

MEDA Broadband Committee Meeting

March 22, 2021

2pm

Present: Tracy McIntyre, Chair; Paul Tuss, Karl Unterschuetz, Bethany Chinadle, Charlotte Lauerman, Geoff Feiss, Andy Shirliff, Stephen Walter, Russ Fletcher, Brian Obert, Steve Simonson, Jennie Stapp, and Gloria O'Rourke.

Select Committee HB632

Geoff Feiss reported on the work of the HB632 committee to begin processing the Federal funds coming in via American Rescue Plan Act. \$350m was recommended last week to deploy broadband. Director Osterman outlined a multi-layer structure to utilize the funds. SB297 would contain matching funds. The ability to match may be an issue with local entities. Stephen Walter said Montana Sky has some concerns, such as the set bandwidth speeds. Low Earth Orbiting Satellites (LEOS) – no office in Montana.

Is now the time to beat the drum for right-of-way access? HB494 is moving through the legislature with the dig once bill. Agreement was reached to put all issues and barriers on the table.

Service providers need time to get things done, whatever is passed. Spectrum in Wyoming had to return funds because of the delay in receiving permits.

Concerns: Shortage of glass, the right sand, and workforce to install the fiber.

SB297: Amendments are in the works. Until the new language is known, this committee will support. Bethany said it is important that projects already in planned format can be eligible for funding.

Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF)

HR133: Passed congress in December. Allison will share a document with information.

Next Steps

- Clarify barriers to broadband, including issues with workforce, supply, right of way, etc.
- Meet again April 5th; 30 minutes.