



The Honorable Greg Walden
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

The Honorable Marsha Blackburn
U.S. House of Representatives
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2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6115

March 21, 2017

RE: Comments on Discussion Draft of Broadband Deployment Legislation

Chairman Walden and Subcommittee Chairwoman Blackburn;

Thank you for holding this House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing entitled “Broadband: Deploying America’s 21st Century Infrastructure.” We applaud the Committee for tackling the very important issue of barriers to broadband deployment throughout America and appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on the topic.

ROCKET FIBER OVERVIEW

Rocket Fiber is a Detroit-based residential and commercial internet service provider founded by three young entrepreneurs, Edi Demaj, Marc Hudson and Randy Foster. Since 2014, Rocket Fiber has been on the cutting-edge of redefining Detroit’s traditional manufacturing economy as a digital economy and has been a leader in bridging the largest digital divide of any major American city.

In less than three years, Rocket Fiber has successfully constructed 30+ miles of urban fiber optic network that provides gigabit internet services in hundreds of buildings, servicing thousands of clients in downtown Detroit. Our flagship gigabit offering is up to 100 times faster than the current residential average connection, facilitating the upgrades necessary to bring Detroit up to speed as an emerging technology and innovation hub. Rocket Fiber’s infrastructure investment has also served as a catalyst to encourage new investment in broadband services by Detroit’s incumbent internet service providers. Rocket Fiber’s experience demonstrates the value to residents and businesses alike that can be realized when barriers to competition and innovation are reduced or eliminated.

Rocket Fiber is part of the Quicken Loans Family of Companies located in Detroit, Cleveland, Scottsdale, and Charlotte that share the same culture and philosophy of innovation and exceptional client service. The Family of Companies, which have 17,000 team members in Detroit, weave the



threads of what we call our “isms” to make each of our communities better places in which to live, work and play.

REGULATORY BARRIERS TO BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT

Having built a new telecom entrant from the ground up in Detroit, we are uniquely familiar with many of the challenges related to the deployment of broadband infrastructure in the United States. To continue deploying brand-new fiber optic and wireless infrastructure in the city and as we look to expand beyond its limits, it is crucial to find solutions that reduce, remove or streamline any regulatory barriers in the wireline and wireless network deployment process.

Due to the diversity of Detroit, whose 143 square miles range from a dense urban core to a vast and sparsely populated network of neighborhoods, our team has learned how to operate in a variety of deployment environments, each with a different set of broadband needs. Through this experimental work, Rocket Fiber has partnered with some of the top wireless manufacturers to deploy new and unreleased technology and is keenly interested in the topic of spectrum allocation. In addition to continuing fiber optic deployment, Rocket Fiber is now experimenting with innovative backhaul and last-mile wireless solutions, in the licensed, lightly licensed and unlicensed spectrum.

Recently, Rocket Fiber renegotiated pole and conduit agreements with three separate entities within Detroit, including the local utility company, the City of Detroit itself, and a State of Michigan-created authority that oversaw the rebuild of Detroit’s public lighting grid. These conversations culminated in a streamlined process for pole attachment that cut the implementation timeline by more than half and which set a new standard that the utility company adheres to on all new deployment projects. Through this multi-year effort, Rocket Fiber not only cut through the regulatory red-tape that was impeding our mission, we also influenced local policy in a way that promotes future competition in the industry and ultimately benefits the citizens and businesses of Detroit. Each negotiation presented a new challenge to overcome, and the process served as a valuable case study on pole attachment regulatory reform.

DISCUSSION DRAFTS FEEDBACK

We support the Committee’s goals in the discussion legislative drafts on broadband deployment being considered. Any efforts to implement legislation to encourage the efficient deployment of broadband infrastructure and reduce the existing regulatory hurdles to leveraging the federal government’s vast existing assets will serve to benefit the public good. In our experience, legislation mandating the “future-proofing” of federally funded highway construction projects by requiring installation of broadband conduit is particularly important. Rocket Fiber benefitted from such forward thinking by having the opportunity to work cooperatively with the QLINE light rail project to ensure that broadband conduit and a “dig once” approach were key components of that significant infrastructure project in Detroit.



CONCLUSION

Today's hearing serves as an important step to tell the troubling regulatory and infrastructure story on broadband deployment. Rocket Fiber is committed to working with this Subcommittee and the full Committee to advance important broadband deployment solutions in line with 21st Century challenges. Should you like to discuss these ideas in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marc Hudson".

Marc Hudson
Chief Executive Office & Co-Founder
Rocket Fiber LLC

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edi Demaj".

Edi Demaj
Chief Operating Officer & Co-Founder
Rocket Fiber LLC