
From: Bonnie Blader <blader.bonnie9@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, May 08, 2015 7:43 AM
To: BOCrfc2015
Subject: Comment on obstacles for broadband coverage in rural communities

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the struggle to acquire broadband in rural unserved communities. I am the co-chair of the Lexington Broadband Initiative in the town of Lexington, Greene County, NY. Acquiring broadband in our community was recognized as a community goal in a planning period after our town was hard hit by Hurricane Irene. I live in the Catskills, in one of two of the poorest NY counties. Lexington is the most unserved town, in terms of broadband, in the county.

Rural towns with small populations and little commercial presence have a tough time attracting a provider because of the miles that need to be covered, and the low per mile population over the covered area. You have to be "in the way" as one individual in the telecom business informed me months ago.

Even grants (RUS, USDA) are not enough of an attraction to providers because the federal grants in particular are notoriously complicated, the reporting requirements are extremely onerous (I have been told by providers) and many of the larger players in the broadband arena simply don't see the advantage of the grant outweighing the staff buildup needed to file necessary reports; they don't want to accommodate federal wage or hiring demands that may be a part of the picture, and the profitability after buildout isn't going to be enough to compensate the providers for their commitment in most cases.

Unserved rural towns know what Broadband will bring them: more residents, younger residents, people working from home offices, longer stays by second homeowners, a leveled playing field for students, and an uptick in clean small scale commercial activity. This ought to be an incentive for legislators to find a better way to help them acquire broadband than their simply being lucky enough to "be in the way," or in our case, to be lucky enough to have a small company in the next county willing to consider us and partner with us. Why? In the end, it allows them to complete a fiber ring and redundancy into their existing service area. In essence, we *are* in the way.

If broadband coverage is seen as important... and we all know how important it is, what an engine for renewal it will be... continuing to depend on a lucky public/private alliance to get there is not the way to get universal coverage. Grants offers will not necessarily bring the bigger companies to the table; in fact, it is difficult to even get them to respond to solicitations. There is no mandate, no quid pro quo, that makes them accountable to the national initiative to bring broadband to all locations. Even if a legislative mandate is rejected as "too much government," there could be some effort made to answer their lobbied requests with a demand that they commit themselves to address broadband needs in both rural and urban unserved areas.

I have nothing but praise for the small company we will partner with to secure grant funding for our Broadband initiative (Margaretville Telephone Company in Delaware County, NY) and nothing but disdain for the Verizons and Time Warners who turn their backs on any sense of obligation to any common good, in spite of their enormous profits.

In summary, not only is the federal grant process an arcane and difficult process for any company, but so too is the constantly duplicated and exhausting process each unserved town must commit itself to in order attract a provider partner when no legislative mandate demands that providers take on unserved communities. "There is no hammer," as the County Broadband Committee Chair explained to me at the beginning of our pursuit of

coverage. I am grateful and proud of the ground we've covered, but I know it isn't the the best way or likely way to bring broadband to all communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Bonnie Blader
Co-Chair, Lexington Broadband Initiative