

25<sup>th</sup> January 2007

Gideon Senensieb  
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Dear Gideon

### **Ofcom consultation on Review of General Condition 18 – Number Portability**

THUS is pleased to respond to Ofcom's consultation on General Condition 18 dated 16<sup>th</sup> November 2006. THUS plc is a leading UK provider of voice, data and Internet services to corporate customers throughout the UK. Headquartered in Scotland, we provide services in every major UK commercial centre, with one of the widest service portfolios available in the market.

#### Routeing of calls to ported numbers

We agree that NGNs provide the ideal opportunity to move to an All Calls Query approach and eliminate dependence on the Donor Network.

*Question 1: Do you agree that an ACQ/CDB solution is required to achieve independence of Donor Networks?*

In order to achieve independence of Donor Networks it is necessary for all calls to query some kind of database. In principle this could involve some kind of peer-to-peer mechanism without a single authority, but in practice this is very hard to achieve. Therefore we agree that a central database – and so ACQ/CDB – is required.

*Question 2: Do you agree that an ACQ/CDB solution common to both fixed and mobile networks is the preferred option?*

We believe that the future of numbering means that there will cease to be a practical distinction between fixed and mobile numbers – it is already the case that mobile phones can be allocated numbers in 01/02. Therefore, if there are separate databases for the two types of network, operators will have to be prepared to query both for any number (even if, to begin with, the correct one can be guessed for most calls). This will lead to inefficiencies and post-dial delay. Thus we conclude that there should not only be a common solution but a common database, which would also hold other numbers such as NTS and PRS.

*Question 3: Do you agree that any transition to ACQ/CDB should occur in the course of migration of fixed networks to NGN architectures?*

We are not in a position to contradict the NPVs given in the consultation. Assuming they are correct, it is clear that networks with NGN architectures should use ACQ/CDB but those with TDM architectures should be allowed to retain the present Onward Routeing arrangements.

We have a concern that network providers may have to source NGN equipment before the standards and processes for ACQ/CDB are in place. This will mean that these providers will then have to convert their systems, and it might be economic for them to delay this. Therefore we would be concerned about any assumption that NGNs automatically make ACQ/CDB easy. However, provided that the actual regulatory requirement does not distinguish the network type (which the proposed wording does not), this will not be an issue.

*Question 4: Do you agree that it would be beneficial to require the mobile industry to complete its transition to an ACQ/CDB solution by September 2009?*

We have no opinions on this.

*Question 5: Ofcom would welcome respondents' analyses of the costs and benefits of a comprehensive transition of the mobile industry to direct routing using NICC Service Description 8 or other suitable standard by the end of 2007, ahead of a further transition to ACQ/CDB.*

We have no input to provide on this.

*Question 6: Ofcom welcomes views from stakeholders as to the appropriate approach to be adopted in achieving the implementation of ACQ/CDB whilst ensuring that such co-operation is limited to technical matters directly related to the ACQ/CDB solution.*

We agree that implementation of the database will require co-operation between providers. However, in our opinion this is not limited to technical matters but divides into three aspects:

1. Technical standards.
2. Governance: determining who runs the database, setting quality standards, agreeing a service contract with the database operator, defining a standard use contract, and similar matters.
3. Commercial: determining the fees paid to the central database operator and charges made to CPs for use of the database.

The first of these can be left to the present NICC process. The other two require an ongoing industry body of some kind.

It appears to us that NGNuk is one obvious body to carry out this role. However, it may be necessary to adjust its membership arrangements to allow other interested parties to be involved, and once its other reasons for existence have reached completion, the structure may be overkill for the task. Another possibility would be UKEC, who are overseeing the User ENUM infrastructure. Whatever structure is chosen, it needs to be fit for this purpose. In particular, membership should not be a "free for all": we would be concerned that having dozens or hundreds of members would make it hard for the organization to deliver the level of service and responsiveness that would be necessary for large telcos. We also consider it essential that the database is under UK control and remains based in the UK.

We would also expect Ofcom to provide a "sanity check" on the charges finally agreed for the database.

*Question 7: Do you have any comments on the transition milestones and their corresponding dates? Could the dates be achieved earlier? Alternatively, could any of the dates be at known significant risk of being missed?*

There are a number of details in the technical standards that will need to be resolved, and it might be difficult to have all of these agreed by June 2007.

We would suggest that item c (common database established) could be brought forward to July 2008 – it should not take anywhere near a year once the standards and governance arrangements are in place to appoint a database operator and have them set up an initial database, so even a slip of a couple of months in the first two milestones would not affect this one.

#### Mobile port lead times

*Question 8: Do you agree that Ofcom should require port lead times to be reduced to less than one working day? If you do not agree, please provide evidence that shows otherwise.*

We are concerned that a reduction to less than one working day would require significant changes to internal systems and the benefits of this would not justify the costs. In particular, as a relatively small mobile operator, we have a partially-manual process that we run daily. A reduction to less than one day would require this to be run several times a day.

We would be comfortable with a lead time of two working days; this means that a port that just misses the start of one daily run can be carried out as part of the next day's run.

We also note that the porting lead time (irrespective of network type) has implications for the ACQ/CDB system. The data in the central database will be labelled with "time to live" (TTL) values so that operators know how long it can safely be cached for. This TTL must be less than the porting lead time. However, the shorter the TTL is, the more queries will have to be sent to the central database (on average, halving the TTL will double the traffic to the CDB). This will affect the design and costs of the database. Therefore too short a lead time could impose costs that outweigh the benefits.

*Question 9: Alternatively, do you agree that Ofcom should require port lead times to be reduced to three working days?*

We would be content with this in respect of individual ports and small groups. For bulk porting (more than 25 handsets at a time), different processes are involved and this time limit might not be achievable.

*Question 10: What is a reasonable timeframe for the implementation of a one working day process?*

We would need more details about the process (e.g. how service providers are to be notified of port requests and how PACs are to be locked) before we can provide estimates of the time required.

*Question 11: Do you consider that a three working days port lead time process could be implemented within 6 months?*

Yes, for non-bulk ports (see our response to question 9).

## Security

The central database will be receiving frequent updates from service providers, and the numbers of these will be large enough that automated processes will be necessary. In practice we expect this to involve some kind of electronic signature system. This requires, or at the very least will strongly benefit from, a certification system and certification authority.

This authority has the ability – by failing to provide proper checks and so allowing accidental or malicious corruption of the database – to completely break the number portability process and, indeed, the entire UK public telephone network. Therefore we would be greatly concerned if this authority was a foreign company rather than being – directly or indirectly – under the control of Ofcom.

## Interconnect payments

At present the normal interconnect arrangement for calls to ported numbers has the effect (irrespective of the actual flow of payments) that the Terminating Provider receives their normal interconnect payment (as if the call was to a non-ported number they host), after which they make a payment to the Donor Provider (the “APCC”) to compensate the latter for the costs of the call.

The problem with this arrangement is that the Originating Operator has no incentive to use the central database, since they are not paying the costs of inefficient routing. Therefore we propose that, once the central database is in place (or after a settling-in period) the APCC should be paid by the Originating Operator for calls routed via the Donor Operator. This will require changes to interconnect agreements, which should be mediated by Ofcom.

## Proposed modifications to GC 18

The definitions in the wording were originally written for setting rules about the porting process. They are now being used to refer to the call routing process as well, and this leads to some anomalies. In particular:

18.5 As from the Relevant Date, all Originating Communications Providers shall ensure that all Electronic Communications originated by them are routed to the Terminating Communications Provider in a manner independent of the Donor Provider.

can be read as forbidding the Donor Provider to be used to transit calls to the Recipient Provider *even when that would be the normal route to that provider for a non-ported number*; it depends exactly what “independent of” means. 18.6 has a similar but bigger problem, since it explicitly forbids transit via the Donor Network. These problems need to be resolved.

Where a number has been ported to a second provider and then back to the first, both providers are – within the definitions – both Donor Provider and Recipient Provider. This can lead to further anomalies; we would propose changes to the definitions along the lines of:

- (c) “Donor Provider” means a Communications Provider whose Subscriber Numbers are in the process of being, or have been passed or ported to a Recipient Provider, except where the Communications Provider is subsequently the Recipient Provider for the same Subscriber Numbers;

- (l) “Recipient Provider” means a Communications Provider to whom Subscriber Number(s) are in the process of being, or have been passed or ported from a Donor Provider and have not subsequently been passed or ported to another Communications Provider;

Subject to our comments above, we agree that the proposed modifications are a reasonable implementation of the Ofcom proposals and are content with them.

Yours sincerely

**Clive Feather**  
Regulation & Interconnect Department

# Cover sheet for response to an Ofcom consultation

## BASIC DETAILS

Consultation title: Review of General Condition 18 – Number Portability

To (Ofcom contact): Gideon Senensieb

Name of respondent: Clive Feather

Representing (self or organisation/s): THUS plc

Address (if not received by email):

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Name/address/contact  
details/job title

Whole response

Organisation

Part of the response

If there is no separate annex, which parts?

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Name Clive Feather

Signed (if hard copy)