

Resolution ?

Broadband Funding Application Process Review
Sturgeon County

Items noted in red font will be completed by RMA

Three-fifths (3/5)

Majority Required

Endorsed by Central District

WHEREAS the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) deems broadband a “basic” or “essential” service for Canadians; and

WHEREAS broadband service in rural, remote and northern communities is slower, with less capacity (bandwidth) and significantly more cost than services in urban centres; and

WHEREAS broadband connectivity is vital to ensuring rural residents are not left behind in accessing online services (e.g., online learning, education, employment, and health, financial and government services). Providing these services in rural and remote areas requires innovative strategies and partnerships; and

WHEREAS access to high-speed internet is a necessity of modern life. This is benchmarked by the Government of Canada’s (GOC) goal to provide access to highspeed internet to all Canadians by 2030. The GOC defines highspeed internet as 50 megabits per second (mbps) download and 10 mbps upload speeds. While private internet service providers (ISPs) are the owners and operators of internet infrastructure, there is a role for all levels of government to play in promoting the development of highspeed internet service; and

WHEREAS the current Alberta Broadband Funding model limits municipalities’ application options.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) advocate that the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada strengthen their direct collaboration to accelerate the implementation of broadband infrastructure projects in rural Alberta.

Member Background

Access to broadband allows Canadians to fully participate in the digital economy and take advantage of quality-of-life services, including telehealth, e-learning and access to government and social services.

Broadband access remains the single largest barrier to digital advancement for rural communities.

Internet challenges exist in both the urbanized and rural areas of Sturgeon County. It is commonly perceived that the County is served with 50/10 speeds given its close proximity to the City of Edmonton; however, it is clear based on speed testing results that this is not universally true, and gaps exist. Therefore, it is pertinent for Sturgeon County to

emphasize the ongoing need for investment in internet access within its boundaries. This will support both businesses and personal use alike.

The Government of Alberta has publicly expressed its goal of exploring solutions for poor cell coverage on major highways. There may be an opportunity to leverage work in this area to expand service to rural areas farther from major highways. Recognizing the policy governing cellular phones is federal jurisdiction, the provincial government can support enhanced service by advocating for updated mapping, which will demonstrate the current conditions.

Competition between cellular service providers should encourage investment in more infrastructure. Where possible, the provincial government should advocate for and seek to attract competition in the cellular service market. Work to address gaps in coverage along highways should include engagement with local municipalities and providers to explore opportunities to improve coverage in other rural areas as well.

The federal government's \$2.75 billion Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) left many rural municipalities ineligible for funding due to imprecise grant eligibility maps. A large portion of the Government of Alberta's \$390 million funding to improve high-speed internet went to "top-up" UBF applications using identical eligibility criteria, again preventing many rural municipalities from receiving funding.

The Government of Alberta had also earmarked \$36 million in Alberta Broadband Fund (ABF) funding, with the intent to "help ensure every rural, remote, and Indigenous household in the province can access high-speed internet". The ABF has two streams with eligibility criteria other than that used for the federal UBF; however rural municipalities continue to face challenges. If changes are made to existing eligibility criteria it could have the potential to expedite the process for improving rural broadband speeds.

By strengthening their collaboration and harmonizing their distinct policy objectives, the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada can create a more cohesive, efficient, and effective strategy for rural broadband deployment. A unified approach would not only accelerate the implementation of broadband infrastructure but also ensure that rural Albertans can fully participate in and benefit from the digital economy and society, achieving shared outcomes more rapidly than if each order of government pursued its initiatives independently.

RMA Background

RMA will provide after resolution is endorsed at district level.