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Decision No. _____.

ORIGINAL

Decision No. 2900

BEFORE THE RAILROAD COMMISSION OF
THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA.

In the Matter of the Application)
of THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH)
COMPANY, a corporation, for per-)
mission to close its offices at)
Bridgeville, Blocksburg, Bell)
Springs and Laytonville, Cali-)
fornia, to enable said applicant)
to take down its one wire between)
Ukiah and Eureka from the highway)
and to erect two wires between)
Ukiah and Eureka along the North-)
western Pacific Railroad.)

Application

No. 1885.

BY THE COMMISSION.

O P I N I O N

Applicant seeks authority from the Rail-
road Commission to close four of its offices upon
its line of telegraph connecting Ukiah, in Mendocino
County, with Eureka, in Humboldt County. Its line
is located along the highway. North from Willits
the line lies to the west of the Northwestern Paci-
fic Railroad until it reaches Alder Point, where it
crosses the railroad to the east and continues on
to the east of the railroad until it reaches Alton,

in Humboldt County, from which point north it follows the railroad.

Hearings were held at Laytonville and Blocksburg. From the testimony submitted it appears that applicant wishes to abandon its single wire along the highway and construct a two-wire line along the railroad, thus enabling it to give better service to Eureka, which has a population of about 12,000, and to furnish service to nine other towns along the railroad with an estimated population of 2,900, which are now without telegraphic service.

The railroad line has been built in sections from Sausalito, on San Francisco Bay, northerly, and from Eureka, on Humboldt Bay, southerly. Various portions of the line have existed for a great many years, but it was not until the present year that the last connecting link of the line was built from Longvale north. Prior to that time a stage line connected Longvale, Laytonville and Bell Springs. There was also a stage line from Longvale through Blocksburg and Bridgeville to Carlota. Both of these stage lines have now been abandoned.

The completion of the railroad has decreased the commercial importance of Laytonville and Blocksburg and has considerably reduced the population of each place and applicant's revenue at those offices. The population of Laytonville

about a year ago was carefully estimated at 180. The population today is about 80. At Blocksburg the present population is about 35 adults and 12 children within a radius of three-quarters of a mile from the town hall. There are 110 registered voters in the precinct, being in a radius of about fifteen miles. The population was much greater before the stage service was discontinued and the railroad completed.

The average monthly revenue derived by applicant from its office at Laytonville for the year ending August 31, 1914, was \$23.84, while its average monthly revenue for the year 1915 has been but \$15. Practically all of applicant's business at the Laytonville office comes in over the telephone lines.

The average monthly revenue derived by applicant from its Blocksburg office was \$17.49 for the year ending August 31, 1915, while its revenue for September was but \$12. Half of this originated from business filed at the office in person or sent in by mail by ranchers living in a radius of about fifteen miles from the office. The other half originated from business received by applicant's office by telephone. The receipts of the Blocksburg office for the year ending August 31, 1915, were considerably higher than in previous years, because of the telegraph business incident to the construction of the remaining link of the railroad.

Cwing to the abandonment of the stage lines and the completion of the railroad, the business and population of the territory reached by the wagon roads and applicant's present line, seems to be drifting to the railroad.

During the summer months the line from Willits to Alder Point is maintained by one line-man, and from Alder Point to Alton by a second line-man, while in the winter months it is necessary to have a third line-man to look after that portion of the line lying between Blocksburg and Bell Springs. These line-men are each telegraph operators and perform the bulk of the service of that character.

At Laytonville there is an operator paid \$15. per month, who is called upon to serve as operator from time to time to relieve the line-man. At Bridgeville and Bell Springs arrangements were made by which during the summer months operators would forward and receive messages for twenty-five per cent. commission of the receipts of the office. At Bridgeville, however, the operator is now paid \$5.00 per month.

The salaries and expenses of the line-men amount to an average of \$117. per month at Bridgeville, \$107.57 at Blocksburg, \$102. at Bell Springs and \$186.12 at Laytonville.

Laytonville is connected with Willits by the telephone lines of the Willits Telephone Com-

pany; and with Bell Springs by a mutual line. Subscribers upon these lines in the vicinity of Bell Springs and Laytonville may communicate by telephone with the office of applicant at Willits without payment of toll.

Laytonville and Bell Springs are also connected with Dos Rios, a town on the railroad, by a co-operative telephone system used by the ranchers of these communities without extra toll charges.

The rate received by applicant for transmitting messages from Laytonville to San Francisco is 30 cents for the first ten words and two cents for each additional word, and from Willits its rate is 25 cents for the first ten words and two cents for each additional word. The bulk of telegraph business at Bell Springs and Laytonville is communication with San Francisco. It is cheaper for telephone subscribers at Bell Springs and Laytonville to telephone their telegraph messages to Willits than to send them direct from applicant's offices at those points.

Blocksburg is connected with Fort Seward and Alder Point by telephone, regular subscribers being connected with these points without extra charge.

It is the custom in all these communities for subscribers to permit the free use of their telephones by non-subscribers.

At the hearings there were three documents presented and admitted in evidence, showing that the residents of the several communities were willing to have the service discontinued. The first was signed by forty persons, stating they had no objection to the discontinuance of telegraph service at Laytonville. These were stated to be every adult person within a radius of two miles of the town, except one. The one who declined to sign is a laborer who has not sent or received a telegram through that office during the last fifteen years.

The second was signed by thirty-six residents of Blocksburg and vicinity, stating that they have no objection to the discontinuance of telegraph service at Blocksburg.

The third bears one signature, that of the only family at Bell Springs, stating there is no objection to discontinuance of telegraph service at Bell Springs.

The testimony was that each of these documents represent substantially all of the possible patrons of each of the several offices, with the single exception noted, and with that exception every person approached on the subject readily signed the document, although in many instances expressing regret that the town was to lose telegraph service but expressing the feeling that the country in general could be better served along the railroad line, and that the communities in question

could use the telephone service in connection with the telegraph along the railroad.

Bridgeville is connected with applicant's line at Fortuna by the lines of The Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company. No showing was made as to the rate for telephone service. The published tariffs of the company, however, show the base rate to be twenty-five cents from Bridgeville to Fortuna and Eureka, and forty cents from Bridgeville to San Francisco.

The country traversed by applicant's present line is very mountainous. The railroad from Millits to Alton follows the very narrow valley of the Eel River and its tributaries for most of the distance, there being little more than room for the passage of the river and the railroad between mountain ranges.

A line running through forests and mountains, and subject to the vicissitudes of storms, vandalism and falling trees is more expensive to maintain than one located beside the railroad on the right-of-way, and it is desirable from the standpoint of applicant and its patrons that needless expense be avoided.

The principal business along the railroad apparent from a trip over the road is lumbering, cattle, shipment of tan bark, and summer tourist travel. These lines of business can probably be

better served by a telegraph line along the railroad than one along the wagon road, and the population along the railroad is far greater than that along the wagon road.

Since the hearings applicant says it has arranged, subject to the approval of the Commission, to dispose of its lines in the vicinities mentioned, for use as telephone lines, so that these communities will have increased telephone facilities beside the use of telegraph service with telephone extension without increase of present rates.

Separate application for authority to dispose of said lines should be filed. This application should be joined in by those intending to acquire the property, in accordance with the rules of the Commission.

In view of the increase of telegraph service to the public, the provision of telephone service in lieu of telegraph service at the points mentioned in the application and the financial features of the situation, we think the application should be granted under the circumstances of this particular case. This action of the Commission, however, should not be considered a precedent in other cases.

O R D E R

THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY having applied to the Railroad Commission for permis-

sion to close its offices and abandon service at Bridgeville, Blocksburg, Bell Springs and Laytonville, that it may remove its line of poles and single wire supplying service to said places and erect a two-wire line along the right-of-way of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad between Ukiah and Ureka;

And hearings on said application having been held at Laytonville and Blocksburg, and it appearing that applicant intends to construct a two-wire line of telegraph along the railroad supplying telegraphic service to nine towns with an estimated population of 2,900, which now have no telegraphic service, and that it is for the public interest and convenience that said application be granted under the circumstances apparent in this case and upon the conditions hereinafter expressed.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that said four offices may be closed, service at said places may be abandoned and said line of poles and wires leading to said places may be removed.

This order is made upon the following conditions, to wit:

1. Before telegraphic service at said four places is abandoned, telephone service shall be established under such conditions that messages may be transmitted over applicant's line and with the aid of such telephone service to the said four

places at rates not exceeding the rates now in effect to and from said places over applicant's lines; such service where not already installed to be installed on or before February 1, 1916.

2. Applicant shall notify the Railroad Commission in writing within ten days after the establishment of such service of the fact thereof, with the names and addresses of the persons, firms or corporations furnishing such telephone service at each of said four places and with a general description of the nature of the service furnished.

Dated at San Francisco, California, this *13th* day of November, 1915.

Max Shelton
W. H. Glavin
Alvin G. Gordon
Edwin O. Edgerton
Frank R. Doherty

Commissioners.