

Quality of Service Report to the DC City Council on Verizon’s Regulated Telephone Network

Compiled by Connect-DC, a partnership between the Communications Workers of America Local 2336 and DC Jobs with Justice

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Introduction

This report has been compiled by **Connect-DC**, a partnership between the **Communications Workers of America, Local 2336** and **DC Jobs with Justice**. Connect-DC is supported by the “Speed Matters” campaign of the **International Communications Workers of America** to raise national awareness about the important role of communications systems in the information age. The views represented in this report are those of the men and women who work on and service the network, and of Verizon consumers.

The Communications Workers of America represents the workers of Verizon in Washington DC. Our members not only provide telecommunication and information services to the city, we are also residents of DC. Our jobs are in DC. We pay taxes in DC. We consume and use the services of DC. We recognize that our interests and well being are tied to the interests and well being of this city. Our role as providers of telecommunication services gives us a unique insight into Verizon’s service quality.

DC Jobs with Justice is a coalition of more than 30 local labor unions, grassroots community organizations, student groups, and faith-based organizations. We represent DC residents from all areas of the city, ages, professions, and income levels. It is through this network that we have been able to reach Verizon customers and document their experiences first-hand.

Connect-DC has three primary goals, which have been endorsed by 80,000 members of the Metropolitan Central Labor Council endorse the goals of the Connect-DC coalition.

1. Build Fiber Optic Service (FiOS) in all parts of the city by the end of 2008.
2. Maintain quality phone and Internet service for all DC residents and businesses.
3. Employ DC residents in DC facilities to build FiOS and sustain existing infrastructure.

The quality of life and economic vitality in Washington DC depends on the quality of services the city provides to educate its children, develop jobs, medical services, safety and security, social services, economic development, entertainment, water, sewage, trash removal, transportation, electricity, and communications and information services. We rely on the Public Service Commission of DC to regulate essential services such as communications, gas and electricity to keep them affordable and ensure high quality.

This report concludes that there is sufficient evidence to believe that the regulated telecommunications network in the city has deteriorated to an unacceptable level. While opposing opinions will surely be expressed during the DC City Council Quality of Service Hearings, we believe that sufficient concerns have been raised by Verizon customers and employees to require the Council to take further steps to insure the interests of the city and its citizens.

**Overview:
The Changing Face of Telecommunications in the DC Metro Area**

Connect-DC believes that the deterioration of DC's copper wire service is calculated and deliberate. As everyone knows, FiOS is the next communications revolution and Verizon and other companies are installing fiber to homes all over the United States.

Since the invention of the telephone in 1876, communications has been transported over a copper wire network. While the technology has evolved over time, the basic copper wire transport has remained relatively unchanged. Until now! Computers, the Internet and digital technologies now demand higher transport speeds than copper wire is capable of providing. Connect-DC fully supports Verizon's investment in its fiber network. Investment in a truly high-speed network is essential to economic growth, job creation and new services.

Nonetheless, new technologies rarely replace old technologies overnight; it sometimes takes many years or even generations. Horses and automobiles used the same roads for decades. The first personal computers were available nearly 30 years ago, but there are many citizens in Washington DC that still do not know how to use one. The same is true for communications.

While Verizon has been installing fiber service in suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia for nearly four years, they do not serve a single home in DC. Even if Verizon begins to install fiber in city tomorrow, the vast majority of Verizon's customers will continue to depend on the traditional copper network for years to come. The copper network serves as the carrier of last resort, providing voice communications that are essential to public health and safety to many consumers and businesses. As an industry leader, Verizon has the responsibility and resources to invest in a FiOS network while upholding high standards for its copper lines. It has an obligation to consumers and the city it serves, as well as its stockholders.

**A Pattern of Disinvestment:
The Deteriorating Copper Network in DC**

The Verizon of Washington DC is not really a DC company at all. Our city is served by our neighbors and is run by corporate executives in New York. Washington DC is simply a customer. Verizon will tell you how much they have spent in maintaining and operating the copper system, but even band-aids cost money and what we have is a completely patched system. It is this patched system that provides telephone, Internet and emergency service to our DC residents.

This report will show that Verizon is abandoning its copper network and placing its resources and investment in fiber networks outside the Nation's capitol. Verizon has stripped our city bare, moving entire operations and selling buildings to fund fiber networks elsewhere. As one Verizon Vice President stated in a meeting with employees,

“You wouldn’t fix an old house if you have a new one being built.” The problem is, the new house is not being built in DC.

There are nearly no Verizon Central Office Technicians, Dispatchers, Maintenance Administrators, Engineers, Customer Service Representatives or Consultants left working in the city. Verizon has moved entire job categories to centers located in Maryland and Virginia. Our neighbors in Maryland and Virginia have benefited from the new technology, the purchase and rental of real estate, the taxes paid and jobs created, at the expense of our city.

CWA represents virtually all of the non-management employees working for Verizon in DC. Between 2004 and October of 2007 the Verizon workforce in DC has been reduced by approximately 44%. Before FiOS deployment, the copper wire network was maintained at minimal levels but now that the deployment is under way, the copper world is crumbling.

The Challenge of Providing Good Service with No Resources: Reports from Verizon Employees

The erosion of Verizon’s copper wire network is the direct result of Verizon’s business decisions and not a reflection of the workmanship or service by the workers. The company’s disinvestment in the city has placed great stress on DC’s communications infrastructure. Employees are regularly told that there is no money for copper maintenance and are pressured to work faster with fewer resources. Verizon has developed strategies to avoid providing proper maintenance.

Because of the heavy complaint load, Verizon has introduced a new scale of priority which disenfranchises the average resident. According to employees, businesses are always ranked first and *“residence is always last.”* Service problems that involve medical emergencies are supposed to be a priority so employees are instructed to provide the customer with an appointment time even it won’t be met.

“Sometimes residential complaints are returned to the pool if a business or DSL¹ trouble comes in and is date due. Business has a four hour window to be resolved and residence don’t.”

Employees are directed not to prioritize customers who have been out of service several days or weeks. If Verizon has already missed the 24 hour requirement to fix an out-of-service trouble, employees are directed to place the complaint at the bottom of the pile, prioritizing instead those problems which they can still fix within 24 hours. This strategy keeps the numbers and fines down. According to Verizon workers, some troubles are

¹ This report includes comments and issues raised about Verizon’s DSL service which is not a regulated service. We include DSL because it too is transported on the same copper network as residential dial tone and many of the problems DSL subscribers experience directly reflects on the condition of the copper network.

rescheduled so many times that the sun dries out the cable and the trouble disappears until the next rain.

One tech reported, “*often the same customer (appointment) is missed in excess of five times.*” Another that “*customers have called in up to nine times about the same trouble or not getting a repair tech out.*” Another employee who works as a maintenance administrator stated that nearly 60% of her calls were from customers who had missed appointment times. In some cases techs negotiate postponements with customers so that the service date can be changed and the commitment time not missed.

Another way to get around maintenance requests is to suggest that customers are not eligible for the service. An engineering assistant described how customers are were erroneously told that they were not eligible for DSL service because they were too far from a serving office, when in fact it was the company that did not want to do the work, “*The only way the copper lines get maintained is if there’s a customer complaint.*”

The employee surveys undertaken by Connect-DC also suggest that Verizon’s service priorities depend on the neighborhood in question.

“*Georgetown, Chevy Chase and Upper – N.W. were to be given priority service,*” stated one maintenance administrator. “*It is generally known that Verizon has always been sensitive to its “upper class” customers who often complain to “higher ups.”*”

Another employee said of the new homes being built in DC that were unable to get phone service, “*We are told that unless they know Ivan Seidenberg or the PSC they will have to wait*

In some DC neighborhoods, Verizon simply does not have enough facilities to provide everyone with a clear line so noisy lines are rotated among their customers. Techs have been instructed to “split pairs” to reconnect the dial tone. This means that they take one wire from one line and another wire from another line in order to get a “working pair.” Split pairs are subject to noise and techs often have to make return repair visits. Many employees reported that there are cables that need replacing that Verizon refuses to fix, so they simply move the line from one pair of wires to another. When asked if techs are directed to cut corners, one tech answered, “*we have been told to swap copper rather than fix a cable.*”

Techs frequently raised the issue that they were given specific instructions on how to code out troubles so that they would not point to a cable needing replacement.

A cable tech explained,

“*We don’t have the maintenance staff anymore to maintain any of the copper lines.*” *We are told to go to the (distribution box) and then the (customer house box) then close it out even if it’s not repaired.* ”

While Georgetown, Dupont, and Downtown may receive priority service, techs report that the copper network in those areas is just as old as that in Southeast, and thus just prone to problems.

Verizon's solution to its eroding copper network is to promote FiOS use. In Maryland and Virginia where FiOS has already been installed, employees are instructed to tell customers that have repeated trouble on their copper service that they are in a "chronic upgrade area" and to attempt to sell them FiOS on the basis that it is more reliable. Employees are instructed to tell the customer that if they choose to stay with copper they will continue to have problems since Verizon *"is in the middle of an upgrade and not replacing copper lines."*

Furthermore, the company's strict adherence to "five jobs a day" frequently does not allow the techs sufficient time to do a quality job of repairing service. Five jobs a day means that a tech has to average 1.6 jobs an hour which includes time talking to the dispatcher, travel and parking time, time accessing the premises, going to several locations to test the trouble, repairing the trouble, testing the service and closing out the paperwork. While a number of jobs can be done within the 96-minute requirement, the fact is many jobs require more time to do them properly but the employee risks discipline for not meeting his or her numbers. Supervisors often harass employees, calling them to ask why the job is taking so long.

Maintenance administrators who handle repair calls, test troubles and dispatch repair techs explained how difficult it was to work when so many customers are "irate." They described how angry customers demand to speak to supervisors or "higher ups" as they scramble to rearrange schedules to placate the customer.

"I don't blame them for being mad, they've had bad service but they shouldn't be mad at me. I want to help them but Verizon calls the shots,"

Employees frequently expressed concern for customers who missed work or made other arrangements only to have the appointment missed numerous times.

During the Quality of Service Hearings, residents will testify to the repeated problems with Verizon's phone service—the many wasted and frustrating hours on the phone, having to take off work to get the same problem fixed again and again. It is impossible to maintain a communications network with band-aids, particularly when workers are transferred from DC to build FiOS in the suburbs.

The statistics show that service problems are rampant throughout our city. According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), between 2001 and 2006, complaints went up 194%. During the same period, out-of-service intervals increased 69%. This number clearly understates the actual statistics—as already noted, Verizon manipulates the order of dispatch in order to reduce the number of customers that exceed the out-of-service interval benchmark.

Assessing the Quality of Service: The Consumer Perspective

During the month of January 2008, the Connect-DC coalition collected 135 random household surveys of Verizon customers throughout the city of DC. Surveys were submitted via the internet, ANC's, at supermarkets and metro stations. While quantitatively speaking this is a small sample, the results are qualitatively significant.

Almost 50 percent of respondents rated Verizon quality of service as less than adequate and half of those respondents identified it as abysmal.

Table 1: Verizon rating

Rating	Frequency
1= abysmal	24
2	22
3= adequate	21
4	13
5= excellent	13
Total Respondents	93

Table 2: Frequency of problems Jan 2007-Jan 2008

Problem	Frequency of Problems 2007-2008		
	Once	2-5 times	More than 5 times
Loss of phone service	9	30	17
Loss of internet service	17	15	28
Problems with your phone line	12	33	32
Slower than usual internet	6	34	42

In addition to the problems highlighted in the table above, households overwhelmingly experienced trouble with their Verizon DSL line.

Resident, SE Washington DC, Ward 8

"We dropped Verizon because they were unable to provide the promised DSL speed. The company states that we were too far from the hub. Similar problem with Verizon cell phone service. Great everywhere else but at home in SE DC."

Resident, Washington DC

"We've given up on trying to get DSL service from Verizon. We'll pay the DSL fee but once the contract runs out later this year, we'll try some company that actually cares."

During or after bad weather 49 respondents said they regularly experience problems with their phone line, including static, cutting off and loss of phone service, and 46 households said they experienced problems with their internet service including loss of internet service and slower than usual DSL.

Resident, 800 block, Whittier Place NW, Ward 4

"I lose my phone service fairly frequently (probably 5 times in the past year) for a day or more, and it's usually associated with bad weather. I always check the outside box first and when it's not receiving a positive signal spend 10-20 minute on the phone."

Resident, Washington, DC

"My internet service speed is so erratic--it's impossible. Sometimes it's so slow I need to disconnect the wireless router and plug the chord straight into my computer. It's a real inconvenience."

Resident, 1300 block Girard Street NE, Ward 5

"I have lived in Brookland 10 years and had the same phone issues the entire time. They said early on that we have old equipment but one would think it should have been upgraded in 10 years."

Resident, 200 block, Tennessee Ave NE, Ward 6

"Every time it rains, the service gets very stacy and if it's a heavy or prolonged rain, the dialtone is lost for several days. After 3 years of complaints, they finally came out and ran a new wire from the pole to the house - and it STILL happens."

Resident, Washington, DC.

"The service is appalling. I can't believe I'm paying for this. My internet service is intermittent, sometimes going out for weeks at a time."

Resident, 400 block, 5th St SE, Ward 6

"Took over 2 weeks to get my DSL hooked up after I moved whereas they connected the phone immediately. Put in the request about 3-4 weeks in advance."

Billing problems have been an added frustration:

Resident, 700 Block of L Street NE, Ward 6

"I signed up for a bundle package in May. It's now the end of January, and these people have yet to figure out how much to appropriately bill me. And when I call to

complain about it, they tend to blame ME for not getting my bills, after an hour long wait.”

Resident, D St. NE, Ward 6

“I tried to use Verizon upon my moving to my house in zip code 20002. Verizon did not provide me with any explanation as of why the phone line never worked. They charged me for the line and connection while it never worked. I will never use Verizon again.”

Resident, 900 block, W Street NW, Ward 1

“Verizon offered a high-speed Internet deal on their website for \$24.99 per month. A week after we signed up for it, we got an email stating that "due to technical problems" they were unable to process our order.”

Customers were also generally concerned by what they saw as declining Verizon involvement in the community.

Resident, 1700 block, 16th St SE, Ward 8

“I am concerned about them cutting off ex-offender program”

Table 3: Getting service problems resolved

Waiting Periods to have problem resolved	Number of Households
Less than 24 hours	13
Less than 48 hours	9
2 or more days	11
More than a week	11
Never Resolved	20
Total Respondents	64

Phone service is essential and long delays in fixing service can have serious consequences.

Resident, Washington, DC

“Phone was down for 5 days, tried to change to a different company but couldn't. Family member passed away and had to use a phone card to help with arrangements.”

Resident, 3500 block, 14th St. NW, Ward 1

“There was a problem with the answering machine that just couldn't be resolved. They told me I had to get a new phone, but new phone has the same problem. The answering machine didn't work through Thanksgiving and Christmas of last year.”

15 percent of all problems have never been resolved. This woman's story is just one of many.

Resident, 1100 block, Orren St. NE, Ward 5

"I have had Verizon service personnel come to the house three times to fix "static on the line" problems. Every time they said that they fixed something, but the problem still exists. It is not our phone - I purchased a new one and it wasn't any better."

Resident, 500 block, Brummel Ct NW, Ward 4

"I have been w/out service for as long as 3 months straight."

Resident, Washington, DC

"They will instruct you to be at your home for a repair person who never shows up. This has happened to me three days in a row. Then they fixed the problem from the outside. One person promises you one thing and then it doesn't happen."

Resident, 1900 block, 18th Street NW, Ward 2

"DSL is consistently slower than Verizon advertises. Connection cuts off regularly. Poor customer service when I have to call for assistance."

Resident, Westminster St. NW, Ward 3

"My problem has happened many times. I just got fed up, my phone still is not working, I just use my cell. If I did not have a 2 year contract for DSL I would ditch them."

Resident, 4500 block, 38th St NW, Ward 3

"I have had static on my line for 5 years. I have had technicians out to my house at least twice, and they have not been able to fix the problem. It's so bad that I use my cell phone inside my house instead of my wireline."

A **third** of respondents were never told the reason for their service problem.

Resident, Washington DC

"The voice mail is a pain it goes round and round. And we all know to reboot the DSL and the pc. Also the voice mail says to go to the website, can't go to a web if there is a problem with the DSL."

Resident, 2900 block, 12th Street NE, Ward 5

"For more than 2 years, I routinely had NO service whatsoever. After repeated visits by Verizon personnel, a repairperson noticed mouse poison/bait I had set out. He decided I had rats in my house (after I told him I had mice) If I thought they were rats, I would have called the exterminator. My problem was never resolved."

A **quarter** of all respondents had to pay extra to fix the phone line. **19** of those respondents were businesses.

Business Owner, Washington, DC

“When we did an office move, Verizon REPEATEDLY failed to show up for its appointed times to reconnect our phone lines. I kept calling and calling and there was a different excuse each time, most revolving around claiming that no one was there to let them in.”

Resident, 1200 block, 45th Pl. SE, Ward 7

“Verizon is the worst when it comes to service. Automation is not a good thing for them. And not having FIOS is a huge problem.”

Resident, Washington DC

“I was transferred between two departments for over an hour before I gave up and continued to pay for a service I never ordered or used.”

A **third** of respondents said that their neighbors had experienced similar problems.

Resident, 300 block, O Street SW, Ward 6

The problem keeps getting fixed and then happening again. It seems to happen whenever other lines in the building are installed or repaired by less competent contract employees of Verizon (none of whom are familiar with the building.)”

Two thirds of the 135 survey respondents had had significant problems with Verizon service in the past year. These results support recent data published by the FCC which shows that between 2001 and 2006 out-of-service intervals in DC increased by 69%. During the same period complaints have risen 194%.

Conclusion:

Verizon's deteriorating copper network in DC is part of a larger pattern of disinvestment visible throughout the US, including in Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania and New York. Public Service Commissions are conducting hearings and investigations and demanding that service levels be restored.

The picture is clear: as Verizon invests in FiOS, it is dumping its copper network. Verizon just recently sold its copper wires in Hawaii to the private equity firm, the Carlyle Group. Currently they are negotiating the sale their copper in Vermont, Maine and New Hampshire to Fairpoint. They have sold their Puerto Rico company to Mexico. Verizon applied for deregulation in Virginia in spite of the fact that they had not once met minimum service levels.

CWA has been working in nearly every state to ensure that Verizon provides fiber optic technology to everyone while maintaining responsible and reliable service on its copper network for those customers who do not have access to or choose not to subscribe to FiOS. Quality of Service is critical to our consumers, our communities and our union.

Connect-DC looks to this committee to work with the Public Service Commission to ensure that consumers and businesses in this city get the quality of communications service that they deserve. In this regard, we make the following recommendations:

- First, the Public Service Commission (PSC) should expeditiously prepare a report to the Committee on Consumer and Regulatory Affairs on the quality of service provided by Verizon in DC. The report should include an independent audit, customer surveys, a customer complaint hotline and other mechanisms to ensure that Verizon does not simply doctor the data that it provides to the Commission. The PSC might want to borrow from a project funded by Verizon in New York a few years ago. Through the New York PSC Verizon funded the union to establish a hotline to collect information from our members to assist the PSC in its collection of accurate data from the company.
- Second, the Committee on Consumer and Regulatory Affairs should work with the Public Service Commission to establish enforceable service quality benchmarks with reporting requirements and penalties.
- Third, establish a collaborative relationship between Connect-DC and government officials to ensure that FiOS is installed in the city.
- Finally, collaborate to ensure that Verizon fulfills its responsibilities to our communities by locating its workforce in this city and partnering with the Department of Employment Services and other non-profit programs to open up there job opportunities to DC residents. Together we can bring more good jobs back to the Nation's capitol.