

# Removing Barriers to Connecting Communities

Congress should act now to standardize and streamline permitting for fiber deployment.

With a historic investment of government and private sector funds in broadband on the horizon, Congress should move quickly to remove barriers to broadband deployment. All policies should be viewed through the lens of connecting communities—from expedited permitting to retirement requirements that companies sustain outdated networks rather than devote those resources to deploying next generation networks, to rooting-out discriminatory and anti-competitive pole attachment rates and rules. Congress should chart a clear and collaborative infrastructure policy course that encourages all to invest with confidence in our nation's broadband future.

- ▶ **Permitting Reform in Conjunction with Next Generation Technologies:** Permitting delays and denials impede network providers from deploying broadband in a cost effective and timely way. To prepare for the influx of broadband builds enabled by BEAD and ARPA projects, Congress should act now to standardize and streamline permitting for fiber deployment on federal lands. Quick and decisive action will increase the speed and reach of broadband deployments and prevent added costs due to unnecessary delays.

## INTERAGENCY BROADBAND COORDINATION

For decades, there has been little to no coordination among different Executive Branch agencies that offer meaningful broadband support programs. While the goal should be to connect everyone to broadband, instead, the USDA, the FCC and various stimulus grants over the years have often appeared to compete with one another. Instead of focusing on those Americans who are the hardest to reach and have no service at all, these various federal broadband programs defined and redefined the definition of broadband service. This has allowed overbuilding of existing networks, even those funded in part by other government broadband support programs. As a result, the same easier-to-serve areas receive faster and faster service, while those living in hard-to-reach areas are left without any service.

Requiring all government broadband programs to make distributions based on the FCC's new broadband maps can break the decades-long cycle of overbuilding to ensure that the hardest-to-reach communities are finally connected.

## MODERN BROADBAND NETWORKS DESERVE A CONTEMPORARY REGULATORY APPROACH

Coordination requirements ensure the efficient allocation of broadband funds, avoid funding duplications and move us closer to 100 percent connectivity. While the interagency coordination directives in The Broadband Interagency Coordination Act of 2020 are a step in the right direction, they fall short of the binding requirements needed to ensure all federal broadband programs are working in concert. Congress should pass legislation that requires the federal government agencies administering these programs to certify that no other federal or state broadband dollars have been awarded to a project area before awarding new funds.

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In addition, states should be required to report where they've made awards of funding, even before a project's completion. This will help avoid federal-state overbuilding that diverts funding from truly unserved and underserved locations.

### **REMOVE THE TAX ON BROADBAND GRANTS**

Congress allocated approximately \$42 billion through the BEAD program to move us toward 100 percent connectivity. However, carriers awarded BEAD and other broadband grants will have to return approximately 21 percent of those grants in the form of federal taxes. A 21 percent tax reduction means as many as one in every five broadband projects cannot be built, which essentially assures BEAD will fall well short of its 100 percent connectivity goal. Carriers are planning now, evaluating potential broadband project bids based on a number of factors, including supply chain availability, labor costs, permitting impediments and matching projects with available funds. To ensure as many Americans as possible are connected, Congress must act soon to make clear that BEAD and other federal broadband grant program funds should remain in the communities they aim to serve—rather than be taxed back to Washington.

### **SUPPLY CHAIN**

Several events including the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest and manufacturing shortages have disrupted global supply chains. Broadband providers face even greater supply chain challenges as the demand for and cost of network equipment rises as providers plan for an unprecedented scale of broadband deployments enabled by BEAD and other programs. Timely access to supplies is crucial to completing BEAD and other projects on time.

USTelecom supports Build America, Buy America and investments in new American manufacturing. At the same time, we are concerned the increased American manufacturing will not be operational in time for providers to purchase the network components needed to complete BEAD deployments and other builds. For example, smaller broadband providers have been informed that the wait for American fiber optic cable could be as long as three years. Congress should ensure that broadband providers can purchase supplies from our nation's trusted partners until the new American manufacturing base comes online.