



BROADBAND INTERNET AND MOBILITY COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

April 30, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

1981 Alaska Avenue, Dawson Creek, BC

Directors Present:	Chair Quibell, District of Hudson's Hope (via Zoom) Director Dober, City of Dawson Creek (via Zoom) Director Graham, Electoral Area B (via Zoom) Director Hansen, City of Fort St. John (via Zoom) Chair Hiebert, Electoral Area D Alternate Director Norbury, District of Tumbler Ridge (via Zoom) Director Sperling, Electoral Area C Director Veach, Village of Pouce Coupe Director Zabinsky, City of Fort St. John
Directors Absent	Director Courtoreille, District of Chetwynd Director Rose, Electoral Area E Director Taillefer, District of Taylor
Staff Present:	Shawn Dahlen, Chief Administrative Officer Tyra Henderson, Corporate Officer Joanne Caldecott, Deputy Corporate Officer Trevor Ouellette, IT Manager Terri Henrickson, Regional Connectivity Coordinator/Recorder
Invited Guest:	<u>Network BC Ministry of Citizens' Services</u> Rachel Greenspan, Executive Director, Network BC (via Zoom)
Delegations:	<u>Ministry of Citizens' Services Re: Internet Affordability Presentation</u> Ian Hobbs, Executive Director Project Management (via Zoom) <u>Northwest Re: Northern Rockies Project Update Presentation</u> Kerry Newkirk, Director, Indigenous and Stakeholder Relations (via Zoom)

1. CALL TO ORDER

The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

MOVED Director Veach

SECONDED Director Hiebert

That the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee adopt the April 30, 2025 agenda:

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. ADOPTION OF AGENDA



3. GALLERY COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

a. Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee Draft Meeting Minutes of January 24, 2024

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6. DELEGATIONS

6.1 Ministry of Citizens' Services Re: Internet Affordability Presentation

6.2 Northwestel Re: Presentation

7. CORRESPONDENCE

7.1 Request for Support - BC First Nations Network - Connecting the Disconnected Project

8. REPORTS

9. NEW BUSINESS

10. CONSENT CALENDAR

10.1 CRTC Extends 911 System Transition Deadline. ADM-BIMC-034

10.2 Prophet River First Nation Data Centre Letter of Intent (LOI), ADM-BIMC -035

10.3 CRTC Broadband Internet Subsidy and its impact on Northern BC, ADM-BIMC-036

10.4 Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee Terms of Reference

10.5 Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee Guiding Principles

10.6 Regional Connectivity Service Establishment Bylaw No. 2487, 2022

11. RECESS TO CLOSED SESSION

12. ADJOURNMENT

CARRIED

3. GALLERY COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS

4. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

4.1 Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee Draft Meeting Minutes of January 24, 2025

MOVED

Director Dober

SECONDED

Director Hiebert

That the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee Meeting Minutes of January 24, 2025 be adopted.

CARRIED

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

6. DELEGATIONS

6.1 Ministry of Citizens' Services Re: Internet Affordability Presentation

The Chair welcomed Ian Hobbs, Executive Director, Project Management with the Ministry of Citizens Services who gave a presentation regarding Internet Affordability.

The following topics were included in the presentation:

- Shared Learning from Affordability Activities
- Canadian telecom dilemma - ubiquitous access for all citizens vs competition to drive service innovation and price
- Elements of achieving Digital Equity
- Two differing "internet affordability" focuses
- Internet Affordability Supports - Current State

6.1 Ministry of Citizens' Services Re: Internet Affordability Presentation (Cont'd)

- Federal Connecting Families Initiative (CFI)
- Internet Affordability Supports - The Gaps
- Low-income household's internet affordability supports gap analysis
- Telecom Federally Regulated in Canada
- CRTC National Contribution Fund (NCF)
- Internet Affordability Supports - Desired Outcome & Actions
- CRTC 2025-9/10

Six percent of homes that do not have internet fall under three categories: Those who are culturally not interested, those who lack digital skills, and those who can't afford it (or low-income homes). Low-income homes are considered to be those that can't afford the average \$75 price per month for Internet. This average affordability price is set by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) which is a division of the United Nations, and it uses a formula of 2% of income as its affordability target price for low-income affordability. A person with an income of \$25,000 who pays \$75 a month for internet is paying twice the ITU target for the Internet. The desired internet rate for affordability for low-income users is approximately \$20 - \$25 per month.

The presenter advised that generally, Canada is doing well in an affordability perspective in that the large Internet Service Providers (ISPs) do provide \$10 - \$35 plans. The challenge is that the eligibility criteria differs between Internet Service Providers, and Satellite Internet Service Providers do not typically provide low-income plans.

Marketing of the low-income internet service plans needs to be addressed, and more awareness of those plans needs to be brought to the public's attention. All levels of government should have a plan to draw awareness to these plans. Telecom providers do not have access to citizen income information therefore they use the federal ministries to make contact with the public to let those who are on federal income assistance programs know that they are eligible for low-income plans. Federal Connecting Families Initiative (an ISED program) is a marketing program; its only focus is to market what the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) have available. Direct mailout campaigns are used by the federal government to inform those who are eligible for the low-income plans, like those receiving a guaranteed income supplement benefit and those receiving a Canada Family Benefit supplement from the government.

The Connecting Families Initiative Program (CFI) needs to update their information to match the new rates and plans available from ISPs. There are 2.8 million homes living below the poverty line in Canada and only 85,000 homes participating in the CFI program. There is a lot of room for growth or increase to the program and marketing and awareness is likely the key to increasing participation in the program. There are also homes that are within the service footprint of service providers, but they don't meet the low-income requirements of the larger ISPs. Additionally, there are others that are served by smaller ISP's or satellite ISPs that don't offer low-income plans.

6.1 Ministry of Citizens' Services Re: Internet Affordability Presentation (Cont'd)

There is a need to make ISPs low-income plan eligibility criteria consistent across the board and to get smaller ISPs assistance to provide the same types of low-income plans. Local government and provincial government cannot interfere with ISP rates because they are federally regulated and managed.

Innovation Science and Economic Development (ISED) has collected over \$20 Billion in spectrum revenues and continues to make money from spectrum and spectrum renewal revenues from the industry. Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunication (CRTC) has the National Contribution Fund (which is like a tax and collects about \$200 Million with a portion of that used to fund the Universal Broadband Fund). National Contribution Funds (NCF) that are collected year after year should be used for addressing affordability issues, while the Spectrum revenues should continue to be used for the Universal Broadband Fund and the building of infrastructure.

A question-and-answer period ensued which included discussion on the following topics:

- Highspeed Internet and pricing plans that are available from ISPs such as TELUS and Rogers to low-income homes.
- Discussed the opportunity for Directors to share the information about the plans to their residents.
- Discussed informing seniors of the low-income plans. It was noted that seniors also struggle with the ability and competency to even be able to access or apply for the low-income plans and the technology that surrounds that process.
- Citizens Services is working to collaborate with various ministry departments and local facilities like libraries to form a plan that will educate seniors in the digital realm and skills. Cyber security and fraud protection advocacy is a main priority in assisting seniors.

Director Veach left the room at 10:35 a.m. and returned at 10:37 a.m.

Rachel Greenspan left the meeting at 10:43 a.m.

Chair Quibell thanked Ian Hobbs for presenting and he left the meeting at 10:46 a.m.

6.2 NorthwTel Re: Northern Rockies Project Update Presentation

The Chair welcomed Kerry Newkirk, Director Indigenous and Stakeholder Relations with NorthwTel who gave a presentation update titled "Northern Rockies Project Update".

The following topics were included in the presentation:

- Northern Canada's fibre network
- Northern BC - Planned FTTH expansion
- Northern BC 2025 Community Activities
- Northern BC Communities like Royal Lodge, Buffalo Loge, Wonowon and Halfway River First Nation
- Final Agreements with CCBC and BC Hydro and 'make ready' or pole preparations for fibre attachment.

6.2 NorthwesTel Re: Northern Rockies Project Update Presentation (Cont'd)

NorthwesTel reaches as far as Nunavut and serves over 97 households across the north. Halfway River is the furthest south community they serve. There is a Fibre loop owned and managed by NorthwesTel; it comes down through Mackenzie Valley, up through Dawson City and up to Nunavik. This has helped immensely in helping to maintain service in these areas. A few years back the fires caused damage to the fibre line connection points and cell service was out for two days in the Yukon because of fire damage. The remedy was a line built in Alaska and another in Alberta to prevent outages if fires happen again.

NorthwesTel has been working with Connecting Communities BC (CCBC) and Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) for approximately eight years now to try to get fibre into the communities. Because Fort Nelson meets the minimum standards of 50/10, it does not meet the criteria needed to get funding for fibre builds in that area to further expand fibre affordably. Delays have occurred on projects because of permitting of BC Hydro Poles and “make ready” pole requirements and these delays cost money. Currently, NorthwesTel, Connecting Communities and BC Hydro are currently in the final stages of working through pole readiness for fibre connecting and currently the responsibility for the pole readiness is now back on BC Hydro at this time. Funding is now available for BC Hydro to ready the poles and will help them to do that.

The transport fibre that runs through the Peace River Regional district is not normally cut into because once it is cut into, the integrity of the fibre transport line is compromised. So individual residences that are nearby still may not get fibre because the fibre transport was not built to branch off to individual residences.

2026 Fibre Construction plans include Wonowon, Liard River, Toad River, Muncho Lake, Prophet River, and Upper Halfway River etc. Ideally, NorthwesTel would like to get everyone off copper lines because it costs more to maintain them and it is an outdated infrastructure that can't carry the telecommunication needs of the future.

NorthwesTel is a part of the Federal program Connecting Families and offers \$10 - \$20 low income plans for its customers and relies on the CRA to notify anyone who receives the child care benefit subsidy or receives an old age pension and inform them of their eligibility for the program and provide instructions to take their letter to NorthwesTel to connect to internet with the cheaper plan and service. Currently however this is only available where fibre plants are available.

A question-and-answer period ensued which included discussion on the following topics:

- Discussion about what exactly is “High speed” fibre? The national standard is 50/10 and is really only capable of a zoom call and a small amount of downloading or data exchange. But the national standard should actually be doubled or 6 times that for future technology and usage to allow for streaming and downloading ease.
- Concerns were raised regarding Upper Halfway Hall and Band office and that is not currently connected to the NorthwesTel fibre line. Upper Halfway is looking at Starlink as an option. Kerry Newkirk confirmed that he would follow up on this with his sales department. The issue could be that Upper Halfway is expected to pay business rates

6.2 NorthwesTel Re: Northern Rockies Project Update Presentation (Cont'd)

and may not want to pay the price and see Starlink as an affordable option that gives them the service they need.

- NorthwesTel will become a wholly indigenous company this year.

Chair Quibell thanked Kerry Newkirk for presenting. Kerry Newkirk offered his assistance and availability anytime for any questions that Directors may have.

7. CORRESPONDENCE

7.1 Request for Support - BC First Nations Network - Connecting the Disconnected Project

MOVED Director Sperling

SECONDED Director Zabinsky

That the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee recommend that the Regional Board send a letter of support to the First Nations Telecom Network to assist with their funding application to the Canada Infrastructure Bank for the 'Connecting the Disconnected Project', an initiative to enhance connectivity by providing reliable, secure and culturally respectful digital infrastructure in Indigenous and remote communities, including Tsay Keh Dene and Kwadacha Nation, to secure long term benefits to education, healthcare, governance, and economic development in the impacted communities.

CARRIED

8. REPORTS

9. NEW BUSINESS

10. CONSENT CALENDAR

MOVED Director Sperling

SECONDED Director Veach

That the Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee receive the April 30, 2025 Consent Calendar.

CARRIED

11. RECESS TO CLOSED SESSION

12. ADJOURNMENT

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:10 a.m.

CERTIFIED a true and correct copy of the Minutes of the Peace River Regional District Broadband Internet and Mobility Committee Meeting held on April 30, 2025 in the PRRD Board Room, 1981 Alaska Avenue, Dawson Creek, BC.

Travous Quibell, Chair

Terri Henrickson, Regional Connectivity
Coordinator/Recording Clerk