

Brief for the Pre-budget Consultations
in Advance of the Next Federal Budget

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- **Recommendation 1:** That the government implement a funding program to provide rural areas with high speed Internet.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the government amend CRTC regulations to require Bell Canada to issue support structure permits in a more timely manner.

Body text

The project to build a fibre optic network is critical for the Matawinie Regional County Municipality (RCM). The region is among the poorest in Quebec and has little economic vitality. Matawinie's economic future depends on broadband Internet access.

Located in the northern part of Quebec's Lanaudière region, the Matawinie RCM covers 615 km² and includes 15 municipalities, an unorganized territory and an Atikamekw reserve. Matawinie is the largest territory in the region, accounting for 11% of its population. Rawdon is Matawinie's largest municipality. Over the past few years, most towns have experienced population growth.

The project will require 2,700 km of fibre optic cables to be installed in 15 municipalities to deliver high-speed Internet to 42,500 homes and businesses across Matawinie. The RCM has more than 55,000 electrical/telephone poles, most of which are owned by Hydro-Québec (75%), and the rest by Bell Canada (25%). Vidéotron, Déry Telecom, Nord Fibre and a few others also rent poles from Bell or Hydro-Québec to install their own strands.

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing us to change the way we work. Currently, more and more workers are required to telework. However, most of them cannot because they do not have access to a reliable Internet connection. In Quebec, for example, more than 24,000 households do not have access to high-speed Internet.

High-speed Internet access in outlying areas today is just as essential as electricity was at the start of the 20th century. The construction of fibre optic networks will enable:

- regional economic development;
- business access to innovative, cutting-edge technologies;
- dynamic land occupancy;
- business innovation;
- access to a modern education system;
- online access to the health care system; and
- retention of young people in remote and rural areas.

Despite the funding invested by different levels of government, we are facing several obstacles to the deployment of high-speed Internet in rural areas, namely due to Bell Canada's various internal processes for issuing construction permits for support structures, which do not reflect the common standard for designing, installing and testing overhead structures.¹

High-speed Internet is an **essential** service in 2020. For rural Canadians and businesses to contribute to Canada's economic development, they need to have the world at their fingertips.

For more information, please consult the following:

¹ <http://www.hydroquebec.com/location-structures/docs/norme-uc-structure-poteau.pdf>. [French only]

- CRTC notice of consultation submitted on March 10, 2020:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5cf7c9ae3b2cf800016a5042/t/5e7a0bb38fd285658a5467fa/1585056694707/CRTC_Avis_2019-406+ver2020-03-09.pdf. [French only]
- Internet haute vitesse: La Guerre des poteaux, July 25, 2020, *La Presse+*:
<https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/2020-07-25/internet-haute-vitesse-la-guerre-des-poteaux.php>. [French only]