MEDA Broadband Committee Meeting
December 14, 2020
2pm

Present:  Tracy McIntyre (Chair), Anne Boothe, Stephen Walter, Elvis Nuno, Steve Simonson, Russ Fletcher, Brian Obert, Allison Corbyn, Tom Kaiserski, Geoff Feiss, Paul DeWolfe, Michael Mattmiller, Paul Reichert, Austin Trunkle, Karl Unterschuetz, Mehmet Casey, Mary Roehr, and Gloria O'Rourke.


Broadband Legislative Priorities
After much discussion, the document was edited as below.

**For Review by the MEDA Legislative Committee and the MEDA Board   12/14/2020**

**MEDA NEXTGEN BROADBAND COMMITTEE KEY THEMES TO ADDRESS WITH LEGISLATION**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of ubiquitous access to optimized high-performance broadband.  Ensuring broadband connectivity is a lead role for economic development.  Key MEDA priorities for 2021 therefore are to encourage investment in high-performance broadband infrastructure and to eliminate or reduce barriers to broadband deployment.  In this regard, MEDA recommends the following public policy initiatives:

⇒  **Mapping Coordination and Integration**

Work with existing mapping efforts at the Federal and State level, such as the Federal Communications Commission's Digital Opportunity Data Collection, National Broadband Availability Map, Montana State Library, and the Broadband DATA Act, to ensure that Montana can accurately identify unserved and underserved locations and focus efforts where broadband is most needed.

⇒  **Defining Sufficient Level of Connectivity**

The definition of "broadband" is evolving.  Broadband infrastructure should be scalable to meet current and future demand for upload and download capacity, latency, reliability and other factors as defined by the customer, regardless of the technology used with the goal of universal access of 1 gigabit.

Not only should broadband facilities and infrastructure be *available* to consumers, it also should be *accessible*.  In cases where broadband is available, but not adopted by consumers, factors such as age, income, education and relevance play a role in low adoption.

When developing broadband investment policies, MEDA supports efforts to close both availability and accessibility gaps in Montana.

⇒  **Encourage investment in high-performance broadband by providers in unserved and underserved locations with consideration of the following policy elements:**
  a.      Reduce the cost of capital expenditure needed by private entities to deploy broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas
             i. See for example Wyoming's broadband services grant program, enacted in 2018 (SF0100)

b. Promote broadband adoption (affordability, education, etc.)  programs to expand economic opportunity while increasing demand (and return on investment) for broadband products and services

c. Remove tax disincentives and other barriers to deployment, such as excessive fees, permitting processes, access to right of way, regulatory or administrative delays, etc.

d. Consider public-private partnerships and government collaboration where appropriate as well as other collaborative relationships among broadband stakeholders to encourage broadband investment in unserved and underserved areas.

e. Utilize Board of Investments (i.e., greater flexibility with Infrastructure Loan Program) and other funding sources to support broadband investment in unserved and underserved areas.

f. Investigate the practicality of the law found in Montana Code Annotated 2019 2-17-603, Government Competition with Private Internet Services Providers Prohibited –Exceptions, to determine its value for Montana.  NOTE:  This was changed by the MEDA Board to read:  Explore the role of competition in the marketplace and its impact on broadband in MT

⇒ **Focus on Closing Montana's Digital Divide**

a. Create a source of leadership dedicated to establishing and executing broadband strategies for Montana.

b. Encourage innovative local grass roots efforts to seek solutions to connectivity.

**Next steps:**

- Share with MEDA Legislative Committee ASAP and then MEDA Board on December 17th
- Coordinate with Governor Elect
- Engage partners such as MLCT, MACo, etc.