

* * * Public Service * * *

Sec. 34a. CRITICAL COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

(a) The purpose of the Critical Communications Infrastructure Program is to improve availability of commercial mobile wireless voice services (CMRS) in areas where those services are currently unavailable.

(b) The Department of Public Service, in cooperation with the Agency of Transportation, shall:

(1) Evaluate CMRS through a driving test of all federal aid highways.

(2) Prioritize road segments identified from the drive test as having no or low-quality voice service using traffic counts and the quantity of E-911 business and residential locations in proximity. In identifying priority road segments, the Department shall seek input on a draft set of priority road segments, including from State agencies and regional planning commissions and any other stakeholders that the Commissioner deems necessary.

(3) Retain an expert to identify search rings, defined as geographic areas in which towers could be deployed to provide mobile wireless service to the priority road segments. In developing the search rings, the expert shall consider the locations of existing tower sites and the optimal extension of existing coverage.

(c) The Department shall develop a program to competitively award grants to facilities-based carriers and tower operators that results in the deployment of new wireless facilities in areas identified for priority in accordance with subsection (b) of this section. In creating the program, the Department shall ensure that the funding is awarded in a manner that:

(1) ensures wireless voice coverage from national facilities-based CMRS carriers;

(2) provides coverage in unserved areas of all Vermont counties; and

(3) provides low-cost or free access to some facilities by Vermont public safety organizations.

(d) In developing the Program, the Commissioner may retain outside consultants for assistance. The Commissioner may also consider neutral host networks in areas that cannot otherwise be supported by the Program.

Sec. 21. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

(Committee Vote 11-0-0)

(3) the amount of \$25,619,184.00 to the Department of Public Service in order to support and accelerate the State's goal of achieving universal access to reliable, high-quality, affordable broadband. This appropriation shall be transferred to the Vermont Community Broadband Fund to make grants through the Broadband Construction Program;

(4) the amount of \$21,500,000.00 to the Department of Public Service for the critical communications expansion program to support mapping, data collection, and the deployment of new mobile wireless installations to improve service along State highways and in population centers; and