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California approves Verizon-Frontier deal... with conditions

California officials unanimously approved Verizon's acquisition of Frontier with a series of conditions and requirements tied to network buildouts and investments in DEI-related programs and initiatives.



Jeff Baumgartner, Senior Editor, Light Reading
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(SOURCE: GREG GUY/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO)

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today to approve Verizon's acquisition of Frontier Communications with a series of commitments and conditions focusing on fiber and 5G buildouts and investments in and programs for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the state.



In a 5-0 vote, the California Public Utilities Commission voted in favor of the Verizon-Frontier deal today at 12:54 p.m. PST (Source: Screen capture of live stream of CPUC meeting on January 15, 2026)

The review was "extensive," CPUC Commissioner John Reynolds explained in his read-out of the approved settlement. He said the CPUC held 16 participant hearings across California and received over 500 public comments during the process.

It was a "complex and challenging matter," fellow CPUC Commissioner Darcie Houck said.

With CPUC approval secured, Verizon and Frontier announced today that they have received all regulatory approvals and expect to close the transaction on January 20. Verizon will come out of it with a US fiber footprint of about 30 million passings.

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Network and service commitments

On the network side, Verizon has committed to deploying fiber to 75,000 new locations in California within five years, prioritizing census blocks with households having income at or below 90% of the county median.

Verizon will also build 250 new cell sites with 5G and fixed wireless access (FWA) capabilities in areas that include households that are eligible for state grants.

The California Public Advocates Office also secured a \$150 million bond to back those requirements. This is to "verify that promises become reality," Reynolds said. "We're not simply trusting that Verizon will do what is promised. We're building the compliance infrastructure to hold them accountable."

Verizon also agreed to lock in a \$20 monthly cost for its "Verizon Forward" broadband program for low-income households for the next ten years. The company also committed to spend \$300,000 annually in advertising to help to ensure that eligible customers understand that the program exists.

Verizon is also tasked with upgrading some of the copper infrastructure it's getting from Frontier. Notably, Verizon is required to deploy broadband services of 100 Mbit/s down and 20 Mbit/s up to 88 wire centers that serve rural and lower-income customers.

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Verizon has seven years to complete the upgrades, with interim milestones at years three and five. Verizon can tap into state grants to offset some spending in certain high-cost areas.

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On the labor end, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) secured a commitment that Verizon will hire at least 600 new union-represented employees over the next six years, with existing unionized employees receiving 48 months of layoff protection.

Threading the needle on DEI

Verizon also figured out a way to address DEI concerns. While the company scuttled its DEI programs in order to secure FCC approval, it also made some commitments that align with California's DEI policies and laws.

For example, the California Emerging Technology Fund negotiated \$40 million for digital inclusion, including \$35 million to support digital divide efforts and \$5 million in grants to community-based organizations and schools. The goal is to bring broadband to 100,000 unconnected households through those investments.

Verizon also is to enter a \$10 million partnership with the California State University system for workforce development and to establish a "recruiting pipeline" from the university and other education institutions that serve underrepresented California communities.

Verizon is also required to maintain its small business accelerator program, with \$500 million committed to the state for five years. The operator will also run quarterly employee satisfaction surveys to monitor how changes are affecting Verizon's workforce.

The settlement also includes some provisions in Tribal areas in California, including dedicated, full-time liaisons that have authority to direct Verizon resources and have access to executive leadership. And within 24 months, Verizon is tasked with providing Tribes with maps of infrastructure in and around their ancestral territories.

About the Author





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Jeff Baumgartner is a Senior Editor for Light Reading and is responsible for the day-to-day news coverage and analysis of the cable and video sectors. Follow him on [X](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Bluesky](#).