

Library Association of Alberta

Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A3

To the Right Honorable Members of Cabinet,

As Presidents of two Associations which responded to the CRTC request for input regarding the matter of High Cost Service Areas, we wish to appeal the October 1999 CRTC Ruling on this issue.

We were disappointed that the Ruling did not address the issues which we raised regarding High Cost Service Areas in Alberta, and have therefore jointly prepared the attached document for your consideration.

We have been very grateful for the federal support for electronic linkages in Alberta, and have worked hard to ensure the maximum benefit through private sector partnerships. We therefore urge the Federal Cabinet to review the recent decision.

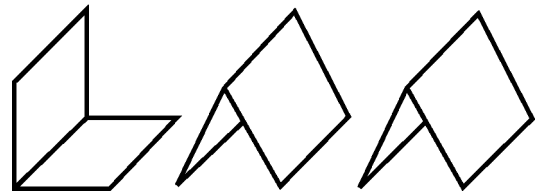
Respectfully submitted,

Rita Dempsey
ALTA President

Alvin Schraeder
LAA President

Appeal to the Federal Cabinet
Of the Canadian Radio-Television and
Telecommunications Commission
Ruling 99-16 on
High Cost Service Areas.

By



Library Association of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta
January 13, 2000

Introduction:

“The Government of Canada has made a strong commitment to keeping our country competitive in today’s global, knowledge based economy. We believe that the Internet is a powerful tool for economic and social development for all Canadians, no matter where they live or how they live.

To help Canadians take advantage of the Internet, the federal government has created a number of innovative programs and services designed for public schools and libraries, First Nations schools, the voluntary sector, rural and remote communities, small businesses, and recent graduates.”

--“*Connecting Canadians*”

These two paragraphs come from the *Connecting Canadians* information kit produced by and funded by Industry Canada. In addition to the information kit, Industry Canada, through the *Connecting Canadians* initiative, has already committed to the spending of more than \$15 million in Alberta. It is the position of the Alberta Library Trustees Association and The Library Association of Alberta that the recent ruling by the CRTC on High Cost Service Areas does not support this initiative.

Alberta Library Trustees Association (ALTA) represents the trustees of public libraries province wide serving all sizes of communities. The Alberta Library Trustees Association promotes effective library service and leadership in communication and advocacy and encourages trustee education and development. The Library Association of Alberta (LAA) is an association representing professional librarians, and others with an interest in libraries. LAA is dedicated to improving library services in Alberta through advocacy and continuing education.

For the purpose of this appeal, we have united to ensure the concerns of the library community of Alberta are addressed. By the ruling 99-16, it seems that there is a misunderstanding of how the problems of High Cost Service Areas affect the library community. We feel it is important to explain some of the issues we face.

The Issues:

Summary

The key issue for us is affordable accessibility to telecommunications and Internet service for all Albertans. Our particular interest is how this affects the library community and its future.

Libraries are a gateway to information for all people, but it is even more important in rural communities, where access to information is very difficult. In Alberta more than 250 rural libraries depend on telecommunications networks to deliver government information, reading materials, training and educational materials to the public.

Libraries are the places people turn to for a wide variety of information, and without enhanced telecommunications services at a reasonable price they will be unable to fulfill this mandate.

1. Internet Access

The Internet has allowed many small libraries to access enormous volumes of current information for the first time. The Internet enables access to many information sources such as databases, websites, and encyclopedias online.

Internet access has brought many administrative efficiencies to the library community and is now considered an essential part of business. Administrations within each regional library systems are centralized allowing for shared resources through the Internet. For example, individual libraries within these regions are not required to maintain their own online library catalogues.

The problem lies with the cost, reliability, and speed of data lines. These issues were not addressed in the ruling 99-16 by the CRTC of October of 1999.

a. Access to Information

The Internet is a major communication tool for dissemination of information by all levels of government, and plays many other integral roles in lives of Canadians. Many times information from governments of all levels is only posted on websites or distributed electronically. This has increased the role of libraries in helping the public obtain the necessary information they need from governments.

Many levels of government seek public consultation through the Internet. It is a tool of the democratic process and facilitates true two-way communication between governments and their constituents.

People who have no other Internet access turn to public libraries for this service. Libraries are a credible, reliable place for people who need help in obtaining and understanding information.

b. Speed of Access

In the CRTC ruling, Internet access speed was not defined under the description of basic service. In order for libraries to provide public access to the incredible amount of information on the Internet, specifically in the databases, 56K-modem speed is required. In many towns in Alberta this service is not available, due to the inability of existing telecommunications lines to sustain this speed.

c. Reliability

Consistent reliability and quality of phone lines available in smaller towns for Internet access is an issue. For example, in Sexsmith, a small town located 20 km north of Grande Prairie, the library has difficulty in obtaining a good circuit for Internet access, and may try up to five times before a suitable connection is made. At best, Sexsmith can achieve 33.6 k modem speed, which is below minimum standard for most database applications. Sexsmith is one of 30 members of the Peace Library system. Of these 30 locations, 12 experience similar difficulties.

This is not limited to northern Alberta communities. The Marigold Library System, located just south of Calgary, has similar experiences.

d. Affordability

A competitive environment among telecommunication service providers keeps pricing reasonable. Without competition there are no natural market forces to keep prices down. In remote locations, there is typically only one supplier.

We recognize that the cost of upgrading lines and providing service to remote locations is expensive. However, consumers cannot solely absorb these costs. If costs are allowed to increase unchecked, it may cause libraries and potentially residents to have to disconnect their service.

In Strathmore, located 20 minutes southeast of Calgary, the regional library office was quoted \$7,500 for installation and \$2,500 per month in line fees for a T-1 highspeed data line into their facility. Considering the

proximity to Calgary, and the size of the community of Strathmore, these fees seem excessive.

e. Value Added Services

Installation of the necessary data service lines would allow libraries to increase their service to the public. The opportunity to provide Tele- and Video-Conferencing to rural populations at a reasonable cost in the future would allow the public to have greater access to information and training opportunities. In many communities it would be a vital link to a world increasing in speed and knowledge, and would keep these communities viable.

2. Business Rates charged to Libraries for local service

Libraries in Alberta are deemed to be a business, therefore they are required to pay business rates for local phones. In these times of ever-tight budgets, particularly in small rural communities, it can be a stretch to pay these higher rates. It is imperative that we cap these rates to ensure future access to those most disenfranchised. People of limited means would be the portion of the population most likely to be left behind in the “information age”.

3. Extended Flat Rate Calling

In many parts of High Cost Service Areas, the Extended Flat Rate Calling charge represents a substantial portion of local phone bills, and is not optional. One of the issues relating to Extended Flat Rate Calling is the arrangement by which small towns can call larger centres at a flat rate, but have additional long distance charges to call other small towns.

In the regional library systems, this is very important, as many small town libraries are connected to each other. A different approach to Extended Flat Rate Calling would be beneficial to libraries throughout the province.

4. Enhanced Services

Teleconferencing is one of the ways that rural communities can band together to achieve greater results. This cooperative action was put into practice when the library community formed regional library systems. It is very helpful for safety, time and economic reasons to be able to meet via phone; unfortunately in rural areas it is very expensive. For example, a Board meeting of the Peace Library System, held one January by teleconference due to poor road conditions, cost \$2,200. Safer, yes. Affordable? Not really.

The lack of competitive suppliers in these areas makes the cost prohibitive. In addition, the lack of enhanced telecommunications lines makes it impossible for these types of meetings to occur over the Internet where it would be immensely less expensive.

High Cost Service Area Comparison:

The CRTC in their ruling made a distinction for areas covered by Northwestel. Although we understand their situation is critical, many areas in Alberta are in similar situations: low population, dispersed over a broad geographic area, and deserve the same consideration.

Conclusion:

As outlined, the issues facing libraries, particularly in High Cost Service Areas, threaten their viability at a time when access to information is vital to the growth and development of people across the country.

It is impossible rural telecommunications customers solely to take on the enormous responsibility of the cost of upgrading to a level of service that will be acceptable in the future. In addition, it could take years for the remote communities in many provinces to be able to use the services many of us take for granted. If these delays are allowed, it could cripple areas of the country as well as make 21st century library services, including vast amounts of electronic information, next to impossible to provide.

We are asking the Federal Cabinet to consider these issues, in reference to decision 99-16 of the CRTC which did not go far enough in ensuring reliable, affordable and sustainable telecommunications service to High Cost Service Areas. Based on the issues outlined in this briefing, it is apparent the decision does not support, and is indeed contrary to, the *Connecting Canadians* initiative and the vision of Alberta libraries which is barrier free access to information resources for all Albertans.



8301 - 110 Street
Grande Prairie, AB
T8W 6T2

(780) 538-4656
FAX (780) 539-5285

January 14, 2000

Mr. Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A3

To the Federal Cabinet:

**Re: Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission
(CRTC) Ruling on High Cost Service Areas**

The 27 municipalities located in northwestern Alberta that make up the Peace Library System support the appeal by the Alberta Library Trustees Association (ALTA) and the Library Association of Alberta (LAA) to this CRTC ruling.

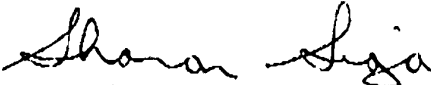
A sparse population scattered over vast distances is the reality we face in northern Alberta. We are very distressed that the CRTC ruling does not recognize or address the problems faced by Canadians living in rural and remote areas. Our goal is to provide residents of northwestern Alberta with the information they need to be part of the global economy and to support decisions they must make in their daily lives. We have been making gains recently because so much information can now be delivered electronically. In our area, thanks to support from Industry Canada, many small libraries just started offering access to electronic information to residents without their own equipment and connections. This is very positive, but there are problems looming.

Some of our larger communities need higher bandwidth, but many telecommunication services are not offered outside of large centres, so they cannot efficiently link to information sources. Smaller communities have slow and unreliable basic telephone connections that impact the ability of individuals and public libraries to access electronic information. As well, the increasing cost of basic telephone service will soon put this out of the reach of small public libraries and will eliminate gains that have so recently been made.

We ask that the Cabinet look again at the issues facing high-cost service areas because there are real problems that have not been addressed. At the very least, please look at the regulations that stand in the way of creative solutions, such as community partnerships, that would benefit rural and remote areas.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours truly,


for Jane Bourlon
Chairman, Peace Library Board



Government of Canada
Federal Cabinet
Re: Appeal of CRTC Ruling on High Cost Service Areas
by the Alberta Library Trustees Association and the
Library Association of Alberta
January 14, 2000

To the Right Honorable Members of Cabinet,

As Director of the Calgary Public Library, I write in strong support of the appeal being brought forward by the Alberta library community with respect to the CRTC ruling on High Cost Service Areas. Affordable and accessible telecommunications are vital to the provision of library service throughout Canada. These issues, while important to all Canadians, have an even greater impact on Canadians living and being served by libraries in rural areas. Advanced telecommunications is as critical to Canadian productivity, prosperity and quality of life in the early 21st Century as transportation was in the early 20th Century. The speed, reliability and affordability of Internet access and other telecommunications are essential to the realization of the vision set out in the government's Connecting Canadians initiative.

The ruling of the CRTC on High Cost Service Areas fails to properly address several key components necessary for the enhancement, advancement and equitable accessibility of the information highway for Canadians from all walks of life, from all socio-economic sectors and from all regions of the country.

The emerging division of information-rich and information-poor is of great concern in both urban and rural settings. This issue causes special concerns in many rural areas where the quality of telecommunications is often poor, and the cost of bridging distances and providing access is prohibitively high.

I urge you to consider the important issues raised in the appeal by Alberta' library community, and ensure that concrete steps are taken to improve the reliability, affordability and sustainability of telecommunications service to High Cost Service Areas.

Sincerely,

Gerry Meek
Director, Calgary Public Library

January 17, 2000

Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Dear Mr. Cappe,

Marigold Board supports the letter of appeal from the Alberta Library Trustees Association and the Library Association of Alberta. The Board is made up of representatives from 38 municipalities in south central Alberta. Public library services are offered to the 93,961 residents through 31 member libraries, 13 paperback deposits and a paperbacks-by-mail service.

Communication is vital to the ongoing success of the organization. And telecommunications with a growing emphasis on the Internet is becoming more and more of an issue to all our member libraries plus the headquarters operation.

Marigold is especially concerned with the basic cost of telephone service and the reliability of the Internet connections. There does not appear to be any consistency in service or in the "basic" costs of service. We feel that these concerns need to be addressed as outlined in the appeal submitted by the two associations.

Yours truly,



Erika Lane, Chair

All libraries are the same size - when they are connected!



Chinook Arch Regional Library System

2902 - 7th Avenue North Lethbridge, AB T1H 5C6

Phone: (403) 380-1500 Fax: (403) 380-3550 Email: arch@chinookarch.ab.ca

January 14, 2000

Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Dear Sir:

The Chinook Arch Library Board supports the appeal by LAA and ALTA to the federal cabinet regarding CRTC ruling 99-16 concerning High Cost Service Areas.

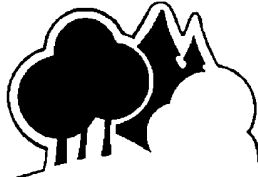
The Chinook Arch Regional Library System operates a wide area network which connects 27 libraries in diverse rural areas of southwest Alberta. Several of these community libraries are affected by the problems of rural and remote service. The accessibility of information services and Internet services to the public libraries is severely affected by the cost of telecommunications. At present the service available in these areas is severely limited in terms of speed of access. In addition, the cost of telecommunication links to these communities is extremely burdensome to the operating viability of the Regional Library System. Without the System these libraries would be completely unable to afford important access to the Internet. With the System the issue of sustainability of the connection is a serious concern.

Libraries throughout rural Canada must have reliable, affordable and sustainable telecommunications service in order to ensure equitable access to information for Canadians.

Sincerely

M.E. Macdonald
Chief Executive Officer





5404 - 56 Avenue
Lacombe, AB T4L 1G1

Ph. (403) 782-3850
Fax (403) 782-4650

Parkland Regional Library

January 14, 2000

Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block, 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A3

To the Right Honorable Members of Cabinet,

Please accept this letter as a support of the Appeal to the Federal Cabinet of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission's Ruling on High Cost Service Areas. The Parkland Regional Library is in full agreement with the analysis of the problems faced in our more distant library service points.

A case in point would be Bodo in the Municipal District of Provost. That library recently was given an Industry Canada computer to give community access to the Internet. The library cannot in actuality provide that access because there are so many hops for the connection to be made and the lines are so slow (8K not 56K) that the connection times out before the library can get onto the Internet! This is not an isolated incident - getting Canadians up on the Information Highway really depends on FAST and INEXPENSIVE telecommunications.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Silver
Director, Parkland Regional Library



Northern Lights Library System

4929 - 51 Avenue, Postal Bag 8, Elk Point, Alberta T0A 1A0
Tel (780) 724-2596 Fax (780) 724-2597 nlls@incentre.net

January 14, 2000

Mr. Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A2

Dear Mr. Cappe:

We support the Alberta Library Trustees Association and the Library Association of Alberta's Appeal to the Federal Cabinet of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission Ruling on High Cost Service Areas.

The Northern Lights Library System (NLLS) represents libraries in thirty-three rural municipalities in Northeast Alberta. One of the biggest challenges that we face is the prohibitive cost of telecommunications. Technology is in theory the great equalizer but, in practicality, this has not been the experience of our public libraries. One of many examples is the Edgerton Public Library that serves a community of 372. A year ago, when Edgerton joined our library system, it did not even have a telephone because of the cost of installation. What was even more significant, the board knew it could not sustain the commercial monthly and long distance rates. Although it is located within a 25-minute drive of several other NLLS communities, long distance charges apply between it and all but one of these communities. Even the closest city, Lloydminster, 95 kilometers away, is long distance by telephone.

A special grant from NLLS was used to install communication lines and to cover the line costs for a few months. This however is due to run out shortly, and sustainability is a significant issue because of cost. One major access point for staff and patrons is in jeopardy.

On behalf of the residents of these small rural (and not necessarily remote) communities, we request your support for their right to have access to the information they need for economic, educational, and recreational activities through directives for reasonable telecommunication rates. Information dispersal is frequently accomplished by electronic means which depend on telecommunication structures. In small municipalities this dissemination is just as vital, and sometimes even more so, than in large urban areas which have the advantage of economies of scale. Necessity walks hand in hand with rights when it comes to information access in Canadian rural communities.

Sincerely,

Linda MacCallum, Director, Northern Lights Library System



YELLOWHEAD REGIONAL LIBRARY

Box 400, 433 King Street, Spruce Grove, Alberta T7X 2Y1

Phone: (403) 962-2003 Fax: (403) 962-2770

e-mail: yellowhd@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca

January 17, 2000

Mel Cappe, Clerk of the Privy Council &
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Dear Mr. Cappe:

The Board of Yellowhead Regional Library views the October ruling on High Cost Serving Areas by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission with concern. Many of our member libraries serve small communities in sparsely populated areas. Getting adequate and affordable access to telecommunications can be a problem for them.

The services Yellowhead Regional Library offers to its members are becoming increasingly dependent upon telecommunications. We generally view developments in the area of technology with excitement for the opportunities they bring us to offer more equitable service to all of our members, regardless of size and location. The Connecting Canadians initiative of Industry Canada has played no small part in the development of these technology-based services.

Unfortunately, we feel the CRTC decision makes the long-term viability of these initiatives doubtful, especially in small communities. Therefore we would like to express our support of the appeal being made by the Alberta Library Trustees Association and the Library Association of Alberta. We feel this document clearly sets out the issues and consequences of the CRTC ruling and ask that you give it serious consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie Mardy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Debbie Mardy
Chair



2375 - 10th AVE. S.W., MEDICINE HAT, AB., CANADA T1A 8G2
PHONE: (403) 529-0550 FAX: (403) 528-2473

Mel Cappe
Clerk of the Privy Council and
Secretary to the Cabinet
Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
Canada
K1A 0A3

Dear Mr. Cappe,

We support the appeal presented by ALTA and LAA, particularly, business rates for library telephones and the added extended flat rate calling charges.

Though the Shortgrass Library System area borders on the U.S., its rural population density is only 0.75 persons per square km. in the rural areas. Though over 81,500 people live within its boundaries, over 50,000 live in Medicine Hat and 10,000 in Brooks (110 kms from Medicine Hat). That leaves about 21,000 in the remainder of the space.

To serve them equitably, their libraries are networked to our central database. To provide them with a telecommunications connection to the database, and Internet services, cost over \$26,000 in 1999; this even with creative ways to minimize costs.

For services to Foremost, a community of 556, we must use a call forward through another village to save on the high cost of long distance charges. However, we must pay for four business class telephone sites with "call-forwarding" and "flat rate calling" for a library that is only open 20 hours per week.

We trust that you can also find creative ways to support library and information services to our rural residents.

Sincerely,

Ray Lusty, Director



End of Document