

NTIA Conference 2015

Remarks from Jill Szuchmacher, Director of Business Development, Google Fiber

Deb Socia: I really enjoyed listening to the speakers this morning as I'm sure you did as well, and some of the takeaways for me, one of them was Senator King's comments on there may not be a silver bullet but there is a silver shotgun, in other words there are many, many ways to solve problem and we're going to need all of them. I appreciate Rep. Higgins' comment about TeleHealth and the Island Institute's comments about bringing back our young people. Both of those are comments I hear from Next Century Cities on a regular basis about the importance of having an internet in their communities. I loved Elin's advice about building a network of champions at the city level. At Next Century Cities we really believe in local leadership and the strength and power of local leadership.

One of the most common questions I get as Executive Director of Next Century Cities is do you know anybody at Google, and could you get Google to come to my community. Today I'm going to pass this question on to someone who knows the answer better than anyone else.

Jill Szuchmacher began working at Google in 2006 and brings over 20 years of experience working at the intersection of technology and media in her current role as Director of Expansion of Google Fiber. Please join me in welcoming Jill Szuchmacher.

Jill Szuchmacher: Hello everyone, good morning. It's been great to be here this morning. I have not actually not, even though I am based in New York, I have not spent that much time with Google Fiber in New England as I'm sure many of you know. It's nice to be here and hear a lot more about what folks are doing and thinking about here in Maine.

As Deb mentioned, my name is Jill Szuchmacher and I head up expansion for Google Fiber. That means my team works with cities, utilities, and other key partners in order to bring Google Fiber to a growing list of cities in the U.S.

Given the focus of today I'll focus my comments this morning specifically on what cities can do, not just with Google Fiber, but more generally to encourage high speed internet deployment. I'll share a little bit about the history of Google Fiber itself, because that might be an interesting story, and then I'll share a bit about our experiences using best practices from working with some of our existing fiber cities and hopefully we'll leave you with a few things to think about.

First the history of Google Fiber, five years ago Google put out an RFI to see if there are any U.S. cities that would be interested in working with us to build a local gigabyte network. We expected maybe eight, maybe ten submissions and we weren't really sure at all what the proposals would look like. We were overwhelmed and surprised and delighted when we received well over a thousand proposals from cities who were very excited and urged us to choose them to bring a gig to. Cities were incredibly eager to work with us, Topeka, Kansas as some of you might recall actually changed the name to Google, Kansas for a day which is a little overwhelming. Many cities organized city wide rallies and produced amazingly created pitch videos that were really amazing to see.

One of the things that we learned through our process, we chose Kansas City and then we worked with Austin, Texas as our second fiber city and one of the things we learned is that demand was really only one part of the puzzle when it comes to building these types of networks. I'm sure many of you folks who work actually in city government, my next comments will probably resonate with you because one of the things we learned was how very hard it is actually to do, to build or deploy fresh city wide infrastructure.

In Kansas City and Austin we made announcements of our intentions first, and then began the planning work which really both started the clock in the minds of residents and the mind of cities in terms of expectations of when would fiber come and how long would this take. We hadn't even begun to understand the permitting processes, what construction requirements would be, understanding the right of way, pole access, all this stuff that goes into building a large scale network before you deploy and start construction of thousands and thousands of miles of fiber. We knew there had to be a better way and a more efficient way, so that's why last year we published a Google Fiber checklist to work with cities on an upfront joint planning process.

The checklist is a simple concept and maybe some of you have downloaded and read it. Since city wide fiber construction is such a big project the checklist provides an actionable plan to help cities and providers, not just us, get ready ahead of time. It's a selection of best practices recommended by Fiber to the Home Council, Gig-U, and other industry experts some of who are probably in the room today.

The goal is really to have a tool for any city that's preparing for any fiber builder. It's really not specific to Google Fiber.

Now that we've had a chance to work through the checklist with a number of cities, there's a few best practices that I'd like to share this morning.

First, have a strong vision for what abundant high speed internet can do for your community, both as it relates to speed and as it relates to access. As a provider we want to know that if we invest in building a network in your city your residents and businesses will want to use it. It seems simple but it is actually something that is important to think about. Your mayor and your city leadership team should be able to pitch the local need for speed to potential providers, and again this is not specific to Google Fiber at all, there's many, many solutions to this question and that network provider might be actually a municipal solution. It doesn't necessarily have to be a commercial provider like us.

It's also really important to understand the specific digital divide issues in your community and have a plan to address that. Every city is different. In Provo for example it's mostly seniors who are not connected and I would imagine that would be a similar situation here in Maine. The challenge looks different in Nashville, in San Antonio, and Charlotte, and each of the other cities we're working in. One best practice that we've seen was in the city of Raleigh, where they did a proactive study on the digital divide long before we started our engagement with them, looking at what the barriers were in Raleigh for their residents. Was it literacy, was it relevance, was it affordability, and then took those results and implemented what they call "Digital Connectors" which is actually a leadership development program for young people ages 14-21 that they set up to better connect their community.

The leadership in Raleigh had done that work before we started our conversation about bringing fiber and also AT&T is bringing fiber there, and also Frontier is bringing fiber to some parts of the triangle.

As of today Raleigh and some of the other cities in the triangle are in a great place to partner with us and other providers to ensure their entire community is served.

The second learning I'd like to share is the need to prepare your city organizationally. This is something my team cares deeply about; we work very closely with cities. These are large scale infrastructure projects and in our experience cities can best prepare for and manage these projects by creating a cross functional working group that's ready to act as dedicated liaisons with network providers.

For example in Nashville 12 departments were represented at every meeting, public works, planning, fire, GIS, police, everyone. The goal was to have the team that was ultimately going to process and approve the permits all in the same room to make sure that the processes could scale for a large scale network deployment.

The third learning I'd like to share is really the key pillar of our checklist which is your city should do everything it can to know what resources you have and then store them in a shareable format. We've had cities who didn't even know, couldn't identify where their public right of way was, did not have any digital assets so they had all the maps on paper. These types of investments are actually really important for any network provider coming in, needs to know where to put stuff in the right of way, so that's really critical.

Last but not least and this is hopefully actionable for all of you which is that cities can explore ways to play an active role in facilitating faster, less disruptive construction and there are a couple suggestions that we have here. One is dig once, this has been brought up earlier this morning and I'm sure it will continue in the afternoon. If you're doing road improvement work think about laying fiber or underground conduit while the streets are already open, ask new developers to install fiber in their buildings right next to copper and plumbing, require communications providers to install oversized conduit banks as they build or repair their networks. Implement one touch make ready, you can also consider requiring one touch relocations along utility poles, this is really wonky so the folks in the room who work with right of way this will make sense, folks who do other types of policy maybe none of this will make sense. Often when a new provider is building there's a lot of work that has to be done on the utility pole and it could take months of sequential work, multiple visits to a pole, lots of traffic disruption all to facilitate the construction of new fiber on poles. Cities can take action here to modernize right away and to require that all make ready moves be made at one time with the preapproved contractor.

Hopefully these are some helpful steps to becoming more fiber friendly and are good ways to start conversations with any provider, including starting a conversation to think about if this might be a solution for folks and cities to pursue on their own.

Thank you so much, hope this was helpful and enjoy the rest of the day. Take care.

END