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AT&T talks potential merger

ELKO — Allowing customers to download a picture in mere seconds while carrying on a phone conversation sans static in a rural area like Lamoille is the end goal for AT&T Nevada representatives, should the AT&T and T-Mobile merger come to pass.

In preparation for AT&T's potential acquisition of T-Mobile and Deutsche Telekom, which AT&T Nevada President Stephanie Tyler said will hopefully come to fruition by the end of the year, Tyler and external relations representatives stopped in Elko to discuss planned coverage enhancements throughout the state.

The agreement has been approved by the board of directors of both companies and awaits various approval from the Department of Justice and the FCC. Tyler said they are hoping the merger will go through by the end of the year, although it is not certain. She said part of the reason they are traveling to different areas throughout the state is to increase public awareness of what could come to pass as far as coverage throughout the state as a result of the transaction.

"We want people to know about it and we want people to be excited about it," Tyler said.

This transaction would allow AT&T to expand coverage of 4G LTE, which is high speed Internet broadband. It also means the capability of the company's smart phones would enhance across the U.S. and in rural areas throughout the West, Tyler said.

T-Mobile owns towers throughout rural Nevada, of which AT&T has roaming agreements to use. Should this merger go through, AT&T will purchase T-Mobile's towers and customer base, which will allow for the company to bring all of its towers up to 4G LTE speed — a seven year plan that will cost the company \$8 billion to build across the U.S. With this large monetary investment in infrastructure, Tyler said AT&T would reach 97 percent of the U.S. population and 97 percent of Nevada's population with 4G LTE. This would be more than 120,000 Nevada residents who could be covered as a result of this transaction.

The company's main coverage expansion throughout Nevada will take place in northeastern Nevada, although the entire state would reap the enhancement of 4G speed, she said.

"These rural western states are expensive to serve," Tyler said. "That's why this commitment we're getting ready to make is so important to northern Nevada, particularly a community like Elko."

The purchase of T-mobile is partly about purchasing wireless spectrum, which is important for AT&T to own in order for the company to increase the speed and capacity for smart phone and broadband users.



“In the last four years we estimate the capacity on our network has increased by 8,000 percent” as a result of smart phones, Tyler said. “That spectrum is a major need of ours and it’s very important.

“If we don’t own the tower and spectrum, we can’t upgrade it to LTE.”

Without acquiring T-Mobile’s towers and wireless spectrum, the only areas AT&T could provide the 4G LTE coverage to are Las Vegas and Reno, where it currently holds ownership over the spectrum and towers. After the merger, the Interstate 80 route toward Reno, major corridors and the majority of northeastern Nevada would have that coverage including Elko, Lamoille, Wells, Spring Creek and other rural areas.

“The rural footprint for T-Mobile in Nevada is substantial,” Tyler said.

Customers in these areas, she said, would be able to download photos on their phones in a matter of seconds because of the increased broadband speed.

The tower upgrade would begin in the urban areas first and then begin to flow toward northern Nevada.

“This has put a focus on our western, highly rural states in a very important way and I believe it provides a path to better economic development opportunities, distance learning opportunities for kids living on the outskirts of Elko,” who will no longer have to live off of dial up Internet, she said.

If the merger closes, T-Mobile customers will have the option to either stay with AT&T or switch providers.