

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA RELEASE

Department Announces Release of the COVID-Response Telecommunications Recovery Plan.

Montpelier, VT – The Department of Public Service announces the release of the Draft COVID Response Telecommunications Recovery Plan. The Department is seeking public comment on the draft plan. The Plan was prepared by the independent consulting firm CTC Energy and Technology, in partnership with the Vermont based Rural Innovations Strategies, Inc. The Plan was commissioned at the direction of the Vermont General Assembly through Act 137 and was supported with funding from the federal CARES Act. The purpose of the Recovery Plan is to “reassess the State’s critical connectivity needs in light of the COVID-19 public health emergency and to reevaluate broadband deployment objectives going forward.” The Plan offers an independent assessment of Vermont’s telecommunications networks and offers key recommendations for improving and expanding telecommunications services. Specifically, the project team conducted quantitative and qualitative research to understand the use of telecommunications services during the Covid-19 pandemic and the gaps that still exist in Vermont. Key recommendations include construction of targeted line extensions, small scale wireless projects, and an increase in the use of subsidies for low-income residents to increase broadband adoption. The plan also recommends the mobilization of a “Broadband Corps” – a team dedicated to supporting Communications Union Districts and mobilizing the people power necessary to confirm mobile hotspot options, assist residents with nontechnical installations, and provide technical support for low income and technology challenged Vermonters.

“The plan provides helpful insight into the telecommunications needs of Vermonters and the steps that Vermont can take to connect everyone during the pandemic,” said June E. Tierney, Commissioner of the Public Service Department. “The pandemic has shown us all that broadband and telephone services are necessary for Vermonters to access education, telehealth, and employment during the COVID-19 Emergency” said Clay Purvis, Director for Telecommunications and Connectivity.

The Department will be taking public comment on the draft plan in anticipation of releasing the final report on December 20, 2020. The plan is posted at the [Department of Public Service website](https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/covid-response-telecommunications-recovery-plan) (at <https://publicservice.vermont.gov/content/covid-response-telecommunications-recovery-plan>) and readers are encouraged to submit electronic comments on the plan. To ensure every comment is considered, members of the public are encouraged to submit a comment on or before December 10, 2020. The Department is also scheduling two online, public hearings on the plan. The hearings will be held at **1:00 p.m. on December 3rd** and **6:00 p.m. on December 8th**. Please check the [Department’s website](#) for forthcoming details about these hearings.

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