

**STATEMENT OF  
COMMISSIONER MICHAEL J. COPPS**

Re: *Telephone Number Portability BellSouth Corporation Petition for Declaratory Ruling and/or Waiver (CC Docket No. 95-116)*

Congress required number portability in the 1996 Act. Although there are costs involved with number portability, Congress recognized that the consumer benefits—enhanced competition and increased innovation—outweigh the expense.

Six years ago, the Commission determined that incumbent carriers could recover number portability costs through end-user charges over a limited period. At the time, the Commission was less than lucid about exactly what costs could be recovered. The focus of recovery was on the near term costs of portability between wireline carriers, with portability between wireline and wireless carriers further out on the horizon. Five years later, the Commission clarified that wireline carriers have the duty to provide intermodal number portability. As a result, carriers like BellSouth are faced with a situation where the period for recovery will run its course before intermodal costs are taken into consideration. Because this situation is unfair, and based chiefly on the Commission's past failure to be precise about number portability obligations and permissible costs, I support today's action.

Now the burden shifts to carriers seeking additional cost recovery. They will have to file detailed cost data to support tariff revisions. The Commission will need to scrutinize these data carefully before permitting further recovery. Our careful review is all the more critical when you consider that these tariff revisions are destined for line items on consumer bills. The proliferation of line items for number portability and other charges have irritated and confused consumers across the country. With so many end-user charges that differ from carrier to carrier, comparing carriers and plans is like comparing apples to oranges. Consumers need a way to compare apples to apples. They need meaningful and accurate information on their bills, not an explosion of line items that can serve as smokescreens for costs they do not understand.

It's time for the Commission to do something about this. Our truth-in-billing policies have morphed into mass confusion-in-billing. We are overdue for an overhaul of our billing rules. This would be the perfect complement to today's action. I urge the Commission to move forward and take action in this area on behalf of American consumers.