



REPORT

To: Chair and Directors

Report Number: ADM-BRD-194

From: Crystal Brown, Electoral Area Manager

Date: May 27, 2021

Subject: **Connectivity**

RECOMMENDATION #1: [Corporate Unweighted]

That the Regional Board authorize the establishment of a Broadband Internet and Mobility Standing Committee to expand upon the work of the Fiber Working Group and the PRRD Connectivity Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION #2: [Corporate Unweighted]

That the Regional Board adopt the following Vision for connectivity in the region:

“Residents, businesses, and organizations within the PRRD will have access to reliable, redundant, high-speed Broadband Internet services in their homes, businesses and public buildings, at performance levels that meet all of their needs for health, education, economic development, that are delivered now and into the future.”

RECOMMENDATION #3: [Corporate Unweighted]

That the Regional Board adopt the following connectivity principles:

- Connectivity is essential to strengthen the social, economic, ecological and cultural resilience within the region.
- Connectivity and technology shape residents’ choices, behaviours, and needs.
- Connectivity is pertinent to all regional district planning and decision-making.
- The Regional District has a role in ensuring residents have access to high-speed Broadband Internet.
- The Regional District views Broadband infrastructure as essential infrastructure.
- The nature and expense of connectivity deployment requires a forward-looking vision to maximize potential and coordinate efforts within the regional district.
- Convergence of public and private infrastructure where it benefits the public and protects public interests is good public policy.
- Access to Broadband Internet and Infrastructure must be leveraged through Official Community Plans, regional growth planning, and spatial planning (i.e. land use bylaws, subdivision bylaws) to maximize potential within the region.

- An understanding of the true drivers and needs for connectivity will inform decisions.
- Leveraging one infrastructure to advance another (i.e. dig once policies) is in the public interest.
- Access to Broadband Internet and infrastructure allows the regional district to retain and grow businesses, create and retain skilled workers, and re-invigorate communities.
- Broadband Redundancy is essential to protect Internet, telephone, cellular, and essential government services throughout the region in the event of damage to Broadband Infrastructure at any time.

BACKGROUND/RATIONALE:

On October 8, 2020, the Regional Board passed the following motion:

MOVED, SECONDED, CARRIED

That the Regional Board enter into an agreement with Valo Networks to develop a high level design and costing for the PRRD connectivity strategy, at a cost of \$10,000, with an additional \$5,000 per in-person Fiber Working Group meeting; further, that the Chair and Chief Administrative Officer be authorized to sign the agreement on behalf of the PRRD.

The Fiber Working Group (FWG) consisted of representatives from Electoral Areas B, C, D and E, and the City of Dawson Creek, District of Chetwynd, District of Taylor, District of Hudson's Hope, and the Village of Pouce Coupe. The FWG met through Dec 2020 – April 2021. Topics of the meetings included:

- Broadband Fundamentals
- Distribution Technologies
- Review of PRRD Needs Assessment Report - 2020
- Funding Programs
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Evaluation Principles for evaluating letters of support
- Project Governance Models
- Priorities and vision for individual FWG members
- Presentation from the Ministry of Citizen Services regarding Connected Communities
- Presentation from the Ministry of Citizen Services regarding SpaceX
- Presentation from NDIT regarding Letters of Support from internet service providers for broadband funding
- Broadband Mapping Exercises

On April 20, 2021, the draft PRRD Connectivity Strategy was presented to the FWG, and then presented to the Committee of the Whole on April 29, 2021.

The PRRD Connectivity Strategy is a high level document to guide the PRRD in facilitating the creation of broadband infrastructure so that residents and businesses in the region can have access to reliable, high speed Broadband Internet.

This Connectivity Strategy is to be used as a framework to outline mid-to-long term goals for Broadband Internet connectivity throughout the region. It is intended to be forward looking and provide a benchmark to weigh future projects and opportunities against. The PRRD Connectivity Strategy is meant to be a living document, and will evolve as technology and need changes.

As per the Committee of the Whole meeting, held on April 29, 2021, the following changes have been made to the draft PRRD Connectivity Strategy:

- Removed the word “affordable” and “equitable” from the vision and connectivity principles.
- Added reliable and redundancy to the vision and connectivity principles.
- Changed shovel ready to shovel worthy.

Broadband Internet and Mobility Standing Committee

Building a Broadband network is only part of the work necessary to ensure access to connectivity. Speed shouldn't be the only metric of success. Quality, affordability, and standards of parity between urban and rural centers are other important factors of Broadband Internet access in rural and remote areas. (Middleton, 2017)

To ensure that the Connectivity Strategic Plan is comprehensive, scalable, inclusive, and meets the needs of the community, local governments should engage with local ISPs, First Nations, funding partners, technical experts, government agencies, business and residents to understand the challenges and priorities of the community, identify goals, and addresses needs or gaps in service. (NDIT)

The role of the Standing Committee will be to engage with service providers and stakeholders, research and review current technologies and market trends, share information, examine funding opportunities, develop a connectivity work plan, and make recommendations to the PRRD Board regarding Broadband Internet and mobility policy to fulfill the PRRD's connectivity vision.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS:

1. That the Regional Board incorporate Connectivity Principles (Recommendation #3) into a draft Terms of Reference for the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee.
2. That the Regional Board provide further direction.

STRATEGIC PLAN RELEVANCE:

- ☒ Advocacy
- ☒ Increased broadband connectivity for rural communities - Situational/Gap Analysis and Investment

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION(S):

If the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee is established, there will be additional meetings fees for Directors who attend the meetings.

COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATION(S):

None at this time.

OTHER CONSIDERATION(S):

If the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee is established, a Terms of Reference will need to be developed and approved by the Board.

Attachments:

1. Draft PRRD Connectivity Strategy – Version 2