

Workstream Report
Small value invoice payment deferral
Modification Reference Number 0201

Version 1.0

This Workstream Report is presented for the UNC Modification Panel's consideration. The Distribution Workstream considers that the Proposal is sufficiently developed and should now proceed to the Consultation Phase. The Workstream also recommends that the Panel requests the preparation of legal text for this Modification Proposal.

1 The Modification Proposal

Currently UNC Section S 3.1.2 requires gas transportation invoices of any value to be issued by a Transporter to a shippers as and when these invoices are processed, for payment by the shipper the 12th Day after the Day on which the invoice was deemed to be received. However, in some cases the value of the transportation invoice is so small that the cost to the shipper of processing payment of the invoice exceeds the value of the invoice itself.

Where a shipper fails to pay a transportation invoice on time, a late payment charge of £40 is applied per invoice. This fact usually deters a shipper from batching small value invoices together for a single payment.

British Gas believes that whilst it is necessary for the UNC to drive appropriate invoice payment behaviour – in this case by disincentivising late payment through the application of late payment charges – it can be inefficient for a shipper to incur payment costs in excess of the invoice value.

It is therefore proposed that Transporters and Shippers have the option to batch small value Ad hoc invoice payments with larger payments (e.g. Ad hoc invoices are paid with Capacity, Commodity, CSEP's invoices staggered throughout the month) and the late payment fees and interest is waived for small value invoices subject to the backstop provision set out below.

For the purpose of this proposal small value invoices are defined as non Energy related Ad hoc invoices below £25. Therefore the scope of this proposal will affect all invoices except the main Transportation invoices; Capacity, Commodity, Unique Sites, CSEP's and Reconciliation and Gas GRE invoicing (payment of these invoices must continue by the payment due date as at present, because of the Energy element contained within the invoice).

As a safeguard against unfair delays by shippers in paying small value invoices, this proposal places an end stop date of month end plus 30 calendar days to clear the account and to make the payment(s) in full. Failure to achieve this will result in late payment charges plus interest being applied to each outstanding invoice from the original payment due date; this backstop therefore being the full effect of the current arrangements.

The proposer believes that the UNC should therefore allow flexibility for payment of small value invoices, thus reducing the incidences of unnecessary bank charges and

unwarranted late payment charges.

2 Extent to which implementation of the proposed modification would better facilitate the relevant objectives

Standard Special Condition A11.1 (a): *the coordinated, efficient and economic operation of the pipe-line system to which this licence relates;*

Implementation would not be expected to better facilitate this relevant objective.

Standard Special Condition A11.1 (b): *so far as is consistent with sub-paragraph (a), the (i) the combined pipe-line system, and/ or (ii) the pipe-line system of one or more other relevant gas transporters;*

Implementation would not be expected to better facilitate this relevant objective.

Standard Special Condition A11.1 (c): *so far as is consistent with sub-paragraphs (a) and (b), the efficient discharge of the licensee's obligations under this licence;*

Implementation would not be expected to better facilitate this relevant objective.

Standard Special Condition A11.1 (d): *so far as is consistent with sub-paragraphs (a) to (c) the securing of effective competition: (i) between relevant shippers; (ii) between relevant suppliers; and/or (iii) between DN operators (who have entered into transportation arrangements with other relevant gas transporters) and relevant shippers;*

Implementation would not be expected to better facilitate this relevant objective.

Standard Special Condition A11.1 (e): *so far as is consistent with sub-paragraphs (a) to (d), the provision of reasonable economic incentives for relevant suppliers to secure that the domestic customer supply security standards (within the meaning of paragraph 4 of standard condition 32A (Security of Supply – Domestic Customers) of the standard conditions of Gas Suppliers' licences) are satisfied as respects the availability of gas to their domestic customers;*

Implementation would not be expected to better facilitate this relevant objective.

Standard Special Condition A11.1 (f): *so far as is consistent with sub-paragraphs (a) to (e), the promotion of efficiency in the implementation and administration of the network code and/or the uniform network code.*

The proposer believes that implementation of this proposal will reduce the number of very small value invoices that Shippers are required to process. Such invoices are disproportionately costly to process. This will better facilitate the promotion of efficiency in the administration of the UNC.

3 The implications of implementing the Modification Proposal on security of supply, operation of the Total System and industry fragmentation

No implications on security of supply, operation of the Total System or industry fragmentation have been identified.

4 The implications for Transporters and each Transporter of implementing the Modification Proposal, including:

a) implications for operation of the System:

No implications for operation of the system have been identified.

b) development and capital cost and operating cost implications:

There are some direct capital, development and operating costs, particularly significant for National Grid resulting from this proposal. Other Transporters have indicated minor operating costs.

c) extent to which it is appropriate to recover the costs, and proposal for the most appropriate way to recover the costs:

No additional cost recovery is proposed.

d) Analysis of the consequences (if any) this proposal would have on price regulation:

No consequences have been identified.

5 The consequence of implementing the Modification Proposal on the level of contractual risk of each Transporter under the Code as modified by the Modification Proposal

Transporters and Users may face slightly longer payment lead times for very small value invoices. However, this Proposal includes a backstop mechanism which disincentivises excessive delays. This Proposal does not affect the payment terms for higher value invoices.

6 The high level indication of the areas of the UK Link System likely to be affected, together with the development implications and other implications for the UK Link Systems and related computer systems of each Transporter and Users

No implications for the UK Link system have been identified. National Grid have identified implications for their systems.

7 The implications of implementing the Modification Proposal for Users,

including administrative and operational costs and level of contractual risk

Administrative and operational implications (including impact upon manual processes and procedures)

Administration implications are expected to be minimal.

Development and capital cost and operating cost implications

Operational costs are expected to reduce..

Consequence for the level of contractual risk of Users

User contractual risk is expected to fall since this Proposal will relieve some of the burden of disproportionately high invoice processing costs, and the potential for late payment charges where a User chooses to batch invoices together for payment.

8 The implications of implementing the Modification Proposal for Terminal Operators, Consumers, Connected System Operators, Suppliers, producers and, any Non Code Party

No such implications have been identified.

9 Consequences on the legislative and regulatory obligations and contractual relationships of each Transporter and each User and Non Code Party of implementing the Modification Proposal

No such consequences have been identified.

10 Analysis of any advantages or disadvantages of implementation of the Modification Proposal

Advantages

- All users have the option to use, or ignore this facility on the basis of their own systems, which can reduce costs of unnecessary banking charges to the industry.

Disadvantages

- Transporters may need to amend their systems, or force suspension of late payment invoices.

11 Summary of representations received (to the extent that the import of those representations are not reflected elsewhere in the Workstream Report)

No written representations have been received.

12 The extent to which the implementation is required to enable each Transporter to facilitate compliance with safety or other legislation

No such requirement has been identified.

13 The extent to which the implementation is required having regard to any proposed change in the methodology established under paragraph 5 of Condition A4 or the statement furnished by each Transporter under paragraph 1 of Condition 4 of the Transporter's Licence

No such requirement has been identified.

14 Programme for works required as a consequence of implementing the Modification Proposal

Programme of works to be identified.

15 Proposed implementation timetable (including timetable for any necessary information systems changes)

Implementation as soon as possible after a direction is received from the Authority.

16 Implications of implementing this Modification Proposal upon existing Code Standards of Service

No implications of implementing this Modification Proposal upon existing Code Standards of Service have been identified.

17. Workstream recommendation regarding implementation of this Modification Proposal

The Distribution Workstream considers that the Proposal is sufficiently developed and should now proceed to the Consultation Phase. The Workstream also recommends that the Panel requests the preparation of legal text for this Modification Proposal.