

Committee Questions About Broadband Planning & Execution

By Senator Randy Brock

Responses by David Healy, Town of Calais Delegate to CVFiber

Here are some of the issues of concern to the committee. We are seeking the perspective of a broad range of informed witnesses on these issues and in general on the state and future of broadband in Vermont.

1. In your opinion does Vermont have a broadband strategy?
Response: It is not very well articulated.
2. How important is a statewide telecommunications plan?
Response: Very
3. How many years should such a plan cover?
Response: 3, 5, & 10 Implementation Strategies.
4. What are the essential elements of such a plan.
Response: Statute already has most of them.
5. Who should be in charge of commissioning it and who should do the work (state employees, independent firm, etc.)?
Response: An independent body with an advisory board.
6. What are your thoughts about the state's last draft plan?
Response: Incomplete; lacked implementation strategy; coordinated vision.
7. Vermont has created a short-term broadband plan to expand coverage using federal COVID-19 funds as a result of the pandemic. To the extent that you are familiar with all or part of that plan, what are your thoughts about it?
Response: Goals were good. Delivery will be difficult. Could delay implementation of FTTP based on provided a short-term solution impacting take-rates for a FTTP plans to recover costs.
8. Please comment on Vermont's Communications Union District initiatives.
 - What are the obstacles to success of CUD's and what, if anything, should the General Assembly do to help make them successful?
 - **--Response:** Find ways for CUD's to secure funding
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 - How should conflicts between CUD's and legacy providers be resolved?
 - **--Response:** Not sure-perhaps some clear delineation of roles.
 - Should CUD's have veto power over expansion by other providers in their areas?
 - **--Response:** Yes.
9. How can short-term installation of fixed wireless best integrate with fiber or other long-term solutions?
Response: Require ISP's to deliver a minimum of 100/100 service to every premises by date certain.
10. What are your thoughts regarding Vermont's regulatory environment?
Response: No comment
11. What should management of broadband deployment look like and what agencies of government, if any, should be involved?
Response: A separate state board should be in charge with authority to make things happen with broad advisory bodies. Currently it is too far embedded in DPS.
12. If you wanted to bring broadband at 100/100 to every Vermonter, how would you go about it?
Response: Set up a significant Revolving Loan Fund (\$50 Million) with 0% Interest.
13. To what extent should our thoughts about broadband include cell phone access and availability? Are these technologies so independent of one another that there is no crossover or common denominators in planning?

Response: There is definitely spillover. Given Vermont's terrain it is doubtful that cell service can ever serve the entire state without some integration. Fiber solutions can and do support expansion of broadband. Given the need for cost recovery, providing more cell service may hamper the take rate of CUDs as they roll out their FTTP projects.

14. How should electric utilities be involved in broadband expansion?

Response: Ideally they would be responsible for running fiber everywhere, with CUD's leasing strands and operating the ISPs.

15. Is information about pole attachments and provisioning public or proprietary?

Response: Since you can see all pole attachments from the ground, there would seem to be no need for proprietary, esp. if they are in the public ROW.

16. What else should we be thinking about concerning broadband expansion, economy and execution?

Response: Emergency management, public safety, telehealth, education, etc. Prepare for future pandemics.

17. What are the major impediments to these and what recommendations do you have for us to address them?

Response: Leadership; reinstating the Vermont Telecommunications Authority with expanded roles; finding the necessary funds and revenue raising to do the necessary build. Our electric coops can borrow money very cheaply, but are afraid to go out in areas they have never been.