Investing in the Future: American Rescue Plan's Broadband Infrastructure Grants

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 offers states, cities, and towns the opportunity to use federal funding towards broadband infrastructure projects that connect families, schools and small businesses to faster, more affordable networks of the future. This is a historic moment and it is critical that broadband investment is made in robust and reliable networks that can offer at least 1 Gigabit connectivity today and higher speeds in the future. INCOMPAS members are actively building next-generation broadband infrastructure throughout the nation, and this document follows our Broadband Blueprint paper to offer lessons our members have learned to assist states and localities to connect their communities to new broadband infrastructure that can met their immediate and long-term needs as quickly as possible.

Background. Congress and the Biden Administration recognized in the American Rescue Plan that despite our nation's best efforts, we still face serious challenges in connecting all Americans. This includes homes and businesses of all sizes, in both urban and rural communities, who need reliable high-speed broadband. Many Americans have faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the fact they do not have broadband network availability in their communities. Achieving universal broadband availability is an ambitious but essential goal, and one that the American Rescue Plan tackles head-on by allocating $10 billion specifically for broadband infrastructure investment by the states. In addition, it also permits states and localities to use the State and Local Recovery Funds for broadband infrastructure, among other projects. Below we offer our perspective on ensuring that broadband infrastructure funded by the Plan can meet immediate and future needs of communities as demand for broadband continues to grow annually.

Competition Builds a Better Broadband Future

- **Long-term Planning**. In assessing your communities' needs, consider immediate and long-term requirements.
  - *New Networks*. As business and schooling have moved to homes during the pandemic and as more residents are vaccinated and go back to work and school, it is important that robust broadband capability is deployed to government agencies, residences, businesses, and town centers. To deliver a scalable, robust, and reliable network, investment in backbone, middle mile, and/or last mile networks may be needed.
  - *Speed Matters*. New network builders are delivering 1 gigabit and above speeds today, and they are building reliable infrastructure that will be able to scale as demand increases. Federal policymakers at the FCC and on the Hill are prioritizing funding for 1 gigabit-capable technology.
  - *Fiber Backbone*. Fiber is a critical component in delivering reliable broadband infrastructure and 1 gigabit speeds. Everyone needs access to fiber, including fixed broadband, cable, cellular (mobile), and satellite companies. Building fiber helps all, and fiber densification throughout the U.S. is needed for 5G. Fiber also operates more efficiently and is more scalable, allowing providers to handle broadband growth and demand over the long-term.
- **Partners in the Future**. As you consider companies to partner with, choose financially and technically sound providers with deployment experience and a proven track record. Other factors for consideration include:
  - *Experienced*. Providers have experience serving businesses, community anchor institutions, and/or residences.
  - *Connected and Local*. Providers offer wholesale services to other broadband providers in order to enable more competitive options, such as connecting mobile and other fixed providers, and will deploy network in the community and support the local economy.
- **Deployment Partners**. Incentivize local jurisdictions to streamline permitting and/or franchise requirements to speed broadband deployment.
  - *Investment.* Local jurisdictions may need funding assistance to hire, train, and/or expand their capability to process broadband infrastructure permitting and approval processes.
  - *Permitting*. States should encourage local jurisdictions to expedite permitting, allow for batch permitting, and keep permitting and franchise fees low and based on their actual, objectively reasonable costs.
  - *New=Faster and More Affordable.* New construction technologies that speed deployment should be permitted.