

WHITE COUNTY REMC

321 North Main Street
PO Box 599
Monticello, IN 47960-0599

(574) 583-7161
(574) 583-4156 fax

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 
The power of human connections

May 6, 2002

William F. Caton
Acting Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
445 - 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: WT Docket No. 02-55, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Improving Public Safety Communications in the 800 MHz Band; Consolidating the 900 MHz Industrial/Land Transportation and Business Pool Channels

Dear Mr. Caton:

White County Rural Electric Membership Corporation (White County REMC) submits these comments to convey our concerns regarding the effects the proposed reallocations of the 800 MHz band described in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in WT Docket No. 02-55 (“NPRM”) would have on the operations of our electric system.

White County REMC is located in mid-north Indiana, serving over 7,880 consumers. Incorporated in 1939, we have been serving consumers for 63 years. We are a not-for-profit [tax exempt #350754225] organization. As a cooperative, we are owned by the consumers we serve. Our board of directors is elected by and from our consumers. White County REMC’s primary goal in operating is to provide electricity to our consumer-owners at the lowest possible cost. White County REMC uses 800 MHz band and holds a license registered with the Federal Communications Commission.

Our system is a “small entity” as defined by the Small Business Administration.

We fully support the Commission in seeking to ensure that public safety units have adequate spectrum that is free from harmful interference. Our cooperative, like other critical infrastructure providers, often works closely with local public safety systems. In storms and other natural disasters and emergencies, we are among the “first responders.” We make sure that electric power is maintained or quickly restored so that police, fire and rescue can get their jobs done. We get traffic signals up and running. We keep the lights on in emergency shelters and medical care facilities. Without the necessary radio spectrum to operate our communications systems, we cannot do our job, nor can we help public safety units do theirs. The public safety units in our area do not use 800 MHz; therefore, we do not communicate with them through this system.

As provider of electricity, our 800 MHz communication system provides our immediate contact from dispatcher to truck and truck to truck in daily routine work as well as service interruptions and major storm outages. Our system was installed in the late 1970’s and is not shared with any public safety unit.

We believe the Commission should reject Nextel’s proposal because it is costly, disruptive, and will not likely solve the interference problem. Under Nextel’s proposal, we would be forced to move to either the 700 or 900 MHz bands. As will be discussed below, Nextel’s “alternative” to allow incumbent 800 MHz licensees to remain on the band on a “secondary, non-interference” basis is not feasible for us as a provider of electricity, an essential service. To replace our system’s communication equipment, it would cost an astronomical \$61,400 just in equipment and 3,500 man/hours. Our existing equipment will not operate on 700 or 900 MHz and therefore a total change-

out of equipment would be necessary.

Operating on a secondary, non-interference basis within the 800 MHz band, as Nextel suggests as an alternative, is not an option for us. As the Commission itself noted in the NPRM, “it would not appear advisable to require a station associated with the restoration of electrical power service to precipitously discontinue service.” (NPRM at ¶34.) We operate a private, wireless communications network because we need a very high level of reliability, that is, we need a communications system that is always operating. That’s because we provide an essential service –electricity– that must be provided as continuously as possible or consumers go without light, or heat, or the power to run equipment and appliances. And, in times of storms and other emergencies, our reliance on our communications system is perhaps at its greatest. This is also the time when police, fire and rescue squads would need the spectrum. Obviously, a secondary status to remain in the 800 MHz band is not a workable alternative for us.

Our electric consumers should not be forced to pay to solve a problem that their electric cooperative did not create, nor for which they receive any benefit from its resolution. We have no interference with any local public safety units. The public safety units in our area operate on spectrum other than 800 MHz.

The Commission must understand that as a not-for-profit electric cooperative, all the costs associated with moving to other spectrum ultimately fall to the consumer at the end of the line. We cannot simply reduce our profits or shareholder dividend checks to cover this new and unexpected expense as an investor-owned company might. All of White County REMC’s operating expenses are covered in our consumers’ electric bills. The costs associated with implementing Nextel’s proposal

might be easier for our consumers to accept if there was some benefit to our community. We have contacted our communications vendor to determine the future reliability of our present equipment and they have assured us that our equipment is in excellent condition and will be able to provide us indefinite years of service. White County REMC's system is neither creating interference to public safety nor are we experiencing any interference.

We urge the Commission to explore alternative solutions that are less burdensome and stand a better chance of actually resolving the interference problems where they exist. The NAM/MRFAC alternative proposal discussed in the NPRM would allow our system to remain in the 800 MHz band. At this time, we do not know if our communication system can be retuned to another 800 MHz frequency range. If retuning were not possible, it would still be necessary to replace the equipment at a cost of \$61,400 and take 3,500 man/hours to implement.

However, we urge the Commission to investigate other alternatives, including those short of reallocation as well. We understand that others have looked at the public safety interference problem and believe both its root causes and possible solutions are different than what Nextel proposes. Because we are not currently a source of interference, nor are we experiencing harmful interference on our system at this time, we urge the Commission to not use a sledgehammer to kill a fly. If more targeted, technological or market-oriented alternatives will alleviate the interference in those areas of the country where it exists, then it is not necessary to subject all other, non-interfering 800 MHz spectrum users to a costly and disruptive relocation.

White County REMC is pleased to see that the Commission is seeking input on the issue of who should be entitled to reimbursement if required to move to other spectrum. As we stated above, we do not believe it is fair to make our consumers pay to solve a problem that their electric cooperative did not cause. If White County REMC is required to relocate or to retune, we believe we should be reimbursed for those expenses. Further, we have serious concerns about whether there will be sufficient replacement spectrum on the other bands to accommodate all the displaced users, how that spectrum will be made available and when, and whether the spectrum and the equipment available for use in that band can support our current mission-critical applications and our future plans.

In conclusion, we ask that the Commission in seeking to remedy interference to public safety not unnecessarily disrupt White County REMC's provision of an essential consumer service. If the Commission determines that a reallocation of the 800 MHz spectrum band is necessary, then fair compensation must be made to us to fully cover the costs of relocating or retuning. We therefore urge the Commission to reject Nextel's proposal and to consider, after further study, other alternatives that will more efficiently and effectively address the causes of public safety signal interference. We applaud the Commission for seeking to remedy this significant problem while minimizing the disruption and costs to incumbent 800 MHz users. To that end, we request that the Commission consider the essential services being provided by White County REMC, the fact that we are a not-for-profit organization, and that we are a small entity, as it considers the impacts of any reallocation proposal on current 800 MHz users. If White County REMC is required to move to other spectrum, it must be of comparable quality, technically capable of supporting our current and future

communications functions, and available. Further, our costs to move to other spectrum bands or to retune our equipment should be fully reimbursed. Our electric consumers should not have to pay higher electric bills to cover the costs of replacing communications equipment that is not obsolete or worn out, nor should they be forced to pay to resolve a problem that we did not create and are not experiencing in our community. The Commission could use a sledgehammer to kill a fly, but should it?

We think not.

Respectfully submitted,

WHITE COUNTY REMC

Jack R. Landrum

Jack R. Landrum
President & CEO
PO Box 599
Monticello, IN 47960-0599
(574) 583-7161
jlandrum@whitecountyremc.com