



February 26, 2013

Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Ranking Member Anna Eshoo
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce

RE: Is the Broadband Stimulus Working?

Dear Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, Members of the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology:

The National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA)¹ has long advocated for increased broadband deployment and adoption. We believe that increased access to affordable, high-speed broadband is essential to spur economic growth and development, improve the educational opportunities and experiences for our children, and provide badly needed telemedicine services to all Americans. But as we have seen, the private sector is not always willing or able to provide these services to all parts of our country due to financial or other logistical considerations. This is why our association has repeatedly expressed our support for the BTOP and BIP programs.

One of the BTOP projects being looked at by this Subcommittee at its scheduled February 27, 2013 hearing is the Colorado-based EAGLE-Net project. Attached is an October 23, 2012 letter NATOA, along with the Benton Foundation, sent to Assistant Secretary Larry Strickling in support of this project. What we said then is just as relevant today – we urge that the aggressive public relations campaign waged against this and other BTOP and BIP projects not serve to diminish the important job-creating, competition-enhancing accomplishments of these vital programs that are bringing advanced communications services to our schools, libraries and other anchor institutions across our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Traylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a horizontal line.

Steve Traylor
Executive Director

¹ NATOA is the national association that represents the communications needs and interests of local governments, and those who advise local governments. NATOA's membership includes local government officials and staff members from across the nation whose responsibility is to advise and implement telecommunications policy for the nation's local governments. These responsibilities range from cable franchising, rights-of-way management and government access programming to information technologies and Institutional Network (INet) planning and management.



October 23, 2012

Lawrence E. Strickling
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
Administrator, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20230-0002

Dear Assistant Secretary Strickling:

We write in regard to the EAGLE-Net project—the important middle-mile statewide Colorado fiber initiative that was funded by NTIA under BTOP. The EAGLE -Net program and model are exemplary, and exactly the kind of project that our members and stakeholders support as furthering the public interest in communications. EAGLE-Net plans to create a statewide fiber infrastructure with a combination of newly constructed fiber optics and leased fiber (where such fiber is available on the market).

EAGLE-Net's network will reach every school district in Colorado and, in partnership with local providers, will have the potential to reach every school and library in Colorado. Its planned infrastructure reaches into the most rural, mountainous, hard-to-reach parts of the state. As a result of these partnerships and the new fiber, schools and libraries in Colorado will have access to high-bandwidth fiber-based services at prices that reflect that the network is connected to the Internet backbone, removing the pricing disparity so often faced by rural areas relative to urban and suburban areas because of their distance from an Internet point of presence, such as that in Denver.

At the same time as delivering this tremendous capacity to community anchor institutions, EAGLE-Net will provide non-discriminatory, open access to any and all qualified private sector providers who choose to use its infrastructure—thus bridging, for the commercial sector, that same divide that currently exists between suburban and urban areas on the one hand, and rural areas on the other. The emergence of a fiber-based competitive market on those routes will open up rural markets and enable cost-effective access to those markets for private entities that wish to serve residential and small business customers.

We understand that there has been significant opposition to this new fiber, and to the potential for competition in underserved rural areas. We also understand that a range of allegations have been made about the management of the project. In this regard, we have great confidence that NTIA—which has done an exemplary job of creating and overseeing BTOP—has more than adequately overseen the EAGLE-Net project. And for that reason, we are quite dubious about wild allegations made by self-interested parties that oppose EAGLE-Net.

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We certainly hope that the aggressive public relations campaign that has been mounted by EAGLE-Net's opponents does not serve to put this important job-creating, competition-enhancing network at risk—thereby depriving the school children, library users, and rural residents of Colorado of such a significant investment in their future.

We note, too, that if this opposition to EAGLE-Net is allowed to succeed, the precedent that would be set could have the effect of putting at risk similar initiatives throughout the country (funded by BTOP or otherwise) by inviting similar anti-competition campaigns.

We thank you and your staff for the efforts made over the past few years to use BTOP to enable the potential of broadband in rural America.

Sincerely,



Steve Traylor
Executive Director, NATOA



Charles Benton
Chairman, Benton Foundation

cc: Governor John Hickenlooper
Senator Mark Udall
Senator Michael Bennet
Representative Diana DeGette
Representative Jared Polis
Representative Scott Tipton
Representative Cory Gardner
Representative Doug Lamborn
Representative Mike Coffman
Representative Ed Perlmutter