

Ordering Clauses

45. Accordingly, *It is ordered* that, pursuant to the authority contained in sections 1, 2, 4(i), 4(j), 201–205, 214, 254, and 403 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. 151, 152, 154(i)–(j), 201–205, 214, 254, 403 and §§ 1.1, 1.411–1.419, and 1.1200–1.1216 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR 1.1, 1.411–1.419, 1.1200–1.1216, this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking is adopted.

46. *It is further ordered* that the Commission's Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, shall send a copy of this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, including the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

Federal Communications Commission.

Marlene H. Dortch,

Secretary.

[FR Doc. E8–4148 Filed 3–3–08; 8:45 am]

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

47 CFR Parts 32, 36, 54 and 63

[WC Docket No. 05–337; CC Docket No. 96–45; FCC 08–22]

High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service

AGENCY: Federal Communications Commission.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking.

SUMMARY: In this document, the Commission seeks comment on the *Recommended Decision* of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service, released on November 20, 2007, regarding comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service. We also incorporate by reference the *Identical Support NPRM* and the *Reverse Auctions NPRM* into this NPRM. In addition, we will incorporate the records developed in response to those two items into this proceeding.

DATES: Comments are due on or before April 3, 2008 and reply comments are due on or before May 5, 2008.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by WC Docket No. 05–337 and CC Docket No. 96–45, by any of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.
- *Federal Communications Commission's Web Site:* <http://www.fcc.gov>.

www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

- *E-mail:* ecfs@fcc.gov, and include the following words in the body of the message, “get form.” A sample form and directions will be sent in response. Include the docket number in the subject line of the message.

- *Mail:* Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, 445 12th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20554.

- *People with Disabilities:* Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by e-mail: FCC504@fcc.gov or phone: 202–418–0530 or TTY: 202–418–0432.

For detailed instructions for submitting comments and additional information on the rulemaking process, see the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section of this document.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ted Burmeister or Katie King, Wireline Competition Bureau, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, 202–418–7400 or TTY: 202–418–0484.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This is a synopsis of the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in WC Docket No. 05–337, CC Docket No. 96–45, FCC 08–22, adopted January 16, 2008, and released January 29, 2008. The complete text of this document is available for inspection and copying during normal business hours in the FCC Reference Information Center, Portals II, 445 12th Street, SW., Room CY–A257, Washington, DC 20554.

The document may also be purchased from the Commission's duplicating contractor, Best Copy and Printing, Inc., 445 12th Street, SW., Room CY–B402, Washington, DC 20554, telephone (800) 378–3160 or (202) 863–2893, facsimile (202) 863–2898, or via e-mail at <http://www.bcpweb.com>. It is also available on the Commission's Web site at <http://www.fcc.gov>.

Initial Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 Analysis

This document does not contain proposed information collection(s) subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), Public Law 104–13. In addition, therefore, it does not contain any new or modified “information collection burden for small business concerns with fewer than 25 employees,” pursuant to the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Public Law 107–198, see 44 U.S.C. 3506(c)(4).

Synopsis of the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

Introduction

1. In this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM), we seek comment on ways to reform the high-cost universal service program. Specifically, we seek comment on the recommendation of the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) regarding comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service support. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (2007) (*Recommended Decision*). We also incorporate into this NPRM the following two Notices of Proposed Rulemaking: (1) The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking released by the Commission on January 29, 2008, which seeks comment on the Commission's rules governing the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs), including elimination of the “identical support rule;” and (2) the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking released by the Commission on January 29, 2008, which seeks comment on whether and how to implement reverse auctions (a form of competitive bidding) as the disbursement mechanism for determining the amount of high-cost universal service support for ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas. *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 08–4 (rel. Jan. 29, 2008) (*Identical Support Rule NPRM*); *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 08–5 (rel. Jan. 29, 2008) (*Reverse Auctions NPRM*). We also will incorporate the records developed in response to those NPRMs into this proceeding. We note, however, that such incorporation of these two NPRMs does not change or otherwise affect, and we expressly preserve, the positions of the Commission members with regard to those particular NPRMs and the Joint Board's recommendation.

Background

2. In the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act), Congress sought to preserve and advance universal service while, at the same time, opening all telecommunications markets to competition. Telecommunications Act of 1996, Public Law 104–104 (1996). Section 254(b) of the Act, which was added by the 1996 Act, directs the Joint Board and the Commission to base policies for the preservation and advancement of universal service on

several general principles, plus other principles that the Commission may establish. 47 U.S.C. 254(b). Among other things, there should be specific, predictable, and sufficient federal and state universal service support mechanisms; quality services should be available at just, reasonable, and affordable rates; and consumers in all regions of the nation should have access to telecommunications services that are reasonably comparable to those services provided in urban areas at reasonably comparable rates. 47 U.S.C. 254(b)(1), (3), (5). Section 254(e) of the Act provides that only ETCs designated under section 214(e) shall be eligible to receive federal universal service support, and that any such support should be explicit and sufficient to achieve the purposes of that section. 47 U.S.C. 214(e), 254(e).

3. In 2002, the Commission asked the Joint Board to review certain of the Commission's rules related to the high-cost universal service support mechanisms. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, 67 FR 70703, November 26, 2002. Among other things, the Commission asked the Joint Board to review the Commission's rules relating to high-cost universal service support in study areas in which a competitive ETC provides service. In response, the Joint Board made a number of recommendations concerning the designation of ETCs in high-cost areas, but declined to recommend that the Commission modify the basis of support (i.e., the methodology used to calculate support) in study areas with multiple ETCs. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Recommended Decision, 19 FCC Rcd 4257 (2004). Instead, the Joint Board recommended that it and the Commission continue to consider possible modifications to the basis of support for competitive ETCs as part of an overall review of the high-cost support mechanisms for rural and non-rural carriers.

4. In 2004, the Commission asked the Joint Board to review the Commission's rules relating to the high-cost universal service support mechanisms for rural carriers and to determine the appropriate rural mechanism to succeed the plan adopted in the *Rural Task Force Order*. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Order, 69 FR 48232, August 9, 2004 (*Rural Referral Order*); *Rural Task Force Order*, 66 FR 30080, June 5, 2001. In August 2004, the Joint Board sought comment on issues the Commission referred to it related to the high-cost universal service support mechanisms for rural carriers. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*

Seeks Comment on Certain of the Commission's Rules Relating to High-Cost Universal Service Support, Public Notice, 69 FR 53917, September 3, 2004. The Joint Board also specifically sought comment on the methodology for calculating support for ETCs in competitive study areas. Since that time, the Joint Board has sought comment on a variety of specific proposals for addressing the issues of universal service support for rural carriers and the basis of support for competitive ETCs, including proposals developed by members and staff of the Joint Board, as well as the use of reverse auctions (competitive bidding) to determine high-cost universal service funding to ETCs. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Seeks Comment on Proposals to Modify the Commission's Rules Relating to High-Cost Universal Service Support*, 20 FCC Rcd 14267 (2005); *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Seeks Comment on the Merits of Using Auctions to Determine High-Cost Universal Service Support*, 71 FR 50420, August 25, 2006.

5. On May 1, 2007, the Joint Board recommended that the Commission adopt an interim cap on high-cost universal service support provided to competitive ETCs to stem the dramatic growth in high-cost support. *High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Recommended Decision, 22 FCC Rcd 8998 (2007). Specifically, the Joint Board recommended that the Commission cap the amount of support that competitive ETCs may receive for each state based on the average level of competitive ETC support distributed in that state in 2006. The Joint Board further recommended that the interim cap apply until one year from the date that the Joint Board makes its recommendation regarding comprehensive and fundamental high-cost universal service reform. The Joint Board also recommended that the Commission consider abandoning or modifying the so-called "identical support" rule in any reform it ultimately adopts. On May 14, 2007, the Commission released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, seeking comment on the Joint Board's recommendation regarding the interim cap on competitive ETC support. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 22 FCC Rcd 9705 (2007).

6. In a companion Public Notice, released May 1, 2007, the Joint Board sought comment on various proposals to reform the high-cost universal service support mechanisms. *Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Seeks*

Comment on Long Term, Comprehensive High-Cost Universal Service Reform, Public Notice, 22 FCC Rcd 9023 (2007). Specifically the Joint Board sought comment on the following issues and proposals: (1) The use of reverse auctions to determine high-cost universal service support; (2) the use of GIS technology and network cost modeling to better calculate and target support at more granular levels; (3) disaggregation of support; (4) the methodology for calculating support for competitive ETCs; and (5) whether universal service funding should be used to promote broadband deployment.

7. Finally, the Commission recently adopted two Notices of Proposed Rulemaking, which seek comment on specific high-cost universal service comprehensive reform proposals. First, on January 9, 2008, the Commission adopted the *Identical Support NPRM*, which seeks comment on the Commission's rules governing the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to ETCs and tentatively concludes that the Commission should eliminate the "identical support" rule. *Identical Support Rule NPRM*, FCC 08-4. Second, on January 9, 2008, the Commission adopted the *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, which tentatively concludes that reverse auctions should be used as the disbursement mechanism to determine the amount of high-cost universal service for ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas and seeks comment on how to implement reverse auctions for this purpose. *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, FCC 08-5.

Discussion

8. On November 20, 2007, the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service issued its *Recommended Decision* regarding comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service. *Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (2007). In this NPRM, we seek comment on the Joint Board's recommendations contained in the *Recommended Decision*.

9. We also incorporate by reference the *Identical Support NPRM* and the *Reverse Auctions NPRM* into this NPRM. In addition, we will incorporate the records developed in response to those two items into this proceeding. We thus request that parties who file comments in response to either or both of those items include those comments as part of their filings in response to this NPRM. We note, however, that such incorporation of these two NPRMs does not change or otherwise affect, and we expressly preserve, the positions of the Commission members with regard to

those particular NPRMs and the Joint Board's recommendation.

Procedural Matters

10. Pursuant to §§ 1.415 and 1.419 of the Commission's rules, 47 CFR 1.415, 1.419, interested parties may file comments on or before April 3, 2008 and reply comments are due on or before May 5, 2008. Comments may be filed using: (1) the Commission's Electronic Comment Filing System (ECFS), (2) the Federal Government's eRulemaking Portal, or (3) by filing paper copies. See *Electronic Filing of Documents in Rulemaking Proceedings*, 63 FR 24121, May 1, 1998.

- **Electronic Filers:** Comments may be filed electronically using the Internet by accessing the ECFS: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/> or the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <http://www.regulations.gov>. Filers should follow the instructions provided on the Web site for submitting comments.

- For ECFS filers, if multiple docket or rulemaking numbers appear in the caption of this proceeding, filers must transmit one electronic copy of the comments for each docket or rulemaking number referenced in the caption. In completing the transmittal screen, filers should include their full name, U.S. Postal Service mailing address, and the applicable docket or rulemaking number. Parties may also submit an electronic comment by Internet e-mail. To get filing instructions, filers should send an e-mail to ecfs@fcc.gov, and include the following words in the body of the message, "get form." A sample form and directions will be sent in response.

- **Paper Filers:** Parties who choose to file by paper must file an original and four copies of each filing. If more than one docket or rulemaking number appears in the caption of this proceeding, filers must submit two additional copies for each additional docket or rulemaking number.

- Filings can be sent by hand or messenger delivery, by commercial overnight courier, or by first-class or overnight U.S. Postal Service mail (although we continue to experience delays in receiving U.S. Postal Service mail). All filings must be addressed to the Commission's Secretary, Office of the Secretary, Federal Communications Commission.

- The Commission's contractor will receive hand-delivered or messenger-delivered paper filings for the Commission's Secretary at 236 Massachusetts Avenue, NE., Suite 110, Washington, DC 20002. The filing hours at this location are 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. All hand deliveries must be held together

with rubber bands or fasteners. Any envelopes must be disposed of before entering the building.

- Commercial overnight mail (other than U.S. Postal Service Express Mail and Priority Mail) must be sent to 9300 East Hampton Drive, Capitol Heights, MD 20743.

- U.S. Postal Service first-class, Express, and Priority mail must be addressed to 445 12th Street, SW., Washington, DC 20554.

People with Disabilities: To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (tty).

Ex Parte Requirements

11. These matters shall be treated as a "permit-but-disclose" proceeding in accordance with the Commission's *ex parte* rules. 47 CFR 1.1200 through 1.1216. Persons making oral *ex parte* presentations are reminded that memoranda summarizing the presentations must contain summaries of the substance of the presentations and not merely a listing of the subjects discussed. More than a one or two sentence description of the views and arguments presented is generally required. 47 CFR 1.1206(b)(2). Other requirements pertaining to oral and written presentations are set forth in § 1.1206(b) of the Commission's rules. 47 CFR 1.1206(b).

Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis

12. As required by the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), 5 U.S.C. 603, the Commission has prepared this Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis (IRFA) of the possible significant economic impact on small entities by the policies and rules proposed in the NPRM. Written public comments are requested on this IRFA, which is set forth below. Comments must be identified as responses to the IRFA and must be filed on or before April 3, 2008. The Commission will send a copy of the NPRM, including this IRFA, to the Chief Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration (SBA). 5 U.S.C. 603(a).

Need for, and Objectives of, the Proposed Rules

13. In the Telecommunications Act of 1996 (1996 Act), Congress sought to preserve and advance universal service while, at the same time, opening all telecommunications markets to competition. Telecommunications Act of 1996, Public Law 104-104 (1996).

Section 254(b) of the Act directs the Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service (Joint Board) and the Commission to base policies for the preservation and advancement of universal service on several general principles, plus other principles that the Commission may establish. Section 254(e) provides that only eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) designated under section 214(e) shall be eligible to receive federal universal service support, and any such support should be explicit and sufficient to achieve the purposes of that section.

14. In this NPRM, we seek comment on ways to reform the high-cost universal service program. Specifically, we seek comment on the recommendation of the Joint Board regarding comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service support. *Recommended Decision*, 22 FCC Rcd 20477 (2007). We also incorporate into this NPRM the following two Notices of Proposed Rulemaking: (1) The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking released by the Commission on January 29, 2008, which seeks comment on the Commission's rules governing the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs), including elimination of the "identical support rule;" and (2) the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking released by the Commission on January 29, 2008, which seeks comment on whether and how to implement reverse auctions (a form of competitive bidding) as the disbursement mechanism for determining the amount of high-cost universal service support for ETCs serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas. *Identical Support Rule NPRM*, FCC 08-4; *Reverse Auctions NPRM*, FCC 08-5. We also will incorporate the records developed in response to those Notices of Proposed Rulemaking into this proceeding. We note, however, that such incorporation of these two NPRMs does not change or otherwise affect, and we expressly preserve, the positions of the Commission members with regard to those particular NPRMs and the Joint Board's recommendation.

Legal Basis

15. The legal basis for any action that may be taken pursuant to the NPRM is contained in sections 1, 2, 4(i), 4(j), 201 through 205, 214, 254, and 403 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and §§ 1.1, 1.411 through 1.419, and 1.1200 through 1.1216 of the Commission's rules. 47 U.S.C. 151, 152, 154(i) through (j), 201 through 205, 214, 254, 403; 47 CFR 1.1, 1.411 through 1.419, 1.1200 through 1.1216.

Description and Estimate of the Number of Small Entities to Which Rules Will Apply

16. The RFA directs agencies to provide a description of, and, where feasible, an estimate of the number of small entities that may be affected by the rules, if adopted. 5 U.S.C. 604(a)(3). The RFA generally defines the term "small entity," 5 U.S.C. 601(6), as having the same meaning as the terms "small business," 5 U.S.C. 601(3), "small organization," 5 U.S.C. 601(4), and "small governmental jurisdiction." 5 U.S.C. 601(5). In addition, the term "small business" has the same meaning as the term "small business concern" under the Small Business Act, unless the Commission has developed one or more definitions that are appropriate to its activities. 5 U.S.C. 601(3). Under the Small Business Act, a "small business concern" is one that: (1) Is independently owned and operated; (2) is not dominant in its field of operation; and (3) meets any additional criteria established by the Small Business Administration (SBA). 15 U.S.C. 632. Nationwide, there are a total of approximately 22.4 million small businesses, according to SBA data. A small organization is generally "any not-for-profit enterprise which is independently owned and operated and is not dominant in its field." 5 U.S.C. 601(4). Nationwide, as of 2002, there were approximately 1.6 million small organizations.

17. The most reliable source of information regarding the total numbers of certain common carrier and related providers nationwide, as well as the number of commercial wireless entities, is the data that the Commission publishes in its *Trends in Telephone Service* report. The SBA has developed small business size standards for wireline and wireless small businesses within the three commercial census categories of Wired Telecommunications Carriers, Paging, and Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications. 13 CFR 121.201. Under these categories, a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. Below, using the above size standards and others, we discuss the total estimated numbers of small businesses that might be affected by our actions.

Wireline Carriers and Service Providers

18. We have included small incumbent local exchange carriers (LECs) in this present RFA analysis. As noted above, a "small business" under the RFA is one that, *inter alia*, meets the pertinent small business size standard

(e.g., a telephone communications business having 1,500 or fewer employees), and "is not dominant in its field of operation." 15 U.S.C. 632. The SBA's Office of Advocacy contends that, for RFA purposes, small incumbent LECs are not dominant in their field of operation because any such dominance is not "national" in scope. We have therefore included small incumbent LECs in this RFA analysis, although we emphasize that this RFA action has no effect on Commission analyses and determinations in other, non-RFA contexts.

19. *Incumbent LECs.* Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a size standard for small businesses specifically applicable to incumbent LECs. The closest applicable size standard under SBA rules is for Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. 13 CFR 121.201. According to Commission data, 1,307 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of local exchange services. Of these 1,307 carriers, an estimated 1,019 have 1,500 or fewer employees, and 288 have more than 1,500 employees. Consequently, the Commission estimates that most providers of incumbent local exchange service are small businesses that may be affected by our action.

20. *Competitive LECs, Competitive Access Providers (CAPs), "Shared-Tenant Service Providers," and "Other Local Service Providers."* Neither the Commission nor the SBA has developed a small business size standard specifically for these service providers. The appropriate size standard under SBA rules is for the category Wired Telecommunications Carriers. Under that size standard, such a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. 13 CFR 121.201. According to Commission data, 859 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of either competitive LEC or CAP services. Of these 859 carriers, an estimated 741 have 1,500 or fewer employees, and 118 have more than 1,500 employees. In addition, 16 carriers have reported that they are "Shared-Tenant Service Providers," and all 16 are estimated to have 1,500 or fewer employees. In addition, 44 carriers have reported that they are "Other Local Service Providers." Of the 44, an estimated 43 have 1,500 or fewer employees, and one has more than 1,500 employees. Consequently, the Commission estimates that most competitive LECs, CAPs, "Shared-Tenant Service Providers," and "Other Local Service Providers" are small

entities that may be affected by our action.

Wireless Carriers and Service Providers

21. *Wireless Service Providers.* The SBA has developed a small business size standard for wireless firms within the two broad economic census categories of "Paging" and "Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications." 13 CFR 121.201. Under both categories, the SBA deems a wireless business to be small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. For the census category of Paging, Census Bureau data for 2002 show that there were 807 firms in this category that operated for the entire year. Of this total, 804 firms had employment of 999 or fewer employees, and three firms had employment of 1,000 employees or more. Thus, under this category and associated small business size standard, the majority of firms can be considered small. For the census category of Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications, Census Bureau data for 2002 show that there were 1,397 firms in this category that operated for the entire year. Of this total, 1,378 firms had employment of 999 or fewer employees, and 19 firms had employment of 1,000 employees or more. Thus, under this second category and size standard, the majority of firms can, again, be considered small.

22. *Wireless Telephony.* Wireless telephony includes cellular, personal communications services (PCS), and specialized mobile radio (SMR) telephony carriers. As noted earlier, the SBA has developed a small business size standard for "Cellular and Other Wireless Telecommunications" services. 13 CFR 121.201. Under that SBA small business size standard, a business is small if it has 1,500 or fewer employees. According to Commission data, 432 carriers reported that they were engaged in the provision of wireless telephony. We have estimated that 221 of these are small under the SBA small business size standard.

Satellite Service Providers

23. *Satellite Telecommunications and Other Telecommunications.* There is no small business size standard developed specifically for providers of international service. The appropriate size standards under SBA rules are for the two broad census categories of "Satellite Telecommunications" and "Other Telecommunications." Under both categories, such a business is small if it has \$13.5 million or less in average annual receipts. 13 CFR 121.201.

24. The first category of Satellite Telecommunications "comprises establishments primarily engaged in

providing point-to-point telecommunications services to other establishments in the telecommunications and broadcasting industries by forwarding and receiving communications signals via a system of satellites or reselling satellite telecommunications.” For this category, Census Bureau data for 2002 show that there were a total of 371 firms that operated for the entire year. Of this total, 307 firms had annual receipts of under \$10 million, and 26 firms had receipts of \$10 million to \$24,999,999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of Satellite Telecommunications firms are small entities that might be affected by our action.

25. The second category of Other Telecommunications “comprises establishments primarily engaged in (1) providing specialized telecommunications applications, such as satellite tracking, communications telemetry, and radar station operations; or (2) providing satellite terminal stations and associated facilities operationally connected with one or more terrestrial communications systems and capable of transmitting telecommunications to or receiving telecommunications from satellite systems.” For this category, Census Bureau data for 2002 show that there were a total of 332 firms that operated for the entire year. Of this total, 259 firms had annual receipts of under \$10 million and 15 firms had annual receipts of \$10 million to \$24,999,999. Consequently, we estimate that the majority of Other Telecommunications firms are small entities that might be affected by our action.

Description of Projected Reporting, Recordkeeping, and Other Compliance Requirements

26. This NPRM seeks comment on ways to reform the high-cost universal service program. Specifically, the NPRM seeks comment on the recommendation of the Joint Board regarding comprehensive reform of high-cost universal service support. The Joint Board recommended the creation of three distinct high-cost funds; a broadband fund, a mobility fund, and a provider of last resort fund. If the Commission ultimately adopts the Joint Board’s recommendations, new or additional reporting requirements may be required for carriers to receive support under a three-fund approach. Additionally, the NPRM incorporates by reference two NPRMs addressing the adoption of a reverse auctions approach for distributing high-cost support, and the elimination of the identical support

rule for competitive eligible telecommunications carriers. Projected reporting, recordkeeping, and other compliance requirements are discussed in the IRFAs of those NPRMs.

Steps Taken To Minimize Significant Economic Impact on Small Entities, and Significant Alternatives Considered

27. The RFA requires an agency to describe any significant alternatives that it has considered in reaching its proposed approach, which may include the following four alternatives (among others): (1) The establishment of differing compliance and reporting requirements or timetables that take into account the resources available to small entities; (2) the clarification, consolidation, or simplification of compliance or reporting requirements under the rule for small entities; (3) the use of performance, rather than design, standards; and (4) an exemption from coverage of the rule, or part thereof, for small entities. 5 U.S.C. 603(c).

28. This NPRM seeks comment on ways to reform the high-cost universal service program, including recommendations issued by the Joint Board. The Commission expects to consider the economic impact on small entities, as identified in comments filed in response to the NPRM, in reaching its final conclusions and taking action in this proceeding. To the degree that the other NPRMs that the NPRM includes by reference offer alternatives that may minimize the significant economic impact on small entities, those alternatives will be considered as well.

Federal Rules That May Duplicate, Overlap, or Conflict With the Proposed Rules

29. None.

Ordering Clauses

30. Accordingly, *it is ordered* that, pursuant to the authority contained in sections 1, 2, 4(i), 4(j), 201 through 205, 214, 254, and 403 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. 151, 152, 154(i) through (j), 201 through 205, 214, 254, 403 and §§ 1.1, 1.411 through 1.419, and 1.1200 through 1.1216 of the Commission’s rules, 47 CFR 1.1, 1.411 through 1.419, 1.1200 through 1.1216, this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking Is Adopted.

31. *It is further ordered* that the Commission’s Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, Reference Information Center, shall send a copy of this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, including the Initial Regulatory Flexibility Analysis, to the Chief

Counsel for Advocacy of the Small Business Administration.

Federal Communications Commission.

Marlene H. Dortch,
Secretary.

[FR Doc. E8–4143 Filed 3–3–08; 8:45 am]

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

47 CFR Parts 54 and 63

[WC Docket No. 05–337; CC Docket No. 96–45; FCC 08–5]

High-Cost Universal Service Support; Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service

AGENCY: Federal Communications Commission.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking.

SUMMARY: In this document, the Commission seeks comment on the merits of using reverse auctions (a form of competitive bidding) to determine the amount of high-cost universal service support provided to eligible telecommunications carriers serving rural, insular, and high-cost areas.

DATES: Comments are due on or before April 3, 2008 and reply comments are due on or before May 5, 2008.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments, identified by WC Docket No. 05–337 and CC Docket No. 96–45, by any of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

- *Federal Communications Commission’s Web site:* <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs/>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

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- *People with Disabilities:* Contact the FCC to request reasonable accommodations (accessible format documents, sign language interpreters, CART, etc.) by *e-mail:* FCC504@fcc.gov or *phone:* 202–418–0530 or *TTY:* 202–418–0432.

For detailed instructions for submitting comments and additional information on the rulemaking process, see the **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** section of this document.