

MEDA Broadband Committee Meeting
December 4, 2020
9am

Present: Tracy McIntyre, Chair; Stephen Walter, Paul Tuss, Brett Simons, Austin Trunkle, Allison Corbyn, Karl Unterschuetz, Tom Kaiserski, Geoff Feiss, Paul DeWolfe, Mehmet Casey, Mary Roehr, Adam Vauthier, Jennie Stapp, and Gloria O'Rourke.

DRAFT BROADBAND COMMITTEE KEY THEMES TO ADDRESS WITH LEGISLATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of ubiquitous access to 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:

1. 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, 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.

2. 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.

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.

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- 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.
4. Focus on Closing Montana's Digital Divide
- Create a source of leadership dedicated to establishing and executing broadband strategies for Montana.

Notes:

- Other state programs have flaws; yet could be a guide for Montana
- Outreach to key partners such as MLCT, MACo, etc,
- Watch for December 8th announcement for how Montana's legislative session will be held. "Rules of the Road" pending
- Data cap discussion

<https://gregformontana.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Montana-Come-Back-Plan.pdf>

Next steps:

- Share with entire Broadband Committee and once again share any edits on December 14th meeting.
- Share with MEDA Legislative Committee ASAP and then MEDA Board on December 17th
- Coordinate with Governor Elect
- Engage partners such as MLCT, MACo, etc.