifies that it will comply with the service requirements applicable to the support that it receives.

**(2) Functionality in emergency situations.** MEI retains the ability to remain functional in emergency situations, including maintaining a reasonable amount of back-up power to ensure functionality without an external power source, the ability to reroute traffic around damaged facilities, and the capability of managing traffic spikes resulting from emergency situations. MEI has significant experience with emergency preparedness and is well prepared to

respond to emergency situations. MEI has appropriate Disaster Recovery Plans in place to respond to emergency situations.

MEI's fixed wireless network has reasonable amounts of back-up power and the ability to reroute traffic around damaged facilities and manage traffic spikes resulting from emergency situations. MEI's fiber optic network is supported by uninterruptable power supply facilities including 8 hours of battery backup. Fixed standby generators along with portable generators are used to maintain network and service up time for extended commercial power outage situations. MEI utilize numerous monitoring and management tools to respond to any service outages and to pro-actively anticipate any bottlenecks or developing network issues. MEI intends to continually upgrade its capabilities (tools and training) to troubleshoot the network, to the subscribers and upstream.

**(3) Consumer protection and service quality standards.** MEI will satisfy applicable consumer protection and service quality standards, including complying with all applicable state and federal consumer protection and service quality standards. As an operating CLEC in Michigan, MEI already is subject to Michigan's consumer protection and service quality requirements and MEI's customers will receive the service quality and consumer benefits of those protections. To the extent that customers receive wireless services, those services will be fixed wireless services, not mobile wireless. Therefore, some of the provisions of the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association's ("CTIA") Consumer Code for Wireless Services ("CTIA Code") are not applicable to MEI. MEI will comply with those portions of the CTIA Code which are applicable to fixed wireless services.

(4) **Tribal Lands.** MEI is not seeking designation as an ETC under Section 214(e)(6) of the Federal Communications Act<sup>8</sup> for any part of Tribal Lands. MEI's service area does not include any tribal lands.

(5) **Five year plan.** MEI's five year plan for proposed improvements or upgrades to Applicant's network throughout its proposed service area. MEI's five year plan for proposed network improvements and upgrades is attached as **Exhibit C**. A map showing that proposed improvements and upgrades by year is attached as **Exhibit D**. MEI estimates that such improvements will expand MEI's services area by 111 square miles and will expand the reach of MEI's network to cover 10,542 population or 3,778 households.

### C. **Conclusion**

In light of the foregoing, MEI respectfully submits that it is well qualified to be designated as a high-cost ETC in Barry County, Michigan.

## VI. **PUBLIC INTEREST CONSIDERATIONS**

MEI believes that expanded deployment of its fiber and wireless communications network will serve the public interest by expanding the availability of communications services, including high speed communications services, in Barry County, Michigan. Such increased availability will inure to the benefit of residents and businesses located in those areas and enable such residents and businesses to access the communication capabilities required to support many currently available residential and business applications that require high speed communications access. Granting MEI the designation as a high-cost ETC will foster MEI's ability to deploy such networks and supports the implementation MEI is seeking to complete through the FCC's RDOF auction to build out its network in Barry County, Michigan. Therefore, granting MEI's

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<sup>8</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 214(e)(6).

request will serve the public interest by expanding the availability of broadband services in the State of Michigan.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

Applicant submits that the information contained herein demonstrated the MEI meets the requirements for a high cost ETC designation in Barry County, Michigan and the expansion of MEI's broadband service offering in the State of Michigan will serve the public interest.

WHEREFORE, MEI respectfully requests that the Commission promptly grant this Application as soon as possible but no later than June 7, 2020.

Respectfully submitted,



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David Stoll  
MEI Telecom, Inc.  
123 W. Orchard  
Delton, Michigan 49046  
execadmin@mei.net  
Tel: (269) 623-9999

Dated December 23, 2020

**Exhibit A**

**Management Experience**

### **Key Management Experience**

MEI Telecom is a competitive local exchange carrier that currently provides data to approximately 800 subscribers through its wireless network, as well as 214 voice and 61 business data customers on its fiber network. MEI's management team is well qualified to offer ETC services in Michigan.

Jim Bender has been a critical component in providing the engineering and management skills needed for the fiber deployments and continued network operations to MEI's customers. Jim has annually delivered on time and on budget fiber expansion projects to serve the customers with an annual Board approved budget of about \$1.25M. As Plant Manager, Jim initiates purchases of equipment of all types including vehicles; trains outside plant personnel on specifications, safety, and preventative maintenance of facilities; manages the traditional voice circuits on the network; designs fiber-to-the-home or business networks using active Ethernet and GPON technologies; directs all network operations including construction; prepares and manages annual budgets for projects; and maintains continuing property records of outside plant.

Deborah Cusack brings financial controls to the company. She manages the cash flow of the capital expenditures, secures financing, and insures that all financial reporting is accurate and on time. Deborah joined the company in 2015. She brings to the management team over 25 years of accounting, leadership and strategy expertise. She has previously worked in the Competitive Access Internet and VoIP (CLEC) service provider space for 8 years prior to joining the company. In Deborah's previous role as Comptroller, she worked extensively with all aspects of the financial reporting. Deborah is a registered Certified Public Accountant, and she holds a BS in Accountancy and an AS in Business Management. She has implemented performance metrics to save 25% operational expense through analysis and improvement of administrative

efficiencies, and revenue improvement of approximately 30% through implementation and development of success-based capital investment strategy. She is proficient with banking and investment relationships and processes, shareholder relationship management, workflow management with outside consultants and contractors, Human Resource administration, and she supervises accounting, customer service, billing, accounts receivable, and accounts payable staff.

Finally, David Stoll, the CEO and General Manager, is also a certified Professional Engineer, giving him a unique advantage to oversee the business, operational, and technical aspects of this project and have true insight of what responsibilities the other key management staff have (he also has engineering, business, and finance degrees). David has 21 years of Telecommunications experience and has worked for several leading cellular companies including Sprint, Nextel, US Cellular, AT&T, Cingular and T-Mobile. He has worked in Boston, Detroit, Puerto Rico and other locations across the United States. He joined Barry County Service Company initially in 1998 as an RF Engineer. After working with the Company for three years, he decided to pursue independent contracting for various telecommunications companies. In 2006, David returned to the Company in the position of Business Development Manager. David has assisted the enterprise with the evolution and development of the MEI Telecom CLEC business strategy as well as the expansion of the fixed wireless broadband services. In 2011, he officially became the CEO of the Company. Since his return, the Company has significantly increased its geographic broadband footprint through fiber and fixed wireless technologies. He has worked with the Company board of directors and management to develop success-based capital project models as they continue the Company expansion and vision of broadband access. This strategy has been effective in meeting budgetary expectations and has also resulted in an increased EPS return to the Company stockholders. David's qualifications to run this project and

its management team include leadership and team building, management development, strategic planning, community and public relations, in addition to his vast knowledge and experience in technology, business and finance.

**Exhibit B**

**Barry County ETC Service Area**

**Exhibit C**

**Five Year Plan**

**Confidential- Filed Under Seal**

Redacted Version-Confidential Materials Redacted

**Exhibit D**

**Five Year Plan Map**

**Confidential- Filed Under Seal**

Redacted Version-Confidential Materials Redacted

**Officer Certification**

STATE OF MICHIGAN  
COUNTY OF BARRY

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**VERIFICATION**

I, David Stoll, am the General Manager of MEI Telecom, Inc. (the “Company”); that I am authorized to make this Verification on behalf of the Company; that the foregoing Application was prepared under my direction and supervision; and that I certify or declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Michigan that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.



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David Stoll, General Manager

Sworn and subscribed before me this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2020

\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public

My commission expires \_\_\_\_\_

# Proposed ETC Service Area

