

BROADBAND ACTION PLAN

December 15, 2014

The State of Vermont is committed to ensuring that Vermonters have the best available high speed Internet access. Specifically, 30 V.S.A. § 202 (c) (10) states that the intent of Vermont's telecommunications planning and policy law is to “support measures designed to ensure that by the end of the year 2024 every E-911 business and residential location in Vermont has infrastructure capable of delivering Internet access with service that has a minimum download speed of 100 Mbps and is symmetrical.”¹ In the short term, legislation indicates that Vermont must start with those locations that lack service of 4/1 Mbps or better, and provide each with access at these speeds.² Presently, fiber optic cable to the premises (FTTP) provides the best available opportunity to meet the 2024 goal set by the General Assembly. FTTP is capable of providing speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second (Gbps) symmetrical service—far in excess of Vermont's 100/100 Mbps goal. This Action Plan offers a strategy to accomplish the 2024 goal set by the General Assembly.³

- It is projected that the Federal Communication Commission's (FCC) Connect America Fund (CAF) Phase II program will, by 2020, bring universal availability of broadband Internet access at 4/1 to service to census blocks that are completely unserved.⁴
- The State of Vermont's Connectivity Fund (including the High-Cost Program and the Connectivity Initiative)⁵ supported by the Vermont Universal Service Fund, will be directed to bring service to partially-served areas of the state. This will include areas that lack complete access to services meeting the minimum technical objectives (“Objectives”) in place on December 31, 2014⁶, but that are excluded from the CAF II program because they are partially served. This initiative will be aligned with the FCC program for universal availability at 4/1 by 2020. This will require two steps:
 - The Department will work with the Public Service Board to ensure that support from the High Cost Program is directed to these partially served areas.⁷

¹ 30 V.S.A. § 202 (c) (10).

² 30 V.S.A § 7515b (a).

³ 30 V.S.A § 2222b (b)(3) indicates that Secretary of Administration shall have the duty to formulate, on or before December 15, 2014, an action plan to accomplish the goals of universal availability of broadband and mobile telecommunications services.

⁴ Areas eligible for the CAF Phase II program are census blocks in which no locations have internet access service at 4/1 (with data reported as 3 mbps down and 768 kbps up as a proxy for 4/1), or more, from a service provider other than the incumbent LEC. Grant recipients will be required to offer services supporting 4 mbps download speed and 1 mbps upload speed to all supported locations within 5 years of the award, expected in 2015.

⁵ 3 V.S.A § 7516 directs the Fiscal Agent of the Vermont Universal Service Fund to annually determine the amount of monies available to the Connectivity Fund, such funds apportion equally to the High-Cost program and the Connectivity Initiative.

⁶ The Objectives were defined in the 2011 Telecommunications Plan as 4 mbps download speed and 1 mbps upload speed. *See* 30 V.S.A. § 7515b (a).

⁷ 30 V.S.A § 7515(j) indicates that the Board shall adopt procedures to ensure projects funded under this section are not competitive overbuilds of existing wired telecommunications services.

- In identifying areas eligible for Connectivity Initiative grant funding, the Department will develop and employ an inventory of infrastructure that is available or reasonably likely to be available to support provision of services to unserved areas to ensure that the Connectivity Initiative funds are directed to these partially served areas. Although the objectives set a floor for broadband speeds, funding can, and should, be focused on bringing the highest available speeds to those addresses not currently served at 4/1.
- After the goal of universal availability of at least 4/1 is met, the focus will be brought on furtherance of the goal of ensuring universal availability at 100/100. Support will be targeted to locations in order of priority starting with locations with the lowest available speeds.
- The Telecommunications Plan will define the Objectives⁸ to evolve over time as related below.⁹
 - 2014: 4/1
 - 2017: 10/1¹⁰
 - 2020: 100/100¹¹
- The Objectives serve two specific purposes:
 - Locations lacking services at these speeds will be eligible for State support¹², and
 - Grantees accepting State support will be obligated to provide services at these speeds¹³
- The Division for Connectivity will pursue additional strategies to meet the broadband goals outlined in statute, including:
 - Identifying and aggregate shared customer access objectives
 - Developing manageable, replicable deployment models
 - Coordinating opportunities and stakeholders to advance economic development, education, public services, and healthcare
 - Coordinating multiple federal grant programs
 - Providing technical support for funding applications
 - Tapping both private and public funding sources

⁸ 30 V.S.A § 202d(g) directs the Department to review and update the minimum technical service characteristic objectives in the Telecommunications Plan.

⁹ The Objectives will remain at the previous level until commitments are in place to reach all unserved areas at the lower speed.

¹⁰ In June 2014, the FCC issued an FNPRN seeking comments on a proposal to increase the speed requirements for supported services from 4 mbps download speed to 10 mbps. It also sought comment on whether to increase the upload speed from 1 mbps, but did not propose a speed.

¹¹ The Department proposes that the goal of ubiquitous 4/1 set in 30 V.S.A § 7515b(a) should be met by 2020. The Objectives will be increased to 100/100 when the 4/1 goal is met.

¹² 30 V.S.A § 7515b(a) indicates that locations not served according to the Objectives are eligible for support from the Connectivity Initiative.

¹³ 30 V.S.A § 7515b(a) does not specify the specific speeds required for supported services, but the Department finds that these services should meet the Objectives. 30 V.S.A § 2225(e) indicates that the Connectivity Division shall promote the expansion of services that meet the Objectives.

- Giving technical support to State agencies to leverage federal funding