



NOVA SCOTIA

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

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Hon. François-Philippe Champagne,
Minister of Innovation, Science, and Industry
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0H5

September 28, 2022

Dear Minister Champagne:

Nova Scotia is currently recovering from Hurricane Fiona, possibly the largest and most devastating storm to ever hit our province. I have the unfortunate task of writing to you to express my disappointment with the poor participation and support from telecommunications companies before, during and after this event.

The Nova Scotia Emergency Management Office began preparations for Fiona a week ahead of its arrival. During that time, EMO contacted key critical infrastructure partners to request that they send a representative to the Provincial Coordination Centre (PCC). Given the expected impacts on power and telecommunications, having a representative attend in person was imperative for optimal collaboration and support of recovery efforts.

It is my understanding that not one telecommunications company was initially willing to send a representative to the PCC. Only after complaints from EMO to their senior leadership did Bell agree to send an agency representative in person, and they attended two days before announcing they were working virtually. Eastlink, Rogers, and Telus participated in briefings and communicated with staff virtually but declined to attend the PCC in person during the initial response. It was only after three days and public and media pressure that the companies sent representatives in person to the PCC.

While improvements have been made to cellular and landline service, there are still many cell towers operating on generators and service is unreliable in areas of Cape Breton.

Other key partners have actively sought opportunities to communicate regularly with Nova Scotians leading up to, during and after the storm. Nova Scotia Power, Canadian Red Cross, Halifax Regional Municipality and Cape Breton Regional Municipality have not once declined an opportunity to participate in media interviews or daily provincial press briefings, which have been broadcast live on the radio and are one of the only ways to reach Nova Scotians with no cell or landline service.

Our telecommunications partners have had little to no involvement in these briefings. Their absence is notable. When they do make a spokesperson available to media, questions about how many customers are without service and where, and when Nova Scotians can expect to have their service restored, have largely been unanswered.

I'm asking you, as the Minister who oversees these companies, to consider all potential legislative and regulatory means to hold telecommunications companies accountable for participating in emergency planning, preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery to the fullest extent possible.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tim Houston".

Hon. Tim Houston,
Premier of Nova Scotia