

Department of Public Service COVID-19 Emergency Broadband Plan

The Department of Public Service is drafting a Broadband Deployment Plan that is tailored to respond to the COVID-19 emergency. The Plan will propose measures that, if fully funded, will achieve universal service and bring broadband capable networks to students, remote workers, teachers, patients, and healthcare workers. The Plan will propose concrete, executable measures that the state can implement. The Plan will include both short term and long-term basis measures. The Plan will also review federal funding opportunities, and describe how those opportunities can be leveraged to increase broadband access. The Department will publish a draft for public comment on Tuesday May 5.

Key Recommendations:

Long Term Broadband Deployment Measures

1. The Department will recommend a broadband deployment program that, if fully funded, provides subsidized support for state-wide fiber deployment.
 - a. Ensure Universal availability of broadband at 100/100 Mbps to all addresses unserved at 25/3 Mbps.
 - b. Funding need ranges from \$85M-\$293M
 - c. Reverse Auction on a town-by-town basis
 - d. Compliments FCC RDOF program
 - e. Reserve pricing uses cost estimates developed in the Magellan Report (*see Map*)
 - f. Grants Communications Union Districts (CUDs) decision making authority over grants made within their borders
2. The Department will recommend modification of 30 V.S.A. § 8091 to provide open access to utility-owned middle-mile fiber.
3. Support further development CUDs
 - a. Provide direct support to communications union districts (“CUDs”) through the state’s Broadband Innovation Grant Program for administrative and grant writing support.
 - b. Provide direct support to CUDs to meet the Letter of Credit obligations imposed by the FCC’s Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (“RDOF”) program.
4. Commercial Mobile Wireless Service
 - a. The State should redirect the \$900,000 capital appropriation, as well as any additional funding available, into a program that supports development of mobile wireless infrastructure to unserved areas.
 - i. Complement FCCs 5G fund
 - ii. Complement T-Mobile merger conditions
 - iii. Provide for First Responder needs
 - b. Recommend implementation of 19 V.S.A 26a(b)
 - c. Continue efforts to streamline licensing of state lands for telecommunications facilities

Short Term Actions:

1. Department will recommend that the state establish a Cable Line Extension Fund, aimed at paying the costs of cable video line extensions attributable to residential customer through PUC Rule 8.00.
2. The Department will review past Connectivity Initiative proposals and recommend whether those projects can be quickly completed.
3. The Department will advocate for legislation aimed at fast tracking or waiving Act 250 and Section 248a processes during the Emergency for wireless facilities installations that will serve locations identified by the state as needing broadband or commercial wireless connectivity now.
4. The Legislature should promptly pass S.301 or H.682 to ensure Section 248a continues to assist the rapid deployment of wireless facilities.
5. The Department will advocate for financial and in-kind support to pole-owning entities that agree to fast-track pole license applications in advance of the summer construction schedule.
6. To standardize and focus efforts within state government in response to the needs of students and patients, the state should organize a working group of professionals both within and outside of government that can collect information on the needs of healthcare workers and educators and coordinate efforts to respond to those needs. This group in partnership with state agencies, including ,PSD, AoE, DoH, DPS, and Libraries will work in a coordinated fashion to identify and direct federal grant draw-down.