

Vermont 2024 Ten Year Telecommunications Plan – Input Session 1

Transcription from Public Input Session held on 3-18-24:

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

So again, this is the first meeting of the public comment session for the public comment draft of the 10-year telecom plan. So the format of this meeting is we're here to solicit input. This is not necessarily an open conversation where we're going to have a back and forth, but the plan is going out there. It's been posted to the website, and we would like to hear your comments on the plan on statutorily they will be included in the plan, and we will provide some kind of response to them. So can we go to the next slide? We'll go over the agenda real quick. So basically, what's gonna happen is I'm gonna stop talking in a minute. And Alex is going to go over and give a rough slide deck of what is included in the 10 year telecom plan. Umm, I would like to ask people to keep their comments initially to 3 minutes if possible. After everybody has a had a chance to go, we will open the floor back up for longer extended comments as appropriate moral adults. Here, let's all make where we keep it polite and civil as we move forward, and with that I will turn it over to Alex and hopefully I didn't miss anything.

Alex Kelley - RISI

No, that was great. Thank you, hunter. So just a few quick another other housekeeping things before we begin. So I'm gonna walk through this deck that shares some of the highlights of the 10 year plan. It is impossible to completely summarize the plan in a slide deck and so please don't take this to be exclusive or exhaustive of what's in the plan. I'm hoping that if you're providing comment you get a chance to read the plan and the original document, but in order to spark thinking and just remind folks who are watching what the plan contains, we're going to go over this deck. The second thing is if you have comments in writing that you're going to read from today, it would help us out. If you also sent those to us via email, then we could include those directly, but as Hunter mentioned, we'll also be taking a transcription. So a little bit of context about this particular plan, the 2024 plan as always, the plan is guided by the telecommunications goals listed in statute and this plan provides analysis and recommendations to support the state's efforts in achieving those goals. It's also the entire process of the plan is laid out in statute as well, and so this plan follows that process. Umm, the moment of time when it when it is happening in 2024 is notable because we are in the midst of a significant amount of federal resources being provided to the state to target certain types of broadband deployments. And so the intent of

the 2024 plan is to build on the momentum created by all of those resources from ARPA Capital Projects Fund and the Bead Fund.

Alex Kelley - RISI

The broadband equity access and deployment and some of those federal resources come with very strict and prescribed rules about how the state can use them. Those resources also require a separate planning process and a parallel planning process that happened during the creation of this plan. And so the other piece of important context is that this plan has follows statute and addresses all of the statutory requirements. However, it also places a special focus on elements that are not being addressed in the simultaneous bead planning that is being required by the federal government. And that's just to be efficient with resources and to provide a deeper perspective on some of the items that are not already being addressed in parallel. So a robust amount of qualitative and quantitative research underpins the analysis and recommendations in the plan. The plan as part of the plan, we did a landline and cell phone survey of a statistically significant sampling of Vermont residents. We also surveyed Vermont businesses, healthcare professionals and public safety professionals via online surveys. We interviewed. It's actually closer to 60 at this point. Stakeholders, we did a statewide mobile wireless engineering and coverage analysis. We did a really a robust analysis called an input output analysis that allows us to understand the gaps and the workforce in the state of Vermont related to broadband construction. There's obviously more in the plan, but this is a highlight.

Alex Kelley - RISI

A selection of highlights, I think of pieces of research that are important to note going into this. So I'll go through a selection of the findings that we think are important in salient to the recommendations. On the next slide, we have uh, Yep, a finding that perhaps is the most obvious because we've seen it happening all around us. Right? Fiber coverage is expanding rapidly in the state that's expanding so fast that the data sources we have to even understand it are. Can't keep up because it's construction is constantly happening so households with access to 100 Meg symmetrical doubled between 2021 and 2023. Vermont is on track to pass all on grid premises by 2029, with a with 100 symmetrical fiber. You know, related to this fiber expansion, our analysis determined that Vermont really needs to grow its broadband construction workforce. The sector had been shrinking prior to 2022, and if we've got an estimated up to \$700 million of fiber deployments still ahead of us, you know the workforce is going to need to grow by about 750 across a number of occupational categories. Couple other findings. One thing that many stakeholders noted

was that fiber infrastructures owners may need to bury portions of the network, and the next 10 to 15 years as part of utility hardening and becoming more resilient to climate change. And the process and costs and protocols associated with that are not clear and and a number of stakeholders really desire clarity around how that's going to work, how that will be coordinated and if there's a role for the state to play, to coordinate more efficiency on that front.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Another important finding just related to the state's efforts to achieve the goal of universal fiber deployment is that the Agency of Transportation is no longer issuing right of way permit waivers which they had been doing for a while in for infrastructure builders and unserved areas to ease the. Be the economics of deploying in the rural areas. So, a couple interesting findings on the mobile wireless service. Umm, so you know, stakeholders reiterated how important the service was, you know, 80% of businesses indicated that they did not think that the Vermont's mobile wireless coverage is adequate for their business needs and a clear majority of residents strongly agreed that the state should use public funds to improve mobile wireless coverage. And while mobile download speeds have increased quite significantly since the 2018 coverage, areas have seen almost no improvements. So there's actually little to no expansion of service areas happening happened in the last five years. Another but lastly, an important finding from the engineering analysis is that. We looked at the entirety of the gaps in the state and the analysis showed that strategically placed small wireless facilities, which we measured at 50 feet, can make significant progress towards closing a good portion of the coverage gaps, right. So in in comparison, we did a similar analysis for more traditional 140 foot towers. And while you know, while the efficiency of those 140 foot towers is notable for the hardest serve areas, the point of this analysis was that it actually demonstrated that Vermont could make significant progress with smaller facilities, at least for the easiest to serve areas that currently don't have coverage from any provider.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Next slide. Umm, affordability is obviously critical and during the creation of this plan it was it. It came about that the Affordable connectivity program at the federal level is sunseting due to lack of funding. Umm, you know that program provided a \$30.00 a month subsidy for about 24,000 Vermonters to either help them with their mobile wireless bill or their fixed coverage. And we we've been some interesting stats about how critical affordability is, you know, for example, 16% of respondents under the age of 45 reported that the cost of their mobile bill often are always impacts essential items. Participation in the ACP was notable,

especially among certain populations who really needed that coverage. Another lastly finding related to mobile broadband affordability is healthcare workers. We surveyed noted that without continuous mobile coverage and access devices, and how's Vermonters have a lot? Harder time accessing care.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Next slide, you know public safety component of this 10 year plan as it everyone knows you know mobile coverage was a big theme in those conversations as well. Uh, you know, due to conversations happening in the legislature, we also spent a lot of ink discussing the pros and cons of public safety, answering point consolidation, the advantages and disadvantages from a coverage and process standpoint, advantages being some increased staffing flexibility, more resources for statewide and more emergencies and potentially long term cost savings, right. Disadvantages include a big startup cost to switch the systems over, you know, a reduction in local knowledge due to the fact that people answering may not be from that area and you need to establish new redundancy and failover processes. So anyways, it's a big section in the plan. Please do check it out if you haven't. In other finding, stakeholders reported that look that we've got a statewide communication interoperability plan and while there are some federal grant resources available to work on, some of those pieces, it's a lack of funding at the state level has been a big barrier to executing on those goals. And then lastly, UM, you know over 51st net sites have been deployed, some new construction and others kind of upgrades to existing facilities, which is good progress. That being said, only 5% of the Public Safety survey respondents reported never losing mobile service on the job.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Lastly, under the direction of some of the stakeholders we interviewed, and especially the Jai talk committee, we did take a look at the statutes governing the plan in and of themselves, but a few different recommendations. One, you know the broadband speed, definitions and deployment parameters are starting to lag behind other states. And there's some, uh, there's some kind of slight misalignment across statute. You know the statutorily mandated end date for the Vermont Community Broadband Board. You know, we feel might be too soon because there are bead program activities that are likely to happen after that date and then we we spent a lot of time discussing some of the statutory goals which were first drafted 40 years ago and we have a recommendation that the legislature revisit those goals and clarify them and add some more specificity to them.

Alex Kelley - RISI

So now I think we're into the summary of some of our recommendations. So we have some recommendations about how the state can take some actions to make wireline deployment more efficient. Again, some of this is dictated by federal statute. That's attached to the broadband funding that the state has available, but nevertheless there are things that they can do. We recommend reinstating the Agency of Transportation permit fee waivers, which will help reduce the challenge of the economics of deploying rural areas. You know we, you know, we appreciate and commend the workforce training that's going on in the state already, but that does need to be scaled to accommodate the amount of construction that will need to happen and calibrated based on the gaps that we identified in, in our analysis. And then lastly, the state is in a position where they should be the ones driving clarity around the future process of burying infrastructure as utilities underground, their infrastructure over the next 15 years. And that part of driving clarity around that will mean understanding the potential impact to ISP and fiber infrastructure owner financials and their business plans and providing a central coordination role to and create savings and align people all working on this to be as efficient as possible.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Umm, we feel that to start making progress on wireless, mobile wireless gaps that the state should deploy what we're calling a pilot grant program and this grant program, we recommend focusing on those small wireless facilities that again can. Make meaningful and efficient coverage progress in the state, while also you know not having as much of an impact on the landscape as 140-foot towers. So we recommend 2 to \$3 million initial pilot program here the plan has detailed recommendations about what we think that pilot program should look like. But it may a critical piece of it is collecting certain pieces of data to then refine it, because this is a an effort that the state that will be new for the state. To some degree, we also have a number of recommendations about data collection practices, large and in ways that the state can strengthen their planning abilities to better measure progress, including repetition of mobile broadband. Drive tests using the same methodology done in 2022. The establishment of a crowd source drive test a framework to collect data on the roads that the previous drive test did not collect and then a slight change in the 248 a data collection process which would be to request that permit recipients notify the public service department upon completion of tower builds.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Umm, affordability has a number of recommendations in that section. A couple highlights here. We recommend using a 2% of monthly income benchmark as a definition of affordable for fixed and mobile broadband spending for low income Vermonters. We have

charts extrapolating what that means in the plan and to really allow Vermonters to have both a mobile and a fixed subscription, which stakeholders, you know, overwhelmingly said was necessary for was necessary for Vermonters. We believe a state run subsidy program should provide \$67 a month to support those both of those types of subscriptions. Means and we also believe that a fully subsidized mobile device and mobile subscription program for on House Vermonters in particular would really benefit that population and ensure continued access to services.

Alex Kelley - RISI

So again, the big theme of some of the emergency communications is you know that they have, there's a plan in place for how to increase the resiliency of those systems and evolve those systems. There are pieces that simply need to be funded and then on the public safety answering point discussion, you know, if the stakeholders support taking another step down the path of consolidation based on the analysis provided in the plan, we recommend performing a detailed kind of consolidation plan to go in great depth as to what the costs would be for that and the process to do that. And then lastly, we provided some recommendations to modernize statutes. So you know, again there needs to be an exercise in aligning the 30 VSA 202 C&D with Act 71. There's a little there's a few pieces that are not fully harmonized. We do believe that the Vermont Community Broadband Board sunset date should be extended and there are ways in which the statutory goals should be updated. Just one example here. You know, there's a goal of competition in the state that was set quite some time ago and there's a way to update this goal to reflect the practices that the state has been promoting by changing the goal to reflect what the intended outcomes of competition are, namely faster speeds, lower cost, better customer service rather than competition itself. So that's just one example of a ways that the statutory goals could be updated and made more specific based on the strategies that the state is currently taking.

Alex Kelley - RISI

I think that is the end of the presentation. So now we are at the at the time when anyone who wants to share thoughts on the plan may, and we will ask that you keep your comments to 3 minutes to start until everyone has had a chance to go.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

So for the folks on the phone, if you would like to raise your hand, umm. And then we can

call on you as you want to comment just a word out all talking over each other the phone. We're here for another 38 minutes anyway so.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Yeah.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

There's a raise your hand function on there where it'll like a little virtual hand go up.

Aaron Brassard – PSD Fiber Optic Project Manager

That's true.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

If you dial in, all these people are connected in with teams, otherwise they would just be telephone numbers.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

Want to get started?

Stephen Whitaker

Was hoping not to go first or last. I think just to set the tone, which I will change later, I wanna commend a couple of sections of the plan. The analysis of the importance and the challenges of developing carrier grade service on our fiber infrastructure or on the new build fiber infrastructure is very good. Unfortunately, it's done in the context of expecting CUD to do that, which is almost laughable. Uh. A Open Access. Statutory compliance has been built into the CUD plans from the start as is required by current statute, not the statute we're hoping will be someday. Then I could imagine carrier grade service providers jumping on and leasing the circuits they need to the points they need them to, and developing carrier great services. That is probably the only way we're going to get carrier grade out of this. Uh, this tie is somewhat together with the study of married if they're currently piloting the direct burial with Green Mountain power. But yet the cost to add a conduit where there already got the ditch open. Were so exorbitant for fiber to go in that it was waived, the opportunity was waived in the pilot and then another section of underground yet to be done. Uh was going to require. Hundreds of thousands in the replacement poles and Selvans decides they'll just charge that out to drop the conduit in.

So the I believe that if we're gonna do a study of direct burial. Communications and fiber in the same operation as direct burial of the Green Mountain Power Electric. It's gonna have to be regulated like a rate case, and it's that plan is long overdue because now all the CUD's have aerial plans, which it may be too late to switch horses.

Stephen Whitaker

The neutral host. Uh analysis or I haven't seen the actual propagation analysis, but the analysis that so many power poles in a small cell arrangement I think is a smart idea and could work better in Vermont. Again, the assumption that the CUD's would own, build and manage those is a is a fallacy. See, these could barely. In any case, I'll refrain this CUD myopic uh, draft. Uh aspect of this draft is, I believe, a result of the same firm writing the plan, which is the same firm that wrote the last plan and failed on 9 out of 10 statutory requirements, is also doing the engineering work for the CUD within the department for the CUD plan review within the department. So some of this, you know, future projections is kind of self-serving, self-serving make work or you know the department and CTC to have further butter for their bread.

Stephen Whitaker

But I'm going to point to some of the flaws in the process. I read the statute very literally and I'm familiar with it for 30 years now. And what's prior to preparing the plan? An overview looking at 10 years ahead of statewide growth and development as they relate to future telecommunication service that's missing. It's not here. Uh shifts in transportation modes, economic development, technological advances? That's not in here. The factors that will significantly affect state telecommunications policy programs that's not in here. The overview shall include economic demographic forecasts sufficient to determine infrastructure investments, goals and objectives. That's not in there. That's prior to preparing a plan. So you really gotten out of here? Of ourselves in preparing the draft without reading what the precursors are. Uh, the surveys are pretty good, but I question the, uh, statistically significant. So the number of people that were surveyed, umm, I'd like. I'd have to talk to somebody. Who knows survey methodology better than I to see what's appropriate for this kind of scale. Uh, we used to have hundreds of people in the 90s. We had hundreds of people participating in this planning process and it's the department failure to write a plan. Failure to properly promulgate it. Failure to hold hearings on a final draft. Failure to even draft a plan for several of the generations under O'Brien and Douglas uh that has caused this capacity of the public to atrophy.

Stephen Whitaker

And so when I read that the in developing the department shall establish a participatory

planning process that includes effective provisions for increased public participation. This doesn't cut it, you know, three meetings with one or two people. This is not anywhere close to what you're you need to be doing to draft such an important document. That's if all the homework we're done 1st and put out for review so. To the extent necessary, I guess that's I want.

Stephen Whitaker

And who's in? Who's determination? The department shall include in a plan surveys to determine existing improvements and extensions, access and coordination between telecommunications providers, methods of operation and any changes that will produce better service or reduce costs. Those are things that there's contractor is to embed with the CUD's and their plans to even think outside the box. We had one good model with WEC and CV fiber for a time. I was integrally involved with CV fiber and that fell apart because this easy money made it too easy to go and just take the money and not worry about not worry about whack getting a low interest are US low, so the poll owning utilities in order both for resilience, planning for public safety and carrier grade capacity and the ability to rapid restoral that having the skilled technicians in in state and readily at hand and ready and prepared and expecting a storm with their trucks and tools and parts loaded is not going to happen the way. We've gone about it with a bunch of out of state, especially Consolidated a bunch of out of state and nonunion fly by night contractors and then they leave town and nobody can even figure out why this, you know, splitters not lighting up.

Stephen Whitaker

So the poll owning utilities and it may be too late, but where we are in the plan, I'm, I'm gonna keep raising it in case there's structural read. Uh, we are steering that can be done. This poll owning utility should be especially in the underground. We're gonna go underground even more so because then we don't have any increased cost of ditching that fiber underground. It's gonna go in as the mountain power varies their own.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

Yeah, but when you have a moment to pause and just so we can check and see if anyone else has any comments yet, I'll pause right there.

Harlie Quero - PSD Telecom Coordinator

Steven, would you be able to state your full name for the record too?

Stephen Whitaker

They're Steven Whittaker from Montpelier.

Harlie Quero - PSD Telecom Coordinator

Thank you.

Stephen Whitaker

And since I'm doing that, I wanna point out, I would ask people to go look at Appendix G of the last 10 year Telcom plan and I put pages and pages of constructive and specific recommendations regarding resiliency and public safety. It needs and it was all just swept off the table. Whoever was doing that, I presume it was Corey. Uh, you would know if you were doing it. I know it wasn't clay so. Ohh but my point is if if that that's again damaging the public participation. If you're gonna bother to participate and provide a lot of input and it's just going to get swept off and ignored. Uh, that doesn't bode well for you adhering to statute with your public participation. So the pole owning utility should be.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

Let's make sure no one else on the phone wants to.

And then come right back to you.

Stephen Whitaker

I thought, I just did that.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

OK, I don't see anyone else on the phone have a comment they'd like to to add.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

All right, back to you, Steven.

Stephen Whitaker

Thank you.

Stephen Whitaker

So the pole owning utilities are the logical entity to build, own and maintain and lease Open Access fiber. Competition, you know, wishful thinking that we're going to get the benefits of competition just by saying we're going to get the benefits of competition with monopolies is is La La land. You know that competition creates an incentive of smart teams of people working against each other to drive prices down and drive quality and loyalty up. And that's a proven fact again and again and we're in statute says that you can't be writing a plan for a statute you hope to change in years to come. And that's what this is. This says we're gonna plow ahead with the monopoly service. We're going to keep all the monopoly arrangement secret between, you know, Waitsfield paged and our GWI and the CUD's. And we're going to grant huge new footprints to monopolies. We're not going to address.

Stephen Whitaker

Here's a gap. The vulnerability of unpowered lines for landlines is increasing dramatically as we shift to fiber, and there's been a PUC docket on it, which the department? Your department sabotaged and nothing came out of it. Oh, we're just going to teach people to maintain batteries. It's like that's a joke. Old people are not going to go in their basement and check on batteries to see if they're too old to be reliant upon during a storm. Uh, we need strategies to make emergency calling available via fixed wireless. That's hardened backhaul to public safety grade that can be reached with a short walk from most of the residences, or we need to maintain the copper. But this reliability we've just we see this pages and pages of propaganda about FirstNet and yet, no, no mention of the massive outage on February 22nd, which took down all AT&T service nationwide, including FirstNet. And no one can answer why and the investigation will be secret. The after action report will be secret. No mention of how FirstNet could fail over with priority and preemption to other carriers in a neutral host model that we design and implement properly, not relying on CUD's. That's put way too much faith and and confidence in CUDs.

Stephen Whitaker

So umm, I heard the goals were drafted four years ago. These goals have been drafted and, uh, 20 years ago, 30 years. 1987 is when our this Statute requiring this plan was first passed, and then the IT was about 10 years ago. It was ten years ago that we put the hundred 100 by 2024 in place, and here it is 2024 and say, oh, let's move it to 2029. I'm like if we had had this plan in place when the DARPA money came or not this plan, but a real plan when the money got here, we might have made some progress and we might even made it by 2025, cause the money's coming out, right? Uh.

Stephen Whitaker

Covered most. Come with the cost. Ohh little to no service area expansion in cellular in the last five years and yet we say ohh AT&T got 15 new powers. Uh, AT&T not only defrauded the state with their promises, they were caught when we, the state paid television to go measure the coverage down in, in when in Bennington County. And the coverage wasn't there. And AT&T basically told the state # sand we measure it differently. Take it up with Washington. We don't answer to you and that's why we shouldn't be advertising for them in, in this pretending that they're the only game in town with priority and branching. No mention that Verizon has priority and preemption. That any first responder could sign up and scan their card credential and get prior to grants turned on. No. And what of the neutral hosts model, where multiple carriers can have priority and preemption and fail over to each other? In a disaster where anyone tear goes down and that's what we that's what would be a plan. So umm.

Stephen Whitaker

I don't understand what this being said. Montpelier was encouraged to bow out of EC fiber. We were a founding member of EC Fiber. We were encouraged to bow out of EC fiber and let CV fiber instead. Nobody built fiber until Consolidated got here and now nobody will build fiber. They see the CUD's were not allowed to build in cabled areas where 25, three was already present. Is my understanding, and yet I'm hearing that we're on track to have 100 megabits symmetric, which means fiber to every address in the state, and it just doesn't add up to me. There's something I'm not understanding about that representation, and it may be touched in the word. Uh, we're gonna pass all unpaid premises. That might mean that we're not going to have any breakout boxes or any service drops. We're just gonna have run a long distance cable through those communities long-distance doesn't count for every E 911 address having 101 hundred fiber speed. So are we presuming that, are we pretending that the cable companies are gonna upgrade to DOCSIS four and have 100 to 100 symmetric? But it's already time. The telecommunications and Connectivity Advisory Board hasn't met in years and has not provided any advice on upgrading the speed. It's time for our base speed to be Gigabit symmetric, but are we gonna have that that every address, including the cabled addresses? Or are we pretending that the cabled addresses or the limitation on the Arbor money gives us a free pass to not provide fiber service to those addresses? CUD's are not designing as far as I know, we're not designing the areas that are cable built. You're not allowed to use this money for that. And yet we're representing that we're on track to have every on good address. So five or served and then fiber served with competition.

Stephen Whitaker

I mean the opening chapter, the opening paragraph of the plan. Says. Uh, the department shall be responsible for the revision of plans for meeting emerging trends related to telecommunications, technology markets, financing and competition. You can't just say competition. Ohh that's inconvenient. You know, that'll make us work harder. That'll make us have to design active fiber and Ethernet networks instead of passive so that we can with a few keystrokes, move somebody to a competitor that can keep the day they determine.

Stephen Whitaker

So I've got a nice marked up copy of the draft and of the but I don't wanna preoccupied this hearing, but I think the fact that nobody showed up. Ohh, the access media organization. The department shall coordinate with Vermont's access media organizations when planning the public hearings required by this subsection. That's these hearings this week and next, and there's been no coordination with the access media organizations. That's why you don't have any turnout here, among other things. But you need advertising. You need radio advertising. You need speakers on VPR. You know ahead of time to say this is a big under Deal undertaking we're taking on and we need to, you know, get everybody up to speed. Here's some homework. You can do ahead of time now. Here's how to understand this plan. That work hasn't been done, and you inherited this mess, I understand. But we really need to rethink how we're going about it at this point. I'm thinking we need to create a an amendment to a bill that's moving related telecom and extend the due date and get this done right and that's not gonna be by RISI and CTC that can click it and they shouldn't pay back the money. They collect it from the last plan, which was not anywhere near close to the contractual terms.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

Thank you.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

You wanna submit handwriting or do you want us to transcribe that?

Stephen Whitaker

I think it's already transcribed.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director
OK.

Stephen Whitaker
And they'll be more we're here two more times and probably a lot more than that.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director
Appreciate your input, Steven.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director
You're still here for another 18 minutes.

Stephen Whitaker
Who? Who made the decision that you can't do a back and forth and argue the merits are picked?

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director
This is just to solicit the input plan.

Stephen Whitaker
But who made that decision? It's not precluded here in statute. Why is this different than your? All your off the record interviews.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director
I scheduled this meeting as just a public input session. Just so we could collect input or respond to it, because anything that has a yeah, I want the varnished response.

Stephen Whitaker
I don't want an unvarnished response I mean, somebody needs to see what you know or what you don't know and who's pulled, who's pulling the puppet string. I guess I won't.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director
We'll put it in the plan and will respond to it.

Stephen Whitaker

I have trouble with encouraging people to come if they're not going to get any feedback on their concerns during the hearings so. Do you know who? The people are HQ AT DB ML.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

I have names on the screen.

Stephen Whitaker

Who knows? So you just lost one of them. No, I don't recognize me.

0:55:18.590 --> 0:55:24.670

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

I don't recognize them as CUD people, I see them as two interpreters.

Alex Kelley - RISI

Yeah and everyone else is from us.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

I'm not sure who Christian is. She with you?

Alex Kelley - RISI

Yeah.

Stephen Whitaker

So where was this advertised?

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

This was advertised on WCAX, Department of Libraries, and the department website.

Stephen Whitaker

Please, I looked at the website today. There's nothing about the telecom plan or about the hearings on the home page. In fact, you got it. You gotta dig and right now, actually, you

could. He couldn't find it all unless you went to the Document section of the Telecom Division. Had nothing about the telecom plan under initiated or nothing about the hearings this week. Then the announcement sections on the right hand side. I don't know where it is now. I think some other announcements have been made since then. You mean it pushed off?

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

On the announcement section on the right-hand side. Not sure where it is now but it's under that section.

Stephen Whitaker

You probably need some professional help getting the. That's what the AMOs were designed. I helped write this statute and the AMO participation was to help get the involved crowd, the invested crowd and even the impacted but Unknowledgeable who want to get knowledgeable ARP and you know, did it was Emmy? Both mailing sent out to any of these groups.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

We also advertised on WCAX and the Department of Libraries

Stephen Whitaker

WCAX, you paid for advertising on there?

Stephen Whitaker

Actually you just got them to cover that.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

Online they're considered a statewide advertising, so if you need to notify the whole state are considered one of the advertisers that state.

Stephen Whitaker

I don't go, I wouldn't go there. I'm a pretty because every person.

Stephen Whitaker

Ohh, another thing that's missing the whole microwave system is missing. Well, they're barking upon a \$99 million upgrade. Uh, which isn't in the states ADS plans, either, but

there's an entire public safety task force that is, uh, already got a contractor underway. Who's gonna do a PSAP call, volume fees analysis and they really need to do it. Coupled with this, it's another reason to slow this, uh, rickety, trained down and get it on the right track. And that's going to be a year long process, but the amount of knowledge we will have about radio systems, the regionally owned radio systems, the state owned radio systems that the opportunity for cost effective concurrent design and build of LTE and LMR if public safety's gonna have to densify their whole network to get P25 working, why aren't we putting LTE and LMR neutral host on those same polls in order to achieve the most cost effective? Solution because they're all going to need generators or all gonna need fiber backhaul or microwave backhaul. But then the statewide microwave system is a huge tell me missing from the planet, unless it's that reference to, you know, it's state police's LMR backhaul, which is both fiber and at least fiber.

Stephen Whitaker

But the opportunity to redo the 911 system on a shared high performance network, you know, there's no reason we couldn't have a network like Menlo Park and teach people to use it. And I track people to come here and build businesses on it. But the reason it's not happening is because we can't seem to get a plan together.

Stephen Whitaker

Throw another two cents in here.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

Yeah, 10 more minutes. Steven.

Stephen Whitaker

The looking at sub nine the nine analyses of alternative strategies to leverage the state's ownership and management of the Right of Way public right of way to create opportunities for accelerating the build out of fiber optic broadband and for increasing network resiliency. Basic that was the language that was put into Act 71, the broadband it created, the Broadband board, they said. A statewide engineered resilient design was both allowed and fun fundable with those funds, the broadband board chose not to do it on the claim that it would have slowed us down by two years. Well, here we are. Three years later and we're it's coming back to roost that the lack of that statewide design means we're not prepared with the resilience design to know where we would bury fiber with Green Mountain power to create a carrier grade hurricane proofed core network. What role should Velco's aerial fiber

play? What role? What's the potential of using similar sienna dense wave division boxes at every CUD homed to two different Velco maxes to create a backbone that is self-healing and or quickly restorable via even if we have to go through New Hampshire and New York to get somebody lit back up after a fiber break. But that combined with underground fiber strategy to support all the antennas that will be putting up for this public safety initiative would have given us the best bang for the buck and probably coming under budget. So you wouldn't have all the poll may credit cost. You wouldn't have all the done pull attachment cost. Central Vermont Fiber is \$400,000 a year for attachment cost. Those wouldn't exist if the poll owners built, owned, and maintained the fiber. And just leased that Open Access CUD would have a much simpler job.

Stephen Whitaker

How did you get so far off course? I could take advantage of this one way conversation.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

Good.

Stephen Whitaker

Another thing that neutral host analysis for small cells failed to include the issue of spectrum. You know we FirstNet has 20 megahertz of valuable 700 megahertz spectrum, uh, details got a 700-megahertz. The advantage that T-Mobile has around the rest of the country with the 2.5 spectrum is owned locally here. CBS CBRS priority licenses are owned locally here at every county. We've got a lot of spectrum that could do a lot of good if we wrote a plan that takes maximum advantage of it, are we gonna keep, you know?

I've talked to the Mac mountain people and I don't. I don't argue with the concept of neutral host, but I don't think we're gonna get the carriers attention. One and two sites at a time. I think we would have to have a aggregated the whole 200 sites or 400 sites and say we can provide this much additional coverage, but if we didn't even get to the 76% that AT&T had offered in their secret plan to the governor, uh and experts have said we should be shooting for 95% coverage. Uh, and if you're in laws coming to town and they're on Verizon or you're on Verizon, they're on AT&T y'all learn connecting, you know, so in in the dead zones. So any state money at all should not go into single carrier solutions because it doesn't help us and think about it from the public safety point of view. Let's assume all three major carriers had priority and preemption turned on for all eligible, but the in a mutual aid, Vermont is mostly volunteers. 5000 volunteers they come from far away areas. If they come from an area served by AT&T and they're coming to an area served by Verizon, their devices aren't

going to work right without cut priority preemption and roam. So that there's just a safety imperative itself and the uh increase coverage and the resiliency of failover for first net and or for Verizon public safety, I forget what they call their public safety offering. That brand name should have been in here too.

Hunter Thompson – PSD Telecom Director

I talked to him about it a few weeks ago.

Stephen Whitaker

And I don't know what T-Mobile's offering is either, but my point is that there's an opportunity to do this right. And the plan is to place to flesh that out, not with, not by trying to undermine our competition statutes and not by trying to, you know, set up the department as a grant maker. Let's you know, teach all to write a plan first before we have you had it now grants the telecommunication the Connectivity Advisory Board, hasn't met in years, but back when they did, they gave \$16,000 per address to Comcast to build some addresses in Norwich. One of the wealthiest towns in the state, so we there's a reference to all the Wi-Fi that was put up during the first year of the COVID pandemic, and nobody checked or logged the backhaul capacity that was speeding those. I mean, it was a lot of squandered money and with it, you know, nobody checked the battery backup. Nobody checked the longevity. Nobody put a contract on their how long and they were charged and you'll maintenance fee with equipment was picked that required today renewing an annual license for the software to use the Wi-Fi access point. Talk about encouraging people to turn it off. You know, it was almost as big as fiasco is giving away all the CoverageCo sells for dollar \$100 or whatever it was. The cabinets were one cabinet that was worth that for our future small cell endeavors.

Hunter Thompson - PSD Telecom Director

We have a couple minutes left. We can wrap up if there's no more comments from anyone on the phone, I would like to thank our two interpreters. Appreciate it and thank RISI for being on the phone around the meeting with us. We will do this again Wednesday night. Same place, same time. Uh, 5:00 PM here. And with that, everybody have a good night. Thank you.