



October 12, 2017

MP Dan Ruimy
Chair, Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology
House of Commons
Room 565, 180 Wellington
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6
INDU@parl.gc.ca

RE: Broadband Connectivity in Rural Canada

Dear Mr. Ruimy:

On behalf of Clearwater County Council, below is our submission to the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology's call for briefs on broadband connectivity in rural Canada.

Over the past decade, Clearwater County has initiated numerous dialogues with both the federal and provincial governments, as well as local telecom and internet service providers (ISPs) to voice the need to enhance broadband internet and mobility services in our west-central region of Alberta. Rural Canada needs accessible, affordable and reliable high-speed Internet.

Simply put, access to broadband allows Canadians to fully participate in the digital economy and take advantage of quality of life services, including telehealth, e-learning and access to government and social services. Access to broadband enhances community viability, economic competitiveness and the ability to attract and retain business and industry.

In order to survive in a global economy, rural communities need access to broadband services to be able to innovate, and to develop and retain a knowledge workforce. Digital equality, being defined as the same access to the internet and internet tools, is integral to Clearwater County and to rural Canada. Rural and remote communities require broadband access to grow and be sustainable.

Clearwater County's Council's perspective regarding the questions posed by the Standing Committee are:



What constitutes acceptable high-speed service?

Clearwater County Council supports the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) statement that broadband access is now a “basic” or “essential” service for Canadians. Council believes that access to broadband Internet is fundamentally important to the economic development, community development and quality of life for the residents of this community, and all rural Canadians.

Clearwater County also supports the CRTC’s current targets of 50 Mbps download/10 Mbps upload for fixed broadband services (by 2021, 90% of homes/businesses); an unlimited data option for fixed services and the latest mobile wireless technology available to all homes, business and along major Canadian roads. However, the infrastructure that is developed must support anticipated advances in technology and growth to meet increasing data and speed demands.

Council believes it is important to clarify the CRTC’s target of 50/10 Mbps for 90% of Canadian households and businesses by 2021. Towns and cities with populations greater than 10,000, in most cases, already have broadband service availability and the population densities and economics support private infrastructure investment in these communities. Council believes it is critical to recognize the population that won’t be addressed through the CRTC targets - the “final mile” are the 10% of the Canadians that are already underserved or have no broadband services available.

Clearwater County strongly believes that grant programs or private sector incentives’ principle focus must be on improving broadband standards in low-density rural, remote and First Nation communities.

It is also important to be future ready, and ensure that broadband speed targets are suitable to the short and medium term, as technological advancements have historically outpaced broadband capacities in rural Alberta.

The financial challenges of implementing high-speed service?

Government (federal, provincial and municipal) needs to work together with the telecoms and ISPs to make broadband available to all Canadians. High capital costs and low return on investment limit the ability for private sector investment in rural Canada. Similarly, government funded fibre and wireless systems create additional demands on limited tax dollars. These public and private financial challenges have resulted in final mile areas not being serviced.



There is a need to create a framework for private/public partnerships that encourage collaborative approaches to better utilizing “dark fibre” and unused radio spectrum.

With the Canadian population shifting towards urban centres, rural communities more than ever need to focus on economic and community development, in order to diversify revenues and remain viable. Broadband access plays an integral role in community development. Partnerships and government funding are critical to achieving broadband access for all Canadians.

Regulatory changes to encourage the implementation of high-speed service?

Cellular and mobile device utilization continues to rapidly increase and the demand for broadband is expected to continue to grow exponentially for the foreseeable future. Access to robust and reliable internet and mobility services remains the single largest barrier to digital advancement for rural communities.

As the regulator of telecommunications, the federal government needs to provide resources and funding that moves us closer to every Canadian having access to broadband, as it truly has become an essential service.

Solutions specific to the middle and final mile/loops are needed. Providing incentives to telecom and ISP providers to foster utilization of existing broadband spectrums, future spectrum purchases and dark fibre would be examples of ways government could help advance the interests of rural Canada.

Again, thank you for the Standing Committee’s consideration of Clearwater County’s submission. Should you have any questions, please contact our Chief Administrative Officer, Ron Leaf at (403) 845-4444 or rleaf@clearwatercounty.ca.

Sincerely,

Pat Alexander, Reeve

cc: Clearwater County Council
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