

SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER KEVIN J. MARTIN

Re: Inquiry Regarding Carrier Current Systems, including Broadband over Power Line Systems, ET Docket No. 03-104, Notice of Inquiry, (adopted Apr. 23, 2003)

I am pleased to support this item, which opens an inquiry into issues related to Broadband over Power Line (BPL) systems. BPL systems use existing electric power lines to provide high-speed communications. Because power lines are ubiquitous – reaching virtually every community and every home – BPL systems have the potential to become a last-mile solution throughout the United States. As such, they would not only provide competition to cable broadband and DSL, they could bring Internet access and high-speed broadband to rural and isolated areas, which have been difficult to serve because of the high infrastructure costs of reaching those areas. Moreover, BPL systems serve an important homeland security function, providing a redundant data network.

Having seen first hand a BPL system in operation, I am confident that this technology can achieve great things. Last week I visited a home in Maryland, where Current Technologies has established a demonstration site in cooperation with Potomac Electric Power Company. I came away truly impressed. Using BPL technology, I was able to watch a DVD quality movie, play a highly graphical interactive video game on the Internet, and print pages from a news web site on a printer in another room – all simultaneously. I was impressed not only with the speed, but also with the ease with which the home could be networked. Simply plugging a device into an electrical outlet enabled it to communicate with the other devices plugged into outlets in other rooms, as well as connect with the Internet. While I recognize that full scale commercial applications may not immediately achieve the speeds that I witnessed, it is clear this technology has significant potential.

I wish to emphasize that the inquiry we commence today should in no way slow down BPL deployment. Several companies have told me they can deploy BPL technology under our existing rules. I strongly support such efforts. This inquiry is meant to facilitate BPL technology. Whatever rule changes we ultimately make, if any, I expect those changes to complement existing efforts. Meanwhile, I look forward to receiving comments in this proceeding.