



October 17, 2023

Ref: 120721

Leonard Hiebert
Chair
Peace River Regional District
9505 100 Street
Fort St. John, B.C. V1J 4N4
Via email: prrd.dc@prrd.bc.ca

Dear Chair Hiebert:

Thank you for your letter on August 29, 2023, in support of developing provincial policy for timely access to passive infrastructure for connectivity. It is always a pleasure to hear from you and the Peace River Regional District.

We agree that timely access to passive infrastructure is crucial in bringing connectivity to the entire province. This infrastructure not only allows service providers the ability to reach new and under-served areas of the province but ensures that connectivity is affordable for those who are able to access it.

My ministry has a team of staff dedicated to addressing permitting reporting requirements as well as the status of permit submissions. Since the Connecting Communities BC program has been underway, the team has been able to make significant progress in improving the permitting process by coordinating between service providers and permitting agencies. In particular, we have a strong partnership with the Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship and other ministries, which are responsible for issuing permits.

The Province continues to work with service providers and BC Hydro as part of an Industry Working Group to facilitate more timely access to connectivity infrastructure by tackling issues associated with accessing utility poles. Connectivity is now reflected in BC Hydro's mandate letter: *"Continue to make improvements to accelerate and expand efforts to support the Province's goal of providing all B.C. communities with access to high-speed internet connectivity by 2027, while maintaining cost effectiveness and reliability for BC Hydro ratepayers, and safety for workers"* and the Industry Working Group meets regularly to increase transparency and efficiency around access to poles for internet and cellular services.

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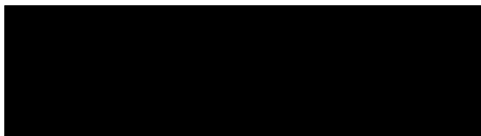
Passive infrastructure involves more than poles and may include access to other private and publicly owned infrastructure to support the expansion of both broadband internet and cellular networks.

As service providers deploy 5G technologies and review the location of infrastructure, local governments must also have policy in place for infrastructure owned at all levels of government. I appreciate the Peace River Regional District Board's awareness of access needs and your support for internet service providers as they work to connect rural residents.

Please continue to advise any internet service provider who approaches you to contact our program for support navigating access to passive infrastructure and permitting. Ministry staff are also available to present to council regarding an update on progress towards permitting and access to passive infrastructure in the province. For specific questions or to coordinate a time, please contact our program at CITZ.NetworkBCPermitting@gov.bc.ca.

Thank you again for your letter and do not hesitate to refer service providers to staff in my ministry. I appreciate your partnership as we work together to support connectivity projects in the Peace River Regional District.

Sincerely,



Lisa Beare
Minister

pc: Honourable Josie Osborne
Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation

Honourable Nathan Cullen
Minister for Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship

Connected Communities
connectedcommunities@gov.bc.ca



PEACE RIVER REGIONAL DISTRICT

August 29, 2023

File: 0400.20.14

Honourable Josie Osborne
Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation
Room 325 Parliament Buildings
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Honourable Lisa Beare
Minister of Citizens' Services
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Re: Access to Passive Infrastructure for Connectivity

Dear Honourable Josie Osborne and Honourable Lisa Beare,

At the August 17, 2023, Peace River Regional District Board Meeting the Regional Board passed the following resolution:

MOVED, SECONDED and CARRIED

“That the Regional Board authorize that a letter be sent to the Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Citizens' Services, and the Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation, to support the development of Provincial Policy to allow Internet Service Providers timely access to Passive Infrastructure for telecommunication facilities.”

Access to passive infrastructure, such as utility poles and supporting structures, has an essential role in the deployment of broadband internet across the province. Passive infrastructure can be a cost-effective and efficient way to bring broadband internet to a community. Utility poles support telecom network facilities, such as fibre and coaxial cables, wireless WiFi and cellular antennas, including small cell antennas, and other broadband network components, which operate together to create a network to deliver access to mobile and fixed-wire high-speed internet and other broadband services to communities. Utilizing existing poles for broadband deployment eliminates the need to construct entirely new infrastructure from scratch, saving significant costs in terms of materials, labor, and permitting.

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The Regional Board has been informed that internet service providers are having challenges receiving timely access to BC Hydro utility poles, jeopardizing their ability to complete their provincial and federal grant funded proposals. The Regional Board would like to request that the Ministry develop policy to address delays in permitting and ensure steps are taken to expedite permitting approvals, allowing faster access to its Passive Infrastructure for telecom facilities.

The Regional Board appreciates all of the support received from the Province and looks forward to working alongside the Province to advance connectivity in the region.

Sincerely,

Leonard Hiebert

Leonard Hiebert,
Chair

c: Dan Davies, North Peace MLA, Dan.Davies.MLA@leg.bc.ca
Mike Bernier, South Peace MLA Mike.Bernier.MLA@leg.bc.ca

REPLY TO: prrd.dc@prrd.bc.ca