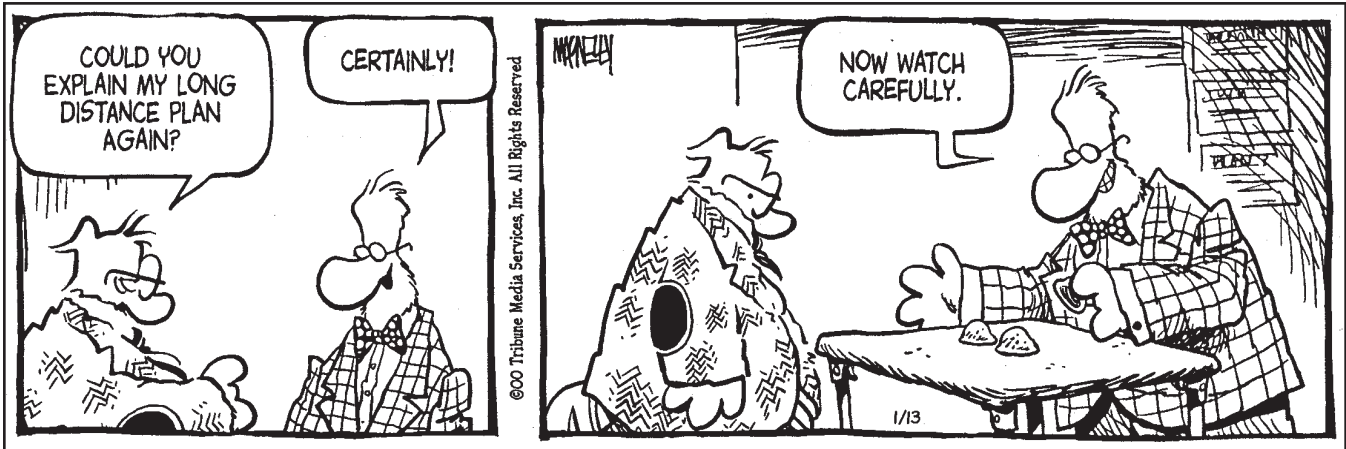




CUB Long-distance Guide

Real Deal Guide to Long Distance



Winning the Shell Game

Long-distance callers know this shell game all too well. Every phone company claims to have great deals, but this guide helps you separate the money-savers from the rip-offs. On pages 3-4, we provide examples of hot long-distance deals and a checklist of questions to ask when you're considering a new long-distance options. You can win this shell game!

Look at CUB's list of low-cost long-distance options on p. 3. Want to see more plans? Check out the long-distance and international "calculators" on the "Telecommunications" page at: www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org

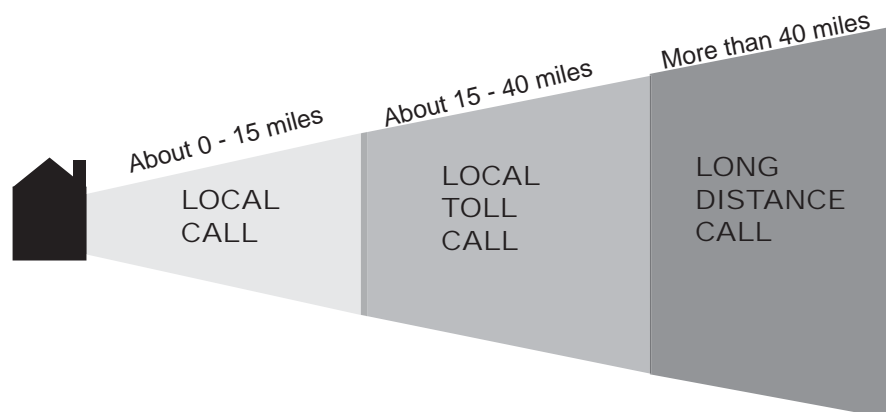
Long-distance Calls Defined

There are three types of calls: local, local toll (a.k.a. local long distance), and long distance.

A local call is to any place about 0-15 miles from your home. Local toll calls are roughly 16-40 miles away, or more. Any call beyond local toll—to another region of Illinois or to another state—is considered long distance.

Name That Call

These are general estimates. The actual distances for local, local toll and long-distance calls may vary depending on the area of Illinois. Other phone companies define calls similar to AT&T, the largest phone company in the state.



Call CUB if you're not sure whether a certain call is local, local toll, or long distance. This guide covers calls beyond the 15-mile local region, which can be pricey. AT&T and Verizon charge up to 16-17 cents per minute for local toll calls, and long-distance rates vary wildly, from two cents per minute to 20 cents per minute or more.

Finding the Right Plan

Don't settle for any long-distance/local toll rate over a nickel per minute. In fact, you can find rates much better than that, as the chart on p. 3 shows.

Many people are on plans with a high per-minute rate and a high monthly fee that they pay even if they don't make any calls in a month. Others subscribe to a "fixed-rate plan" that covers their long-distance calls (and possibly their local calls and some calling features, such as voice mail and caller ID, too) for a certain monthly fee. Most people simply don't make enough calls to justify a fixed-rate plan's price tag. So what are you paying now? Just divide your total long-distance bill (minus taxes and surcharges) by the number of minutes you talked, which should be itemized on your bill. If your current rate is well over a nickel per minute—like many people—you're paying too much. Don't worry! You have options.

Long-distance Options

Traditional Long-distance/Local Toll Plan

AT&T and Sprint charge some of the highest rates in the long-distance market. You can find

rates of 2-4 cents per minute, with a small or no monthly fee, from lesser-known long-distance

companies. People often ask CUB: "Yeah, but is the service reliable?" You probably won't even notice a difference because these companies use the same network of lines that your calls travel over now.

Prepaid Calling Card

You probably see prepaid cards at the supermarket checkout line, the gas station, or on the Internet. The cards, which require you to dial extra numbers to complete a call, sell you a specific

amount of long-distance calling time at a specific price. There's no phone bill. You just call until you run out of time.

Sometimes you can "recharge" a prepaid card for more minutes. Beware of rip-offs with poor service and hidden fees that inflate a low advertised rate. However, some cards charge less than 4 cents per minute, without the monthly fee.

Tip: If you love your low prepaid rate but hate dialing the extra numbers, program those numbers into your phone if it has a speed-dial function.

10-10 Number

Again, using a 10-10, or "dialaround," number means you'll have to punch extra numbers to make a long-distance call. But you could find lower rates.

Unlike a prepaid card, the charges for 10-10 calls will show up on your monthly phone bill. Like a prepaid card, a low 10-10 rate can be inflated by other fees. So read the fine print!

Check out www.1010phonerates.com for information on plans.

Should I drop long-distance service?

If you make very few calls, drop your long-distance company and use a prepaid calling card, 10-10 number, or your cell phone to make such calls. If you drop long distance, tell your local phone company so it can complete the change, which it will do for a one-time fee of about \$5 to \$10. Also ask your local company for "slamming protection" to make sure that another company doesn't try to slap you with expensive local toll/long-distance rates. It can do this "freeze" for free. Remember, even if you drop your long-distance service, you can still make toll-free (1-800, for example) calls—and you can receive long-distance calls. Don't forget to tell your old long-distance company of the switch, so that it stops billing you.

Your Cell Phone

Having trouble using up all your wireless minutes each month?

Use them to make your local toll and long-distance calls. Of course, you never want to go over your allotted minutes and get slapped with outrageous “overage” fees, but if you don’t make a lot of long-distance calls, your cell phone could do the trick. You may not even have to bother with other long-distance options.

VoIP

Voice over Internet Protocol, or VoIP, is an excit-

ing new phone service that carries calls over a broadband Internet connection. VoIP plans cover ALL domestic calls and offer a long list of calling features—but sometimes for a much lower monthly price than other fixed-rate plans.

Plus, VoIP plans include international calls for free or at a very low per-minute rate. Caution: The broadband Internet connection VoIP requires will add \$20-\$30 to the monthly price and if the power or your Internet goes out, so does your phone service. Still, if you are already paying for broadband, this could be the perfect option.

Hot Long-distance Deals

Company	Service	Rates/Notes*	To Sign Up
Pioneer Telephone	Traditional long-distance	2-3¢/minute, online billing, NO monthly fee, unless you want a paper bill AND you make less than \$15 of calls, then fee is 99¢. Rates a bit higher (3.3-4.9¢/minute) if you’re NOT a Verizon or AT&T local customer.	1-877-492-6878 www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org (“Get \$20 off your long-distance bill.”) Note: Unless you have “slamming protection,” don’t call your local and/or long-distance company to switch. Call Pioneer and it will do the switch for you. Questions? Call CUB, at 1-866-688-4282.
Uni-Tel Communications Group	Traditional long-distance	2-3 ¢/minute, \$2 monthly fee waived if you make more than \$15 worth of calls.	1-800-499-5912 www.unitelgroup.com
Enhanced Communications Group	Traditional long-distance	3-4 ¢/minute, 59-cent monthly fee.	1-800-767-5599 www.ecgl.com
AT&T Card (Sold by members-only Sam’s Club)	Prepaid calling	3.5 ¢ per minute, 37-minute pay-phone surcharge, NOT rechargeable.	Sold at Sam’s Club www.samsclub.com
Onesuite.com	Prepaid calling	2.5 ¢ per minute, 55-cent pay-phone surcharge.	www.onesuite.com

Note: CUB has negotiated an automatic \$20 credit for this offer. Just ask for the “CUB Credit.” To sign up, call **1-877-492-6878**, or go to CUB’s website, **www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org**. Go to “Get \$20 off your long-distance bill.”

*Rates change often. Rates may vary depending on where you live. Verify them with the company! Also, check out CUB’s long-distance and international calculators on the Telecommunications page of **www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org**.

CUB's Long-distance Checklist

If you're on the phone with a long-distance company, or you're at the checkout line reading the back panel of a prepaid phone card, ask these questions to avoid rip offs:

What rate does the company offer?

(Rates change often. Make sure the company still offers the rate you want, or close to it.)

Does the plan require online signup? Does the plan require online/credit card billing?

(Some plans require that you sign up through the Internet, or pay your bills online. You may even get a better rate by choosing to signup and/or get billed online.)

Is there a weekly or monthly fee/per-call surcharge/monthly minimum (guarantees you will pay a minimum bill, even if you don't make any calls) or any other fee that will inflate the advertised rate?

(Phone companies find creative ways to charge you more. Look for plans with few, if any, tacked-on fees.)

Does the plan cover local toll calls? What is the local toll rate?

(Get a plan that covers local toll calls—for calls roughly 15-40 miles away. Prepaid cards and 10-10 numbers will always cover local toll, but some more traditional long-distance plans may not. Ask!)

Does the plan have a different "in-state" rate (for long-distance calls within Illinois)?

(Make sure a plan with a reasonable state-to-state long-distance rate doesn't slap you with a high rate for long-distance calls within the state.)

Will your new company pick up the switching charge?

(Your local phone company will charge you a one-time fee of about \$5-\$10 to switch to another long-distance company. Ask your new company to pick up that fee.)

Ask these additional questions if you're considering a prepaid card...

What is the payphone surcharge?

(Every card charges one for calls from payphones, hospitals, dormitories, hotels, other commercial places, and even homes without a long-distance provider.)

Are there any restrictions, such as no in-state calls or an expiration date?

(Avoid getting stuck with an expired card that still has minutes left on it. Read the fine print to learn how much time you have before the card expires and any other restrictions.)

Can you recharge the card? If so, is there a fee to do so?

(An ideal prepaid card doesn't expire and can be "recharged" with more minutes. Unfortunately, some prepaid offers slap customers with a "recharge fee." Tip: Many customers avoid this fee by just buying a new prepaid card when they run out of minutes.)

Does the card have a lower rate if you dial a certain "local access number" but a higher rate if you dial a toll-free number instead?

(Companies will sometimes quote you a low rate if you use a "local access number," but then slap you with higher rate if you use the easier-to-find toll-free number to begin a prepaid call. Always check if the prepaid offer has two different rates depending on what number you dial to access the service.)