

SURVEYS SHOW STRONG SUPPORT FOR LOCAL ACCESS CHANNELS, CURRENT COX SERVICES

Survey Summary

The City of Tucson today released the final results of three surveys it conducted regarding Cox Communications' cable service.

Those surveys show:

- Most subscribers are satisfied with Cox's existing services, but there is interest in improvements to Cox's system.
- There is strong support for local access channels.
- Most subscribers do not want support for access channels reduced.

Background

The surveys were conducted as part of ongoing proceedings that will determine whether Cox's cable television license will be renewed. Under federal law, cable operators must obtain a license to provide cable service. Cox has been operating under a license with the City of Tucson which is scheduled to expire next year. Under federal law, Cox's license may be revoked unless Cox shows that it will reasonably satisfy the needs and interests of the community for any renewal term. It is up to the local franchising authority to identify local, cable-related needs and interests.

The City has been investigating Tucson's cable-related needs and interests, and the surveys are part of that investigation. The City expects to be releasing other reports over the next month, and staff plans to present a final analysis of the needs and interests of the community to the City Council on December 12.

Detail

The surveys were conducted in three different ways.

First, the City commissioned a statistically valid telephone survey that tested consumer satisfaction with Cox's cable system and services, and customer satisfaction with and interest in local "access" channels programmed by the University of Arizona, Pima Community College, the Tucson Unified School District, and by Access Tucson.

Cox has indicated, statewide, that it wishes to eliminate a significant number of those channels, and to cut back on the support it now provides for such local programming. It also wishes to move the channels to "digital tiers," which would result in subscribers being required to pay substantially more to receive the access channels.

The survey shows that a majority of Tucson cable subscribers consider the channels to be important or very important, and 49% of non-subscribers believe the

channels are important or very important. A substantial majority of subscribers and non-subscribers believe that the current level of access support in Tucson is about right. The report suggests that lower-income subscribers are particularly interested in access channels.

The survey also shows that subscribers are generally satisfied with Cox's services. There is an interest in having Cox make improvements to the system that would permit it to offer some more advanced services, such as additional high definition services.

The survey showed that the main complaint with respect to cable service has to do with rates. However, the concern does not appear to be with the amount of support provided for local programming, but instead appears to be focused on the size and number of the rate hikes Cox has instituted for its commercial services. The survey shows subscriber support for an initiative that has been championed by Senator John McCain to allow subscribers to purchase channels "a la carte" rather than in packages.

In addition to commissioning the statistical survey, the City prepared a "mail-in" survey, and placed a survey form on its web site. Interested members of the public could fill out that survey on-line. Neither the mail-in survey or the web survey are statistically valid. Nonetheless, City staff believes that the mail and web surveys provided valuable additional input from the public on the cable renewal, and on community needs and interests.

The mail-in and the web surveys both showed strong support for local programming.