

To: Recchia Chris <Chris.Recchia@state.vt.us>  
From: Stephen Whitaker <Whitaker.Stephen@gmail.com>  
Subject: workshop - road show idea  
Cc: Epler-Wood Greg <Greg@mediavox.tv>, davitian@cctv.org, "Larkin, Charles" <charlesflarkin@gmail.com>  
Bcc:  
Attached:

Commissioner:

It just occurred to me, building on the speakers bureau concept in my message yesterday to Charlie, that the Access Media Organizations around the state could or should be your best avenue to inform, educate and elicit responses from the public toward the comprehensive rewrite of the Ten Year Telecommunication Plan. You would need to find some budget for this to work.

The AMOs, (I believe there are 14) have a vested interest as their purpose and future existence revolve around telecommunication technology, the IP transition and community feedback and support.

If an educational/survey WORKSHOP program, a travelling road show of sorts, was convened under the 10year plan imperative, the AMOs could each host and promote one local workshop bringing together the diverse stakeholders in their service areas. These would also be recorded for repeated broadcast on the 30+ PEG channels. UVM should be involved in designing the survey component to assure proper methodology and credible results.

The design of the program must necessarily not be skewed toward any particular telcom vendor or technology, but instead be an exploration of the available options, existing technology offerings, state networks, Velco L3, etc., and the costs and benefits (and limitations) of various

build-out scenarios. I.e. wireless, fiber, coax, cellular, satellite, municipal.

I believe it is extremely important that just because we're ten years behind, that this process should not be rushed toward a less than credible document. Of equal importance to the document, is the reinvigorating the public's engagement in owning the process and using the plan going forward to steer government, education, non-profit and public investment in our telecommunication future.

Finding the right team of presenters, who can offer insight into today's public, private and government networks and our future choices, without coming off as skewed or gospel, will be key to making this work. No one will believe the "We're the government. We're here to help." attitude.

I can well imagine that almost every agenda peddling vendor or party will want to muscle into the presentation and argue their (obvious) benefits. That will not be as productive as an objective balanced program asking vendors ahead of time only for specific information on coverage areas, speeds available, future plans, obstacles etc. Let the community based organizations' needs take it from there.

The three people who I have cc: with this message are the best available in evaluating the feasibility of, or fleshing out, this proposal. Not exploring its strengths and weaknesses could result in a less than complete plan and a rocky adoption process.

-SW

To: "Larkin, Charles" <charlesflarkin@gmail.com>  
From: Stephen Whitaker <Whitaker.Stephen@gmail.com>  
Subject: hearing comments and Berkman Center Broadband Study  
Cc: Recchia Chris <Chris.Recchia@state.vt.us>, dgram@ap.org  
Bcc: jdillon@vpr.net, hniles@vtdigger.org  
Attached:

Charlie:

Only three people total at the public hearing on the Ten Year Telecommunications Plan! Yourself, me and the woman in St. Albans. Of all the VIT sites statewide, that's the best turnout DPS could inspire. Sad indeed.

We were outnumbered by DPS staff, two to one!

Too bad the press corps has been cut to the bone since we last worked this. Dave Gram certainly brought attention to the plan and it's missing in action status back in the Nynex days.

I spoke to someone at the restaurant/bar afterwards and he lamented that he moved his business here and absolutely needed broadband. The best solution they could offer was to tether his cell phone to his computer and hold the cell phone in the air at a certain window at a certain angle and yet they called it broadband! Comic tragedy.

I sent you a copy of my reply to Commissioner Chris Reccia.

I'd appreciate your blunt opinion on the concern Chris raised. Did it appear to you that I was disrespectful to his staff? Intolerant, definitely. They all strike me as more complacent bureaucrat than advocates.

The DPS staff had also probably been briefed to watch out for me as it

was very likely my demands for the plans, drafts and correspondence related to the missing plans that actually forced their hand to get the process started again. So in a sense, they may have been feeling that I personally dragged them out on a rainy winter night to demand that they listen to the two of us.

I have very little patience for those collecting a public salary while pretending to advocate, leaving the public's interest flapping in the breeze or worse, under the bus. Same for Jim Porter lying to me about the maps.

The pitiful turnout at the meeting was also an example of the intangible cost of having not done a real plan in ten years. Public engagement and ownership of the process has atrophied.

The DPS may need to develop or hire a speakers' bureau to visit schools, chambers of commerce, planning commissions, etc. to inform and elicit ideas and cultivate ownership of the planning process, restore the public's voice in the future of Vermont's telecommunications.

High school and college students could be invited to submit essays on how they would like to use Vermont's telecommunications infrastructure and services in the future, prior to and after they graduate. This discussion should not be defined by simply allowing the proverbial market forces to determine our options.

Jim Porter's excuse that the Legislature required that all the infrastructure information be exempt from public records laws indicates to me that the Department failed to advocate when the bill was being drafted and debated to preclude such a limiting provision be in the final bill. They were also somewhat emasculated from doing so as it would have forced them to acknowledge that their three revisions of the plan were not done as required by statute.

The fallout continues.

Here is a link to the FCC sponsored study by the Beckman Center. Let me know if you find anything exciting in it. I'll seek out the Vermont Supreme Court decision remanding the VOIP docket to the PSB.  
[http://transition.fcc.gov/stage/pdf/Berkman\\_Center\\_Broadband\\_Study\\_13Oct09.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/stage/pdf/Berkman_Center_Broadband_Study_13Oct09.pdf)

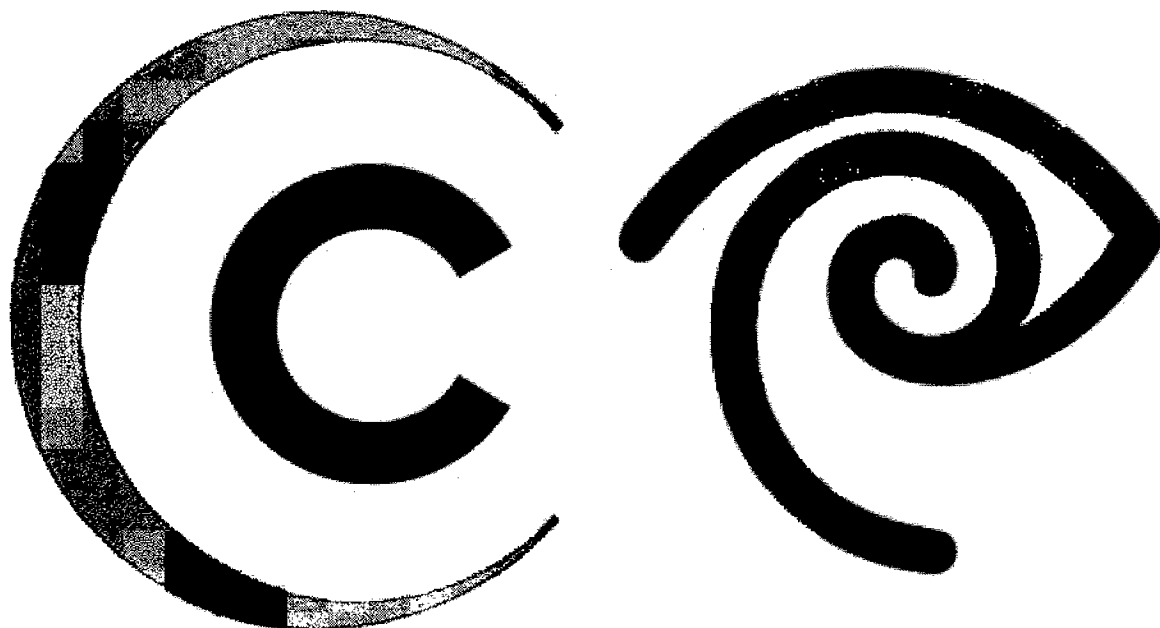
I hope Dave Gram will find time to do a story on the three missing plans, the three person hearing and the dubious definition of broadband success.

We should request a video and a transcript of the hearing to use as an outline for our further elaboration and to provide to Dave Gram.

-SW

## Comcast Calling: Shumlin Backs a Donor's Mega-Merger

By PAUL HEINTZ @PAULHEINTZ



If federal regulators approve Comcast's \$45 billion takeover of Time Warner Cable, the juggernaut will control 16 of the nation's top 20 cable television markets and 35 percent of its high-speed internet service areas.

That prospect has groups such as Consumers Union, **Howard Dean's** Democracy for America and Burlington's CCTV Center for Media & Democracy trying to change the channel.

"A merger between the nation's two largest cable companies would inevitably lead to unprecedented gatekeeper control over our nation's telecommunications and media landscape," those groups and 62 others wrote Monday in a letter to the Federal Communications Commission.

Cable and broadband customers alike, they argued, would face higher prices and fewer choices.

But even as populist politicians such as Sen. **Al Franken** (D-Minn.) and New York City Mayor **Bill De Blasio** raise concerns about the deal, others are cheering it on.

Among them? Gov. **Peter Shumlin** and the Democratic Governors Association he heads.

In a letter he sent the FCC last week, Shumlin praised Comcast's work in Vermont since it acquired Adelphia's cables in 2006. The company, he wrote, has invested nearly \$128 million in expanding broadband access from Burlington to Brattleboro and Newport.

"I look forward to Comcast's continued investment in my state and expect that your approval of this transaction would enhance Comcast's commitment to continue working to bring services to low-income and rural Vermonters," he wrote.

Two days later, DGA executive director **Colm O'Comartun** penned a similar note to the FCC on DGA letterhead. O'Comartun, who reports to Shumlin, urged the feds to "consider Comcast's impressive body of work and all that they do in helping strengthen the middle class and investing in our nation's infrastructure."

Why, exactly, was Shumlin so eager to go to bat for the nation's most powerful telecom corporation?

Because it asked!

According to Shumlin spokeswoman **Sue Allen**, Comcast requested a letter from the governor and his Department of Public Service "stating that Comcast had fulfilled its regulatory requirements" when it replaced Adelphia and "in support of the merger."

Shumlin, Allen says, "told them he would be happy to send such a letter if the [DPS] found it appropriate to do so."

**Todd o'Boyle**, director of media and democracy for Common Cause, the Washington, D.C., good government group, has another explanation: campaign contributions.

"Money buys access. Money influences policy. And money buys favors down the road," he says.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, Comcast donated \$5.3 million last election cycle to candidates for federal office and has already contributed \$3.4 million this cycle. Last year, it spent \$7.7 million on lobbying, the CRP found.

"They've shown they're willing to spend whatever it takes, wherever, from the federal level down to the states — even to the municipal level — to write their own rules," says O'Boyle, whose organization signed Monday's letter opposing the deal.

Indeed, Comcast gave \$9,700 last election cycle to 20 candidates for state office in Vermont — including \$4,000 to Shumlin — according to VT Digger's campaign finance database. Just last month, Comcast ponied up another \$2,000 for the gov.

That money pales in comparison to what Comcast has donated to the DGA, which accepts unlimited contributions from corporations and then doles the money out to its members' reelection campaigns. According to filings with the IRS, Comcast has given \$475,000 to the DGA since Shumlin was elected chairman in late 2012.

"Just think of the purchasing power Comcast has with respect to public officials," says CCTV executive director **Lauren-Glenn Davitian**, whose organization runs Chittenden County's Channel 17 community access station. "Not only can they make mass bulk purchases of programming, they can make mass bulk purchases of public officials."

DGA spokesman **Danny Kanner** did not respond to multiple requests for comment, and Allen denied that Comcast's contributions influenced her boss' decision to put his finger on the scale.

She argues that Shumlin's letter to the FCC was focused on Comcast's "regulatory commitments in Vermont when it acquired Adelphia and its work (as one of many private providers) in bringing more choice and broadband access to Vermonters."

But if the FCC approves the takeover and the Vermont Public Service Board approves a side deal, Vermont would actually end up with fewer cable and internet providers — even though Time Warner Cable doesn't operate in the state. That's because, in order to comply with federal antitrust laws, Comcast plans to shed some customers and trade others with Charter Communications.

The latter company currently serves 8,800 Vermont households — in Barre, Tunbridge, Chelsea, St. Johnsbury and Lyndonville — according to **Jim Porter**, the Department of Public Service's telecom director. That makes Charter second only to Comcast, which serves 113,000 households.

If the deals go through, Comcast would take over all of Charter's Vermont accounts.

Such consolidation won't necessarily stymie competition, Porter argues, because, as in most of the country, Vermont's cable company service areas don't overlap.



"Do we see a problem with that merger? I would say no," Porter says.

Davitian concedes that its impact on Vermont may be limited, but she argues that, nationally, further media consolidation will only hurt consumers — particularly as Comcast assumes more and more control over the internet.

"Having a bigger Comcast does not benefit the public interest," she says. "It's just the opposite of what we're trying to do in Vermont as an economic model. The only reason you'd write a letter like [Shumlin's] is you received a persuasive argument, plus some financial incentives to do so."

*Disclosure: Paul Heintz worked as Peter Welch's communications director from November 2008 to March 2011.*

*The original print version of this article was headlined "Comcast Calling"*

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