ConnectME Authority Meetings ConnectME Authority

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I.   Introductions
Authority Members: Jean Wilson, Chair; Mitch Davis; Vendean Vafiades
Staff: Phil Lindley, Lisa Leahy

II.   Broadband Definition – Discussion
For grant funding purposes, the Authority currently defines broadband service as provider a minimum download bandwidth of 768 kbps. The ConnectME Advisory Council met previous to the Authority meeting regarding the definition of broadband and made a number of recommendations. It was initially suggested that the Authority's definition move to the FCC's (Federal Communication Commission) Tier 2 (1.5 Mbps – 3 Mbps) or Tier 3 (3Mbps – 6 Mbps) for funding grants. The concern about raising the Authority's designation of broadband would be that a higher speed would limit funding discretion or flexibility. Some areas of Maine that are very rural and unserved may be quite well served by a project that provides minimal broadband access that is well above dial-up and has less latency than satellite service. The Authority should have the ability to fund a project that, while providing a much lower bandwidth that any desired standard, does provide a minimal level of internet access. For that reason the Advisory Council group recommended following the lead of the FCC which made two decisions a few years ago. First, the FCC said that the minimum data rate speed necessary to qualify as "broadband" is 768 kbps download. Second, it adopted a seven-tier classification scheme, as follows:

Basic Broadband Tier 1   768 kbps to 1.5 Mbps

Broadband Tier 2   1.5 Mbps to 3 Mbps

Broadband Tier 3   3 Mbps to 6 Mbps

Broadband Tier 4   6 Mbps to 10 Mbps

Broadband Tier 5   10 Mbps to 25 Mbps

Broadband Tier 6   25 Mbps to 100 Mbps

Broadband Tier 7   Greater than 100 Mbps

Using the tier method will give the Authority maximum flexibility and will allow newer, faster technologies to be recognized and encouraged. Projects will be "scored" based on the tier level of service provided. RFP responses can be ranked based on the tier level projected. This has to be balanced against the cost of the project.

Josh Broder, Maine Fiber Company, suggested that latency be considered in the broadband definition as well, as the FCC does not talk about latency. As a practical matter adding latency would only affect satellite – terrestrial services would not be affected. Josh said that the expectation is that latency on network, node to node should not be more than 100 milliseconds, which will allow all cellular technologies and fixed wireless services to participate, but would prohibit satellite. Latency should be measured from the end user location to first node on provider's network.

Fletcher Kittredge, GWI, said that what really matters is latency between user and first node, most of latency is in the first link, since the Authority is not funding entire provider network, it is probably good enough to look at the first link.

Wayne Jortner, Office of the Public Advocate, agrees with the satellite discussion, however, he can imagine an unserved pocket in Maine that could not be served any other way, and it makes sense to encourage service to lower latency, but not tie the Authority's hands.

Jean Wilson said that she likes simplicity and the consistency with FCC standards and to use it as criteria for grants funding.

Vendean Vafiades said that we should be encouraging projects that provide higher bandwidth, Tier 3 or better and higher quality, more stable connections.

The Authority members voted to approve adopting the FCC's seven tiers of broadband service as its definition of broadband, with emphasis on the ability to use applications that require lower latency (≤ 100 ms) such as: VoIP communications; VPN connections; streaming media; gaming; and other interactive services. The Authority also stated that preference will be given to projects that will provide Tier 3 or better service. As this currently applies only to unserved areas, previously funded projects would not qualify for grants to upgrade service.

III.   **Sixth Grand Round Planning**
The Executive Director submitted a proposed schedule for the Authority's sixth round of grant funding.
Proposed schedule:
5/11   Pre Application Information and Notice released
6/6   Pre Application Letter Due
6/15   Full Application Available
7/11   Full Application Due
7/20   Grant Awards (est.)
8/10   Challenges Due.

The Authority approved the proposed schedule.

IV.   Grant Extension Requests
- Pioneer Broadband – Orient RT Project (4th Grant Round)
  Requested six month extension, granted.
- Town of Waldoboro (4th Grant Round)
  Requested extension to 12/30/2011, granted.
- Midcoast Internet Solutions – Town of Northport Project (4th Grant Round)
  Requested extension to 7/31/2011, granted, conditioned on MIS submitting revised information regarding decrease in funding request, change in project specifications, and coverage of revised project.

V.   Broadband Summit 1.0 Review
Phil and Lisa Leahy provided a summary of the summit. The primary benefits were wide exposure of the ConnectME Authority activities; coordination between all the ARRA funded broadband-related projects; and valuable networking between those in Maine seeking to expand broadband availability in the state. The returned evaluations of the summit were excellent.

VI.   NTIA SBDD Grantee Conference (Dallas) Review
Lisa and Randy Claar (Sewall Company), attended the Grantee Conference for the Authority. The conference was conducted by the NTIA for all those state and territorial jurisdictions who received mapping and planning project ARRA grants. It provided a venue to share best practices; provide feedback to the NTIA staff; and to explore common challenges.

VII.   Executive Director Report
The Executive Director provided current financial reports.

VIII.   Public Comment Period
Peggy Kapisovsky, Georgetown, is part of a group of Georgetown area residents without access to any broadband service, called "Georgetown Island Connection." She only has access to dial-up service and is very interested in the next grant round. Fletcher Kittredge, GWI, provided recommendations for changes to the Authority's online broadband map viewer regarding the ability to provide feedback and corrections. Tim McAfee, Pioneer Broadband, provided recommendations regarding the use of a speed test application that would provide more accurate results for Maine.