

MEDA Broadband Committee Meeting
February 8, 2021
2pm

Present: Steve Simonson, Steve Walter, Tracy McIntyre, Charlotte Lauerman, Geoff Feiss, Paul Tuss, Elvis Nuno, Russ Fletcher, Karl Unterschuetz, Mehmet Casey, Michael Mattmiller, Allison Corbyn, Bethany Chinadle, Mary Roehr, and Gloria O'Rourke.

Review of Bill List:

HB181 – Reauthorize e-rate broadband program; e-rate is a program for schools; you can get credit for serving schools. This is a federal program; the bill allows schools and libraries to use funding from this program for matching funds for special construction under the e-rate program. It is likely all of the \$2m funding won't be spent. Local match is needed; this fund provides state match for those local dollars. MTA supported it. Momentum is good. Watch.

LC1539 – authorize municipalities to operate broadband utilities. MEDA removed this LC from its list. Municipalities can come in and do broadband if there is no other provider. 2-17 603 It is likely the bill won't go very far. Watch.

Discussion

Pro: can be done right; services are provided. Encourages competition and the state statute limits competition.

Con: Chattanooga provided funds subsidized by electric utility; have a non-union state. Very risky business to put taxpayer money at risk for public venture, especially with lack of expertise. Compete against private sector with public money.

In the chat:

Chattanooga, Tenn., Makes Economic Case for Municipal Broadband
According to a 10-year study, the municipally owned broadband utility of Chattanooga, Tenn., has brought about economic benefits in the billions. The research could play an important role in future political debates.

<https://matr.net/news/chattanooga-tenn-makes-economic-case-for-municipal-broadband/>

Montana

Mon. Code Ann. § 2-17-603

Montana state laws only allow municipalities to offer broadband services if there are no other private companies offering broadband within the municipality's jurisdiction, or if the municipality can offer "advanced services" that are not available from incumbents. For municipalities that are currently offering broadband service, local authorities must

alert their subscribers if a private company decides to enter the market. The law also states that the municipality “may chose” to discontinue their own service within 180 days of the arrival of a private company, though it’s unclear whether the municipality must discontinue service.

Montana’s mostly rural landscape and lack of connectivity means that these rules effectively only come into play in urban areas where private telecom companies are operating. And yet, there are no municipal broadband services available in Montana, save for a “community fiber network,” in Bozeman.

LC2678 – Package of bills – create broadband coordinator, dig once policy; still in the works.

LC2877 - State Library bill. No language yet.

SB51 – Exempting certain fiber optic from property taxation. Appears to be passing. Could hurt local tax revenue. MEDA support.

Allison’s Draft Legislation

Create programs on the following goals:

1. End digital divide: connectivity and match
2. Addressing the affordability of access:
3. Create a central point of contact for broadband: Dept. of Commerce

Discussion:

- Is 100/100 service adequate?
- Russ - I pay for 400 Mbps from Spectrum. I just ran a speed test and I'm at 53.3. Russ’s point is a company may SAY a particular speed, but it is not delivered.
- Leave it to the FCC to set what is best?
- Use Bonus points or a tiered system for underserved areas; no service customers would love 25/3. Missoula slow speed services, not so much.
- Telemedicine should be at least 5 – 10 upload; some use 12/2

Conclusion: Allison will update the document and share with the group.

Feedback by Friday at Noon; meet again Monday, February 15th, 1pm.

In the chat:

Blackfoot Communications Is Expanding Its Home and Business Internet Service Coverage

Blackfoot Communications today announced plans for bringing fiber-based broadband internet services to portions of Western Montana, including areas around Georgetown Lake, the far southern portions of the Bitterroot Valley, the Highway 12 corridor west of Lolo and the Swan Valley.

<https://matr.net/news/blackfoot-communications-is-expanding-its-home-and-business-internet-service-coverage/>

Starlink already has 10,000 users, according to a SpaceX FCC filing

The filing says most Starlink customers can expect internet download speeds of at least 100Mbps with fewer than 31 milliseconds of latency. That download speed number is key, as it would put Starlink's service well above the average speed users get in several states.

<https://matr.net/news/starlink-already-has-10000-users-according-to-a-spacex-fcc-filing/>

Thought: What about offering subsidies for remote residents to help them subscribe to Starlink?

Think you need fast internet speeds to stream Netflix, Amazon or Sling TV smoothly? Think again.

https://www.wsj.com/graphics/faster-internet-not-worth-it/?mod=article_inline

The Truth About Faster Internet_ It's Not Worth It

How about asking MEDA members what they think is a minimal acceptable speed level?