



MINUTES
TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE
Thursday, December 14, 2023 – 9:00 AM
Warneck Pump Station
23557 NYS Rt. 37
Watertown, New York

The Development Authority of the North Country Telecommunications Committee met in regular session in person and via Zoom Videoconference, at the Warneck Pump Station, 23557 NYS Route 37, Watertown, New York on Thursday, December 14, 2023 at 9:00 am.

Members Present

Brian McGrath* – Committee Chair
Kenneth Bibbins *
Mary Doheny
Thomas Hefferon
Eric Virkler

Staff Present

Carl E. Farone, Jr., Executive Director
Carrie Tuttle, Chief Operating Officer
David Wolf, Telecommunications Division Director
Stephen Bohmer, Director of Information Technology
Angela Marra, Executive Assistant
Tonya Cumoletti, Administrative Associate

Committee Members – Absent

Mark Hall

Other Board Members Present

Margaret Murray – Board Chair

Guests Present

Jennifer Granzow, Counsel, Wladis Law Firm

*Attended via videoconferencing.

1. Committee Chair McGrath called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM.
2. Roll Call was taken and a quorum of the committee was established.

C. Farone noted for the record that we have four members of the committee accessible at a public location, and that Mr. Bibbins had planned to attend this meeting in person but is now sick. Per our policy, this is an extenuating circumstance and therefore Mr. Bibbins is able to attend virtually and we do have a quorum of the committee members in attendance for today's meeting.

3. Telecommunications Update –

C. Farone began with a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the broadband access improvements in Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties since doing our evaluation in 2020 and looking at where we are projecting to be in 2026.

a. NTIA Grant update

This is a \$24.5 million project in partnership with National Grid to construct 335 miles of new fiber optic cable in 12 counties within the North Country. The Authority has three different divisions working together on this project. The proposed routes have been reviewed in detail to ensure these are the best routes with the least amount of environmental impact as possible. This process is now 100% completed on the NTIA project. The preliminary environmental report has been done and will be submitted tomorrow to the NTIA. The status is still in the preliminary design phase and is scheduled to be completed by June of 2026.

b. NBRC Grant

This dovetails with the NTIA project by building off that infrastructure. NTIA is a middle mile grant with no homeowner connections. We do have MOUs with service providers who would make those connections. While we are not directly servicing those customers, we are making it possible for them to be served.

M. Doheny asked about the wireless customers. D. Wolf replied that this is a Lewis County owned tower, and Hudson Valley Wireless will be providing the services and we will be building to the tower to get them all connected. This is the same provider for that service on the Harrisville, Lyons Falls, and Copenhagen towers.

M. Doheny asked if that provider supplies the necessary equipment for the hook-up. D. Wolf responded that we build to the tower and the provider will do the installs and provide the necessary equipment to the customers.

M. Murray commented that some are already connected with this service and are pleased with it.

E. Virkler asked about National Grid's role on the NTIA project. C. Farone stated that National Grid is responsible for all of the make ready work on the National Grid owned poles. The majority of our fiber infrastructure will be hung on those poles that are owned by National Grid. They will do the make ready survey and hire the contractor to do the required movement on each of the poles. This piece is estimated to be a cost of \$8.9 million. National Grid will also be putting in an additional \$1 million if everything goes according to plan.

E. Virkler asked what the benefit is to National Grid. D. Wolf responded that all of the electric utilities are under a grid modernization program. Their funding is going toward an IRU of 36 strands [of fiber] on all of these routes for 20 years. By doing their portion, they won't pay the full amount but will still have access to the fiber for their internal monitoring controls as well as growth. The Authority is doing all of the operations and maintenance on the fiber.

M. Doheny asked if the life of the fiber is 20 years. D. Wolf replied yes, that is the depreciable life of the fiber but this timeline also makes it a capital project for National Grid.

C. Farone stated that this project is also strategically designed to reach roughly 25 of their substations. The NBRC routes cannot be finalized until we have completed the NTIA, and we are finalizing these routes now and the target completion date for the work plan on March 31. C. Farone explained that small pockets of unserved have been identified and we want to be sure not to duplicate efforts. Both projects are on schedule and on budget to be completed by June 29, 2026.

B. McGrath asked what the estimated number of people who will benefit from this is. C. Tuttle stated 2,700 with the NTIA and 1,040 with NBRC, for a total of 3,740 homes or 10,000 people. This is calculated using an average of 2.6 people per household. B. McGrath stated that the number of people is important as this project will be connecting them to information and the world, and this is an amazing accomplishment for many.

M. Doheny asked if another survey would be done in 2026 upon completion of this project. D. Wolf replied that the FCC is requiring all infrastructure to be reported, resulting in them being able to accurately update their maps every six months resulting in another survey being unnecessary.

M. Doheny asked if this information is not only reported by the providers, but also the government, so there is an overlap and crosscheck. C. Farone replied yes, and that within the NBRC resolution being presented today, they will be providing a \$70,000 grant to review the infrastructure and report inaccuracies between the FCC data and what we actually see in the field. C. Tuttle stated that the mapping provides critical information to help determine where we go from here.

D. Wolf reviewed a map showing the progress from 2004 to 2014, where we are today, and where we plan to be in 2026. He reviewed our involvement with networks such as ION, Integrate Optical Networks, ACTION, Adirondack Champlain Telemedicine Information Network, and Avangrid. The last map showed what the whole network would look like with the NTIA and NBRC projects completed. C. Farone stated that it is important to note that we are going to migrate away from leased fiber to Authority-owned fiber, reducing our operating expenses and allowing us to own 144 strands of fiber that we can allow other entities to use to provide services to the end user.

D. Wolf continued with a review of each county's progress, and cited specific examples of success. Currently, Lewis County is 2% unserved, Jefferson is .17% and St. Lawrence is 2.56%. New York State is constantly updating and recently brought us another \$70,000 to review for the FCC database to ensure we are spending funds in the right areas. C. Farone stated that the change of direction in 2020 from schools and

businesses to residential followed the recognized need established as a result of the Board approved ECC study.

c. 20 Year P&L

C. Tuttle reviewed the 20-year profit and loss, expenses versus total income, explaining that expenses have increased while income has stayed flat. To balance this we are looking at our leases and exploring ways to save money, not to profit but to cut costs and maintenance while still covering our costs. Pole Licensing fees and ongoing annual licensing fees, which have recently increased, are things that we will need to keep an eye on. We need a robust fiber network to meet the capacity of our demands, and this needs to be a sustainable network that will meet the needs of our customers for the next 20 years.

d. Additional Telecommunications Opportunities

The following projects are being presented today:

MMF to Barnes Corners – This will service 28 currently unserved hard to reach customers along Route 177. It will additionally add diversity for our existing customers between Rodman and Copenhagen and relieve congestion for our customers between Lowville and Watertown. ConnectAll has available funding and we have submitted the concept for this project to them. We are currently awaiting a meeting of their board for approval.

B. McGrath asked if the 28 customers meant homes or people. C. Tuttle said it was homes, so it could be 70+ people.

B. McGrath asked what the Operations & Maintenance estimate is on a yearly basis for this addition. D. Wolf offered an explanation regarding the congestion from Watertown to Lowville. C. Tuttle responded that the O&M expenses are based on a per mile basis, to include our pole attachment fees which we break down to an average expense per mile. For this, the cost per miles is \$800per mile, or \$2,400 total for the three mile project. She further explained this is the metric being used for all projects. When discussing the areas in need with private partners, they cannot afford the higher fees due to them being private, versus our non-profit status.

Hamilton County – This is a project that has been discussed for a few years. Due to the remote nature of the Adirondack Park and few roads, these areas are some of the highest unserved areas in the state and some do not even have access to 911 services. The Authority has a network that spans the Adirondack Park meaning we are already in many of these communities. This project runs between Morehouse and Lake Pleasant, NY and would provide service to 65 currently unserved homes, or 169 people, by improving the cell tower backhaul and connecting their towers back into our network. We have been through several iterations of the project before we found one that would cover our costs and meet

their needs. This project would be too expensive to do without the grant funding. The county is committing \$550,000 of their own funding to pay for the capital build.

Franklin County – This area has a very high percentage of unserved at 10% with the county being mostly within the Adirondack Park and having minimal roads and no fiber has been built here as of yet. They hired ECC Technologies to develop their plan, and they recently approached us to see if we would be able to put service in the identified critical areas. Initially the plan did not make sense for us, but D. Wolf and his team worked with them to come up with a plan that would work for us and provide some benefit for the county. This is now a 50-mile construction project from Chateaugay to Brainardsville, interconnecting with existing fibers that have been installed by SLIC. There is some fiber in the eastern Adirondacks and we can make this work using leases. The project will be designed and managed by ECC Technologies on behalf of the county, meaning there would be no outlay of funds for the Authority to do their portion of the work. There will be some portion of Authority staff time to review the design and ensure it meets our specifications because they will be designing and constructing, and then turning it over to the Authority as we have requested to own the project upon completion. This will provide service to 371 homes, connect 12 anchor institutions, and improve network reliability. The total project cost will be \$2.75 million in Franklin County through their ConnectAll grant, and could not be done without the grant funding. Upon review of the financials, the margins are lower than other projects, but there is high potential for there to be additional build outs in the future. The county would guarantee to make the Authority whole if in any year the expenses exceed the revenue. They are awaiting our action today before they proceed to approve this project.

B. McGrath asked if the economic consideration for us is the O&M, not the build. C. Tuttle replied yes. C. Farone added that in year one the expense could be \$35-\$40,000 with \$50,000 in profits, which is marginal and why we need the guarantee from Franklin County.

4. Resolution No. 2023-12-87, authorizing the Executive Director to negotiate and execute an agreement with Franklin County to accept ownership and operate approximately 50 miles of fiber in Franklin County between Chateaugay and Brainardsville. Said agreement shall be for 20 years and shall require that Franklin County reimburse the Development Authority of the North Country for expenses incurred that are in excess of revenue in any year of the agreement. Such reimbursement applies only to expenses incurred and revenue generated on the additional 50 miles of telecommunications infrastructure in Franklin County.

Upon a motion by T. Hefferon and seconded by M. Doheny, , Resolution No. 2023-12-87, Franklin County Telecommunication Project, Capital Project Authorization, Telecommunications Division, was unanimously approved by the Telecommunications Committee.

5. Resolution No. 2023-12-88, authorizing the Executive Director to execute an agreement with Hamilton County in the Amount of \$555,000 to construct, own and operate 12 miles of fiber to connect public emergency towers between Morehouse, NY and Lake Pleasant, NY. Upon execution of said agreement, the Development Authority of the North Country Board of Directors authorizes the establishment of a new capital project, Hamilton County Public Emergency Project, in the amount of \$555,000.

Upon a motion by T. Hefferon and seconded by E. Virkler, , Resolution No. 2023-12-88, Hamilton County Telecommunication Project, Capital Project Authorization, Telecommunications Division, was unanimously approved by the Telecommunications Committee.

6. Upon a motion by T. Hefferon and seconded by E. Virkler, the committee moved to adjourn at 10:06 AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Brian McGrath
Telecommunications Committee Chair