5-13-2009

ConnectME Authority Meeting Notes - May 13, 2009

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1. Introduction

Authority Members: Mitch Davis, Acting Chair; Sharon Reishus; Dick Thompson
Staff: Phil Lindley; Amy Spelke

2. Presentation – Potential ARRA Proposal

Jeff Letourneau and Bruce Segee, UMS, presentation on the "Three Ring Binder" project. This is a proposal for a middle-mile fiber project with collocation facilities. The project will likely apply for ARRA funds. Consideration of a regional solution for the need for diverse infrastructure in the New England region and Canada. For example, Halifax is a major trans-Atlantic cable hub. Now fiber goes around Northern New England – why not go through, asked Jeff? Concept - create a market with connectivity.

MTAF grant project, Maine technology asset fund. Could be used for match with federal dollars to fund a data center in an existing paper mill. The paper mill had a bi-product – "Black Liquor" – used for fuel, because of the tax code they were already leveraging energy credits.

NTIA is interested in funding grants to community anchor institutions – UMS and other university and school locations qualify as anchor institutions.

Jeff stated that we need to educate people about the value of high-speed internet access to their own lives.

This is potentially a joint proposal – Education, higher education, State government, GWI – another possible partner – looking to "leverage what we have." The fiber remains part of the private business – not state owned.

It is difficult getting competitors to collaborate and not diminish the private investment – it must enhance/augment private infrastructure.

With broadband we must lower the market barrier for rural areas.

Ben Sanborn from TAM asks, on the issue of ARRA funds, what should Maine support? Ben suggests that in the PUC comments to the FCC the PUC indicates that the primary goal of the ARRA money is to provide broadband service to those who don't have service. The concern is that the middle mile doesn't provide service directly. It is TAM's position that the individual companies should provide their own private networks. The ARRA money needs to result in everyone having service.

Mitch Davis points out that all of the previous Authority grant applicants have stated that there is not enough "middle mile" or backhaul infrastructure.

TAM suggests that a collective group of private companies could propose a middle mile solution.

Audrey Prior, Fairpoint, states that Fairpoint is concerned about protecting its private investment. Before the Authority endorses any project, Fairpoint asks to be able to make a presentation. Fairpoint will likely apply for ARRA funds to accelerate its DSL build-out. Audrey said that the "three ring binder" project could conflict with previous PUC comments to NTIA, and that priority should be for projects underway.

Mitch asks for more information on other projects before endorsing any idea. Dick is also not ready to endorse the three ring binder project. Fiber may be available but when you consider the price it may become less available. We need both – fiber at a lower price, he said.

3. Definition of Broadband Service

The Authority has an annual requirement to define Broadband. Phil recommends that the Authority use the FCC's definition of broadband Tier I, 768kbps download – with consideration about what applications could be used. The service must support: video, VOIP, VPN, gaming, etc. Dick Thompson asks: "Are you sure we need to make a change?" The answer was that the Authority's previous definition was 500kbps and the definition is the standard used for Authority grants. Fletcher Kittredge, GWI, states that you can't have voice service with high latency. Authority members asked Phil to solicit comments from grantees on proposed standards. Most companies and potential grantees present at the meeting agreed that the 768kbps speed was the very minimum that should be considered "broadband."

4. Executive Director Report

Additional staffing needs for the Authority are driven by the upcoming mapping project, third grant round, ARRA project reviews, and the Broadband Strategy Council. Phil provided a draft job description and Dick said that OIT has a position ("headcount") if the Authority needs it, similar to the Executive Director position. Mitch and Sharon want to see a final proposal and cost. Dick and Phil will work on this.

The broadband mapping and inventory RFP bids are due May 19, 2009.

Phil discussed the ongoing meetings regarding the next generation Maine School and Library Network or MSLN3. A memorandum of understanding has been

crafted for the Maine State Library, Department of Education, OIT, and the University. The new structure would not change services for end users – only organizational changes – creating a purchasing collaborative allowing regional RFPs. The new entity would be called "Network Maine" – reporting to the University CIO. They will create an advisory council of stakeholders.

The third round of Authority grant pre-application letters are due June 1, 2009.

Phil reviewed financial reports.

The Authority voted to authorize the Executive Director to sign a sales and use tax reimbursement application for Cornerstone Communications.

The first meeting for the Broadband Strategy Council from LD 1012 will meet in the next month or so.