

# Fiber Partnership discussion summary: Rocky Mountain Region

August 1, 2019

Participants in the August 1, 2019 Rocky Mountain Regional fiber partnerships meeting discussed interests and opportunities, as well as challenges and concerns related to fiber partnerships. The meeting was held at WAPA's Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Loveland, CO. The summarized comments and questions listed below were expressed by attendees and are published herein for informational purposes only. Every effort has been made to capture the full context of the comment or question. WAPA has taken no position on them at this point. The comments and questions will be carefully considered and will be used to inform WAPA's feasibility assessment. Information about the feasibility assessment is available on WAPA's website at: <https://www.wapa.gov/About/keytopics/Pages/fiber-feasibility-assessment.aspx>

## Highlights from the discussions include:

### Interest and opportunities for new partnerships

#### **Customer comments on interests & opportunities for new partnerships:**

- There are opportunities to partner with federal agencies to provide fiber connectivity to offices in rural areas.
- WAPA should maintain current partnership practices; i.e., allow customers to request additional fiber added to the design (if feasible), in addition to WAPA fiber use.
- Additional fiber build-out could also support wireless deployment.
- There is a desire to have input on the design of the build-out to increase reliability in certain regions.
- Rural customers need fiber for both utility services and broadband.
- Rural customers need fiber for broadband to outlying areas.
- Some see this effort as very similar to the rural electrification efforts of the past century.
- There is a need in some areas for additional redundancy and resiliency to support critical services such as 911.
- If WAPA provides the fiber backbone, it would enable the private sector to more easily provide end-use solutions to small communities.

#### **Customer questions on interests & opportunities for new partnerships:**

- Is the lease of fiber a possible revenue stream that could offset power costs?

### Customers' priorities and/or goals for fiber partnership

#### **Customer comments on priorities and/or goals for fiber partnership**

- Maintain existing relationships and obligations.
- Ensure that any effort does not impact the mission to deliver power.
- Conduct any build-out in a manner that maximizes the impact to the community – delivering the best value.



- Consider allocating a certain percent of capacity to rural communities.
- Maintain due consideration of what's in the public interest and consider how some level of local control could be given.

### **Challenges and concerns with new partnerships**

#### **Customer comments on challenges and concerns with new partnerships:**

- Maintaining existing relationships and partnerships could become an issue.
- Ensure WAPA adheres to beneficiary pays construct.
- Concern over how both physical and logical access to the fiber would be provided.
- Determining how much capacity is actually available could be challenging.
- NERC compliance may be a challenge.
- Some utilities that have leased lines have encountered reliability and compliance issues.

#### **Customer questions on challenges and concerns with new partnerships:**

- Does WAPA have the authority for fiber partnerships or expansion?
- Do existing rights-of-way contracts allow for this use of the fiber?
- How does WAPA determine what is considered unused or under-utilized fiber?
- How would WAPA sort out access rights and preference of customers for fiber?
- What would be the capital investment? Who will pay this?
- Would eminent domain be used?
- Would the administration step in and change the current state or the direction?

### **Gaps in feasibility assessment elements**

#### **Customer comments on gaps in feasibility assessment elements:**

- Need to ensure it addresses resilience improvements.
- It should address how guidance will be developed to allow access - who will get preference?
- Concern over unused fiber deteriorating with time should be addressed. Potential need to certify that the unused fiber is actually capable of providing service for high-speed use.
- Need to characterize what is there.
- There may be state level opportunities to provide funding for projects or projects already being explored by the states.

#### **Customer questions on gaps in feasibility assessment elements:**

- Who manages the fiber and fiber access?
- How can partners with common interest come together? What would be the mechanism or forum?
- How do you identify underserved communities?

