

MEDA NextGen Broadband Committee

November 9, 2020

2:00pm

Present: Steve Simonson, Paul Tuss, Anne Boothe, Charles Robison, Adam Vauthier, Tracy McIntyre, Bethany Chinadle, Jerry, Allison Corbyn, Geoff Feiss, Mehmet Case, Austin Trunkle, Brian Obert, Russ Fletcher, Brit Fontenot, Michael Mattmiller, Todd Kaiser and Gloria O'Rourke

Wyoming Legislation:

<https://www.wyoleg.gov/Legislation/2018/SF0100>.

1. **Geoff Feiss- Montana Broadband Providers insight and legislative work being done**

Geoff shared regarding the Wyoming legislation statute and the CARES Act funding. The statute provides \$10m one-time only appropriation including 50% match, public private partnership, speeds, community support, etc. None of the funding has been spent as the language is being re-worked to perfect the bill. In summary, the bill could not just be picked up and dropped in to fit Montana.

Geoff encouraged everyone to review the KINs report on Broadband.

<https://mainstreetmontanaproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Attachment-7 - Interconnectivity-Telecommunications.pdf>

Geoff noted the tax situation can be as high as 400x for telco's if they place fiber into a home and Montana needs to address its tax code. Public lands can be a restriction to fiber deployment as well as prevent maintenance.

Bethany shared that as a provider, millions have been invested in our towns; when other providers are invited, it diminishes that investment.

Geoff noted there is a challenge option in the Wyoming legislation.

Geoff mentioned legislation pending for 2021

- Reduce the burden of railroad crossing costs for deployment
- Reintroduce economic affairs LC0971 which was [SB 239](#) AN ACT EXEMPTING CERTAIN FIBER OPTIC OR COAXIAL CABLE FROM PROPERTY TAXATION

Discussion:

- KINs report talks about bonding for funding broadband. Bonding raises questions with Montana legislators.
- One of the things this committee could try to influence is Right of Way Taxes etc. Not having concrete examples of how companies are being impacted will limit the ability of the committee to lobby successfully. Geoff was asked to let the company know (the company he used in his example) of our interest and give them the opportunity to contact the committee.

- Lack of broadband in MT is a bottleneck for business growth. Would the WY legislation be an effective approach for MT? Ask: what is it we are trying to fix? How can we measure the fix? There is a digital divide because of one or two large shareholder companies that do not invest in MT. Would legislation solve this problem?
- There is a difference between “I don’t like my provider” with “I have nothing available.”
- What one thing would you pick to move forward? Geoff responded: federal programs from at least two agencies that have invested over 100 million per year for MT broadband and maintenance. It would be great if larger companies, such as Century Link, provided service to their unsupported areas. Federal funds are helping but the challenge is to engage those key large companies. Also, review and change Montana’s tax policy.
- ReConnect program – has maps and layers for urban and rural areas.
- Strong direction for better access. Too many areas without service.
- Support what was formerly SB239.
- Using WY sample, begin drafting Montana legislation, specifically grant funds to support growth.
- Invite the Governor elect to visit this group and learn of his intentions
- Michael Mattmiller offered to share data Microsoft has collected regarding broadband.
<https://news.microsoft.com/rural-broadband/>

Suggested to do in the future:

- Truly identify the digital divide and identify true needs.
- Change from using Census data to reflect broadband

2. Montana Map Ap

Jennie sent an email that NTIA approved our Montana map application. Next step is to identify users.

3. Steve Simonson- overview of discussion with Wyoming Broadband Coordinator

Steve reported on his conversation with Wyoming’s Broadband Coordinator. WY made some right decisions back in 2018 which made it easy for the state to give them several million dollars in CARES Act funding. WY offered to assist MT in moving forward. Best practices: right of ways on highway, use business and health corridors, minimum speeds 25/3 for residential and 1 g for businesses. Steve asked everyone to review Russ Fletcher’s post regarding Colorado today. Job creation – community colleges and educators jumped on obtaining the fiber and cable. WY set up a quasi-governmental interface and created a public private partnership to expend funds.

4. Open discussion- setting next steps

1. More political homework needs to be done – review MN broadband legislation
<https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/SessionDaily/Story/15257>
2. Contact Governor Elect and learn of his plans and be prepared to have our ideas in hand, ready to share.

3. Learn from info gleaned from being a part of the Mapping Project – then start talking to legislators and Governor.
4. Determine next steps regarding State Library legislation proposal.
5. Create a Summary Subcommittee to compile a brief on what this committee recommends. Committee: Tracy, Brian, Steve, Michael and Allison.
6. Write legislation