



Connecting Communities

Testimony of Deb Socia
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Before the
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Energy and Commerce Committee
House of Representatives
on
“Breaking Down Barriers to Broadband Infrastructure Deployment”
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Good morning, Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Eshoo, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. My name is Deb Socia, and I am the Executive Director of Next Century Cities, a bipartisan city-to-city initiative with 120 communities across the country with leaders dedicated to ensuring access to fast, affordable, and reliable broadband Internet for all.

High-speed Internet access is essential for our communities from our smallest community, Alford, Massachusetts to the much larger city of Los Angeles. In joining Next Century Cities, our members have agreed to the following six principles:

- **High Speed Broadband is Necessary Infrastructure**
- **The Internet is Nonpartisan**
- **Communities Must Enjoy Self-Determination**
- **High Speed Broadband is a Community-Wide Endeavor**
- **Meaningful Competition Drives Progress**
- **Collaboration Benefits All**

Our communities are committed to universal, high quality Internet access from multiple providers, not just for economic development and quality of life but to ensure the entire community benefits.

They are doing the yeoman's work of wiring businesses, schools, and residents. Sometimes through community and municipal broadband networks, other times through innovative public private partnerships. On behalf of our membership, our message today is simple: this is hard work, and we welcome federal leadership to reduce the cost- and time-intensive burden on Next Century City members and communities across the nation.

Easing access to federal land and assets for those deploying next-generation networks will encourage investment from both public and private entities. Dig once policies will reduce capital costs and streamline new broadband deployments. Assessment of make-ready costs will help new entrants design their business models.

Next Century Cities communities have experience in many of the issues under consideration in these bills - in particular, local dig once policies have been a powerful driver of many of our members' successes.

Consider Santa Monica, California, which adopted dig once some 20 years ago, thus lowering the cost of both public and private investment throughout the city. The city leases access to many private ISPs -- that means real competition for consumers -- even as it also uses its conduit and

fiber to connect more than one hundred buildings and deliver wireless connectivity in all major city corridors.

In the Pacific Northwest alone, Seattle has eased private investment and built many miles of publicly owned conduit with its dig once approach. Mount Vernon, Washington has reduced the cost of expanding its fiber to local business with similar strategies. In Oregon, meanwhile, Sandy's dig once policies lowered the cost of its municipal gigabit fiber optic network, which has been an overwhelming success.

Elsewhere, Mesa, Arizona has used dig once to encourage private sector investment both from ISPs and from high tech firms that can use the conduit to establish multiple fiber paths for redundancy. In building their municipal fiber network, Longmont, Colorado, had lower costs in connecting some neighborhoods because they had been built with conduit from the start.

This July, Next Century Cities released a comprehensive policy agenda identifying concrete steps that all broadband stakeholders—government officials, community members, and the “civil society” of nongovernmental organizations and institutions—can take to help achieve fast, reliable and affordable Internet access. One of our recommendations were dig once approaches -- as they are a low-cost solution across all levels of government that can have a significant impact over time.

We've heard that communities face challenges in implementing dig once across our country's varied federal highways, but Next Century Cities believes that conduit can make a significant

difference at key bottlenecks, such as bridges, overpasses, and railroad crossings. Particularly in rural areas, deploying fiber can be affordable until the path has to cross one of these bottlenecks. Attaching fiber to a bridge may require shutting down lanes of traffic and hiring a flag crew. Negotiating crossings with railroad right of way is legendary in its difficulty. Overpasses may require directional boring to go under access ramps or nearby roads. Each of these situations could be improved with access to well-designed conduit.

Navigating such bottlenecks is especially challenging for new entrants, whether local companies, local governments, or other entities that lack the existing infrastructure of long-established incumbent providers.

We are particularly interested in your deliberations over pole attachments. In some cases, our members own poles and in others our communities have struggled to gain access to privately-owned poles in a timely manner. So we are uniquely suited to participate in these discussions and look forward to assisting the subcommittee on the matter.

In our experience, one of the fundamental challenges with pole attachment is not just the cost, but the time it may take for make-ready to occur. To the extent the Commission is directed to examine this subject, it should investigate both time and costs.

We believe that more information will be useful in this space and appreciate the intent behind having all utilities report the location of their poles and ducts. At the same time, we are cognizant of the impact this may have on small utilities. We encourage Congress to focus first on the larger

utilities that will cover the majority of our population and give more time to the smaller utilities that are may not yet have fully computerized records that would ease complying with such a mandate.

We would like to stress that while pole attachments are a concern for some network deployers, we hear as much or more frustration about the challenge of crossing railroad rights-of-way. We hope that Congress is able to apply the same attention to that potential barrier to investment as to pole attachments.

Day by day, the need for access to fast, affordable, and reliable broadband Internet access becomes more and more evident. Communities across the country are recognizing this urgent need and developing the critical broadband infrastructure their residents demand. I am encouraged that this Subcommittee has chosen to hold this conversation today; as Next Century Cities' policy agenda makes clear, the federal government can play a central role in assisting communities in the development of broadband infrastructure. Hearings such as today's can provide a critical platform for communities to share their experiences and develop opportunities for collaboration with federal policymakers.

I look forward to continuing to work with Members of this Subcommittee and your colleagues to ensure that communities across the country can enjoy the next-generation Internet that is now critical infrastructure for all citizens. Thank you.