

Broadband and Connectivity

Providing broadband and cell phone service to rural Alberta is key for attracting investment, maintaining local businesses, and allowing all Albertans to participate in the digital economy. Providing these services in rural and remote areas requires innovative strategies and partnerships, and rural municipalities strive to make their communities great places to live and invest.

What is the RMA's position on the importance of broadband in rural municipalities?

- ◆ Broadband internet is vital for rural businesses and residents to engage in the digital economy.
- ◆ Broadband internet is essential to rural community-building, as well as attracting qualified professionals and industry to rural and remote areas.
- ◆ Many rural and remote areas do not have the population density to attract broadband services based on a business case. Therefore, it may be necessary for municipalities to partner with federal and provincial government agencies and industry groups to ensure their residents' needs are met.

What financial considerations do rural municipalities have with respect to the provision of broadband?

- ◆ Rural areas with low population density and remote communities will likely not receive broadband service from market forces alone.
- ◆ Rural municipalities with the capacity to deploy broadband should be eligible for broadband funding programs.

What collaborative relationships are essential to developing quality rural broadband?

- ◆ Federal and provincial funding programs should allow for rural municipalities to be partners in constructing broadband infrastructure and providing broadband service.
- ◆ Many community services require collaboration among the Government of Alberta, the local municipality, and one or more non-profit organizations. It is critical that all organizations involved in the delivery of community services have a shared voice as to how the service is delivered within the community.
- ◆ Municipalities work with other internet service providers (ISPs) to support rural broadband service development (e.g. purchasing infrastructure and allowing ISPs to service these facilities to facilitate broadband distribution to low population density areas, partnering with an ISP to share the cost of building infrastructure).

How does the work of the RMA support the sustainability of rural broadband?

- ◆ Through advocacy efforts, the RMA works to increase awareness and support the sustainability of broadband services (e.g. engaging with Service Alberta and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities on broadband policy issues).
- ◆ The RMA champions the rural municipal perspective on broadband services through submissions to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED).
- ◆ RMA ran an internet speed testing project for two years which demonstrated that less than 10% of tests run meet the Government of Canada's goal for internet speeds.
- ◆ Rural broadband is identified as a federal advocacy priority issue for the RMA.

What current broadband-related issues are impacting rural Alberta?

Minimum Broadband Speeds

- ◆ The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) declaration of broadband as a basic telecommunication service, and decision to increase the minimum connectivity speed threshold for an area to be considered "serviced" by broadband are both positive steps towards a consistent level of broadband service across Canada.
- ◆ Any funding programs developed by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) related to improving service in underserved areas must focus on isolated rural and remote areas with the poorest connectivity speeds, and not allow funding recipients to only target areas that are slightly below the minimum threshold.

Alberta SuperNet

- ◆ To this point, the Alberta SuperNet has not been an effective tool to support rural final mile broadband access. However, the RMA is optimistic that Service Alberta's new operating agreement with Bell Canada will offer low cost wholesale and backhaul services for municipalities interested in connecting to the SuperNet.

Provincial Broadband Strategy

- ◆ A coordinated provincial broadband strategy is necessary to provide broadband internet service to all Albertans. The provincial broadband strategy could be strengthened by providing details on initiatives to be undertaken to bridge the digital divide.
- ◆ The Government of Alberta committed \$390 million to be delivered through the Universal Broadband Fund with matching funds from the Government of Canada. While this funding is welcome, the slow delivery and lack of transparency is concerning for rural municipalities who require improved internet access.

Federal Funding

- ◆ The RMA appreciates the Government of Canada's national broadband strategy which outlines the plan to provide broadband internet to all Canadians by 2030, as well as the accompanying Universal Broadband Fund to support this goal.
- ◆ Federal funding must support the long-term maintenance of broadband infrastructure in rural areas. This should include investment through fees collected from communication and internet providers.

Spectrum

- ◆ A large number of rural Albertans receive their internet wirelessly through transmission from towers to their homes and businesses. This technology requires the use of spectrum, which must be managed to meet the needs of rural Albertans.
- ◆ The Spectrum Policy Framework for Canada should be revised to minimize the reliance on market forces to govern spectrum management.
- ◆ “Use it or lose it” policies should be implemented to ensure spectrum is deployed by internet service providers in a timely manner rather than held as an investment.

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