

**Chapter 35.99 RCW**  
**TELECOMMUNICATIONS, CABLE TELEVISION SERVICE—USE OF RIGHT-OF-WAY**

**Sections**

- 35.99.010 Definitions.
- 35.99.020 Permits for use of right-of-way.
- 35.99.030 Master, use permits—Injunctive relief—Notice—Service providers' duties.
- 35.99.040 Local regulations, ordinances—Limitations.
- 35.99.050 Personal wireless services—Limitations on moratoria—Dispute resolution.
- 35.99.060 Relocation of facilities—Notice—Reimbursement.
- 35.99.070 Additional ducts or conduits—City or town may require.
- 35.99.080 Existing franchises or contracts not preempted.

**RCW 35.99.010 Definitions.** The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Cable television service" means the one-way transmission to subscribers of video programming and other programming service and subscriber interaction, if any, that is required for the selection or use of the video programming or other programming service.

(2) "Facilities" means all of the plant, equipment, fixtures, appurtenances, antennas, and other facilities necessary to furnish and deliver telecommunications services and cable television services, including but not limited to poles with crossarms, poles without crossarms, wires, lines, conduits, cables, communication and signal lines and equipment, braces, guys, anchors, vaults, and all attachments, appurtenances, and appliances necessary or incidental to the distribution and use of telecommunications services and cable television services.

(3) "Master permit" means the agreement in whatever form whereby a city or town may grant general permission to a service provider to enter, use, and occupy the right-of-way for the purpose of locating facilities. This definition is not intended to limit, alter, or change the extent of the existing authority of a city or town to require a franchise nor does it change the status of a service provider asserting an existing statewide grant based on a predecessor telephone or telegraph company's existence at the time of the adoption of the Washington state Constitution to occupy the right-of-way. For the purposes of this subsection, a franchise, except for a cable television franchise, is a master permit. A master permit does not include cable television franchises.

(4) "Personal wireless services" means commercial mobile services, unlicensed wireless services, and common carrier wireless exchange access services, as defined by federal laws and regulations.

(5) "Right-of-way" means land acquired or dedicated for public roads and streets, but does not include:

- (a) State highways;
- (b) Land dedicated for roads, streets, and highways not opened and not improved for motor vehicle use by the public;
- (c) Structures, including poles and conduits, located within the right-of-way;
- (d) Federally granted trust lands or forest board trust lands;

(e) Lands owned or managed by the state parks and recreation commission; or

(f) Federally granted railroad rights-of-way acquired under 43 U.S.C. Sec. 912 and related provisions of federal law that are not open for motor vehicle use.

(6) "Service provider" means every corporation, company, association, joint stock association, firm, partnership, person, city, or town owning, operating, or managing any facilities used to provide and providing telecommunications or cable television service for hire, sale, or resale to the general public. Service provider includes the legal successor to any such corporation, company, association, joint stock association, firm, partnership, person, city, or town.

(7) "Telecommunications service" means the transmission of information by wire, radio, optical cable, electromagnetic, or other similar means for hire, sale, or resale to the general public. For the purpose of this subsection, "information" means knowledge or intelligence represented by any form of writing, signs, signals, pictures, sounds, or any other symbols. For the purpose of this chapter, telecommunications service excludes the over-the-air transmission of broadcast television or broadcast radio signals.

(8) "Use permit" means the authorization in whatever form whereby a city or town may grant permission to a service provider to enter and use the specified right-of-way for the purpose of installing, maintaining, repairing, or removing identified facilities. [2000 c 83 s 1.]

**RCW 35.99.020 Permits for use of right-of-way.** A city or town may grant, issue, or deny permits for the use of the right-of-way by a service provider for installing, maintaining, repairing, or removing facilities for telecommunications services or cable television services pursuant to ordinances, consistent with chapter 83, Laws of 2000. [2000 c 83 s 2.]

**RCW 35.99.030 Master, use permits—Injunctive relief—Notice—Service providers' duties.** (1) Cities and towns may require a service provider to obtain a master permit. A city or town may request, but not require, that a service provider with an existing statewide grant to occupy the right-of-way obtain a master permit for wireline facilities.

(a) The procedures for the approval of a master permit and the requirements for a complete application for a master permit shall be available in written form.

(b) Where a city or town requires a master permit, the city or town shall act upon a complete application within one hundred twenty days from the date a service provider files the complete application for the master permit to use the right-of-way, except:

(i) With the agreement of the applicant; or

(ii) Where the master permit requires action of the legislative body of the city or town and such action cannot reasonably be obtained within the one hundred twenty day period.

(2) A city or town may require that a service provider obtain a use permit. A city or town must act on a request for a use permit by a service provider within thirty days of receipt of a completed application, unless a service provider consents to a different time

period or the service provider has not obtained a master permit requested by the city or town.

(a) For the purpose of this section, "act" means that the city makes the decision to grant, condition, or deny the use permit, which may be subject to administrative appeal, or notifies the applicant in writing of the amount of time that will be required to make the decision and the reasons for this time period.

(b) Requirements otherwise applicable to holders of master permits shall be deemed satisfied by a holder of a cable franchise in good standing.

(c) Where the master permit does not contain procedures to expedite approvals and the service provider requires action in less than thirty days, the service provider shall advise the city or town in writing of the reasons why a shortened time period is necessary and the time period within which action by the city or town is requested. The city or town shall reasonably cooperate to meet the request where practicable.

(d) A city or town may not deny a use permit to a service provider with an existing statewide grant to occupy the right-of-way for wireline facilities on the basis of failure to obtain a master permit.

(3) The reasons for a denial of a master permit shall be supported by substantial evidence contained in a written record. A service provider adversely affected by the final action denying a master permit, or by an unreasonable failure to act on a master permit as set forth in subsection (1) of this section, may commence an action within thirty days to seek relief, which shall be limited to injunctive relief.

(4) A service provider adversely affected by the final action denying a use permit may commence an action within thirty days to seek relief, which shall be limited to injunctive relief. In any appeal of the final action denying a use permit, the standard for review and burden of proof shall be as set forth in RCW 36.70C.130.

(5) A city or town shall:

(a) In order to facilitate the scheduling and coordination of work in the right-of-way, provide as much advance notice as reasonable of plans to open the right-of-way to those service providers who are current users of the right-of-way or who have filed notice with the clerk of the city or town within the past twelve months of their intent to place facilities in the city or town. A city is not liable for damages for failure to provide this notice. Where the city has failed to provide notice of plans to open the right-of-way consistent with this subsection, a city may not deny a use permit to a service provider on the basis that the service provider failed to coordinate with another project.

(b) Have the authority to require that facilities are installed and maintained within the right-of-way in such a manner and at such points so as not to inconvenience the public use of the right-of-way or to adversely affect the public health, safety, and welfare.

(6) A service provider shall:

(a) Obtain all permits required by the city or town for the installation, maintenance, repair, or removal of facilities in the right-of-way;

(b) Comply with applicable ordinances, construction codes, regulations, and standards subject to verification by the city or town of such compliance;

(c) Cooperate with the city or town in ensuring that facilities are installed, maintained, repaired, and removed within the right-of-way in such a manner and at such points so as not to inconvenience the public use of the right-of-way or to adversely affect the public health, safety, and welfare;

(d) Provide information and plans as reasonably necessary to enable a city or town to comply with subsection (5) of this section, including, when notified by the city or town, the provision of advance planning information pursuant to the procedures established by the city or town;

(e) Obtain the written approval of the facility or structure owner, if the service provider does not own it, prior to attaching to or otherwise using a facility or structure in the right-of-way;

(f) Construct, install, operate, and maintain its facilities at its expense; and

(g) Comply with applicable federal and state safety laws and standards.

(7) Nothing in this section shall be construed as:

(a) Creating a new duty upon city [cities] or towns to be responsible for construction of facilities for service providers or to modify the right-of-way to accommodate such facilities;

(b) Creating, expanding, or extending any liability of a city or town to any third-party user of facilities or third-party beneficiary; or

(c) Limiting the right of a city or town to require an indemnification agreement as a condition of a service provider's facilities occupying the right-of-way.

(8) Nothing in this section creates, modifies, expands, or diminishes a priority of use of the right-of-way by a service provider or other utility, either in relation to other service providers or in relation to other users of the right-of-way for other purposes. [2000 c 83 s 3.]

**RCW 35.99.040 Local regulations, ordinances—Limitations.** (1) A city or town shall not adopt or enforce regulations or ordinances specifically relating to use of the right-of-way by a service provider that:

(a) Impose requirements that regulate the services or business operations of the service provider, except where otherwise authorized in state or federal law;

(b) Conflict with federal or state laws, rules, or regulations that specifically apply to the design, construction, and operation of facilities or with federal or state worker safety or public safety laws, rules, or regulations;

(c) Regulate the services provided based upon the content or kind of signals that are carried or are capable of being carried over the facilities, except where otherwise authorized in state or federal law; or

(d) Unreasonably deny the use of the right-of-way by a service provider for installing, maintaining, repairing, or removing facilities for telecommunications services or cable television services.

(2) Nothing in this chapter, including but not limited to the provisions of subsection (1)(d) of this section, limits the authority

of a city or town to regulate the placement of facilities through its local zoning or police power, if the regulations do not otherwise:

(a) Prohibit the placement of all wireless or of all wireline facilities within the city or town;

(b) Prohibit the placement of all wireless or of all wireline facilities within city or town rights-of-way, unless the city or town is less than five square miles in size and has no commercial areas, in which case the city or town may make available land other than city or town rights-of-way for the placement of wireless facilities; or

(c) Violate section 253 of the telecommunications act of 1996, P.L. 104-104 (110 Stat. 56).

(3) This section does not amend, limit, repeal, or otherwise modify the authority of cities or towns to regulate cable television services pursuant to federal law. [2000 c 83 s 4.]

**RCW 35.99.050 Personal wireless services—Limitations on moratoria—Dispute resolution.** A city or town shall not place or extend a moratorium on the acceptance and processing of applications, permitting, construction, maintenance, repair, replacement, extension, operation, or use of any facilities for personal wireless services, except as consistent with the guidelines for facilities siting implementation, as agreed to on August 5, 1998, by the federal communications commission's local and state government advisory committee, the cellular telecommunications industry association, the personal communications industry association, and the American mobile telecommunications association. Any city or town implementing such a moratorium shall, at the request of a service provider impacted by the moratorium, participate with the service provider in the informal dispute resolution process included with the guidelines for facilities siting implementation. [2000 c 83 s 5.]

**RCW 35.99.060 Relocation of facilities—Notice—Reimbursement.**

(1) Cities and towns may require service providers to relocate authorized facilities within the right-of-way when reasonably necessary for construction, alteration, repair, or improvement of the right-of-way for purposes of public welfare, health, or safety.

(2) Cities shall notify service providers as soon as practicable of the need for relocation and shall specify the date by which relocation shall be completed. In calculating the date that relocation must be completed, cities shall consult with affected service providers and consider the extent of facilities to be relocated, the services requirements, and the construction sequence for the relocation, within the city's overall project construction sequence and constraints, to safely complete the relocation. Service providers shall complete the relocation by the date specified, unless the city, or a reviewing court, establishes a later date for completion, after a showing by the service provider that the relocation cannot be completed by the date specified using best efforts and meeting safety and service requirements.

(3) Service providers may not seek reimbursement for their relocation expenses from the city or town requesting relocation under subsection (1) of this section except:

(a) Where the service provider had paid for the relocation cost of the same facilities at the request of the city or town within the

past five years, the service provider's share of the cost of relocation will be paid by the city or town requesting relocation;

(b) Where aerial to underground relocation of authorized facilities is required by the city or town under subsection (1) of this section, for service providers with an ownership share of the aerial supporting structures, the additional incremental cost of underground compared to aerial relocation, or as provided for in the approved tariff if less, will be paid by the city or town requiring relocation; and

(c) Where the city or town requests relocation under subsection (1) of this section solely for aesthetic purposes, unless otherwise agreed to by the parties.

(4) Where a project in subsection (1) of this section is primarily for private benefit, the private party or parties shall reimburse the cost of relocation in the same proportion to their contribution to the costs of the project. Service providers will not be precluded from recovering their costs associated with relocation required under subsection (1) of this section, provided that the recovery is consistent with subsection (3) of this section and other applicable laws.

(5) A city or town may require the relocation of facilities at the service provider's expense in the event of an unforeseen emergency that creates an immediate threat to the public safety, health, or welfare. [2000 c 83 s 6.]

**RCW 35.99.070 Additional ducts or conduits—City or town may require.** A city or town may require that a service provider that is constructing, relocating, or placing ducts or conduits in public rights-of-way provide the city or town with additional duct or conduit and related structures necessary to access the conduit, provided that:

(1) The city or town enters into a contract with the service provider consistent with RCW 80.36.150. The contract rates to be charged should recover the incremental costs of the service provider. If the city or town makes the additional duct or conduit and related access structures available to any other entity for the purposes of providing telecommunications or cable television service for hire, sale, or resale to the general public, the rates to be charged, as set forth in the contract with the entity that constructed the conduit or duct, shall recover at least the fully allocated costs of the service provider. The service provider shall state both contract rates in the contract. The city or town shall inform the service provider of the use, and any change in use, of the requested duct or conduit and related access structures to determine the applicable rate to be paid by the city or town.

(2) Except as otherwise agreed by the service provider and the city or town, the city or town shall agree that the requested additional duct or conduit space and related access structures will not be used by the city or town to provide telecommunications or cable television service for hire, sale, or resale to the general public.

(3) The city or town shall not require that the additional duct or conduit space be connected to the access structures and vaults of the service provider.

(4) The value of the additional duct or conduit requested by a city or town shall not be considered a public works construction contract.

(5) This section shall not affect the provision of an institutional network by a cable television provider under federal law. [2000 c 83 s 7.]

**RCW 35.99.080 Existing franchises or contracts not preempted.**  
Chapter 83, Laws of 2000 shall not preempt specific provisions in existing franchises or contracts between cities or towns and service providers. [2000 c 83 s 9.]