

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO

**CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
AGENDA
Thursday, October 7, 2021**

<u>PAGE NO.</u>		<u>ACTION</u>
	<u>AGENDA- October 7, 2021</u>	Approve
	<u>Supplementary Agenda</u>	Receive
	<u>MINUTES</u>	
2-4	Connectivity Committee Meeting Minutes - June 10, 2021	Approve
	<u>REPORTS</u>	
5-9	Nellie Davis, Manager of Regional Economic Development – RDBN Connectivity Funding Strategy Discussion	Discussion
10-12	Nellie Davis, Manager of Regional Economic Development – Regional Service Establishment Communication Update	Receive
	<u>CORRESPONDENCE</u>	
13-14	The Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Citizens’ Services – Response to RDBN Letter Re: Provincial Funding Timelines for Applications Submitted on behalf of RDBN by CityWest	Receive
	<u>SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA</u>	
	<u>NEW BUSINESS</u>	
	<u>ADJOURNMENT</u>	

REGIONAL DISTRICT OF BULKLEY-NECHAKO**CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE MEETING****Thursday, June 10, 2021**

PRESENT: Chair Michael Riis-Christianson

Directors Tom Greenaway
Clint Lambert
Mark Parker
Gerry Thiessen

Director Absent Chris Newell, Electoral Area "G" (Houston Rural)

Alternate Director Andrea Newell, Electoral Area "G" (Houston Rural) – via Zoom

Staff Curtis Helgesen, Chief Administrative Officer
Cheryl Anderson, Director of Corporate Services
Nellie Davis, Manager of Regional Economic Development
John Illes, Chief Financial Officer
Deborah Jones-Middleton, Director of Protective Services
Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant

Others Shane Brienen, District of Houston – left at 2:22 p.m.
Mark Fisher, Electoral Area "A" (Smithers Rural)
Dolores Funk, Village of Burns Lake – left at 2:25 p.m.
Linda McGuire, Village of Granisle
Bob Motion, District of Fort St. James
Jerry Petersen, Electoral Area "F" (Vanderhoof Rural)
Sarrah Storey, Village of Fraser Lake

CALL TO ORDER Chair Riis-Christianson called the meeting to order at 2:05 p.m.

AGENDA Moved by Director Lambert
Seconded by Director Parker

BBC.2021-3-1 "That the Connectivity Committee Agenda for June 10, 2021 be approved."

(All/Directors/Majority) **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

MINUTES

Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes
–April 8, 2021 Moved by Director Lambert
Seconded by Director Greenaway

BBC.2021-3-2 "That the Broadband Committee Meeting Minutes of April 8, 2021 be approved."

(All/Directors/Majority) **CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

REPORTS

Regional Broadband Infrastructure Service Establishment

Moved by Director Lambert
 Seconded by Director Greenaway

BBC.2021-3-3

“That the Connectivity Committee recommend that the Board approve the Alternative Approval Process (AAP) for elector assent for the Regional Broadband Infrastructure Service Bylaw.”

Further, that the Regional Broadband Infrastructure Service Bylaw be presented to the Board on June 24, 2021 for first and second readings.”

(All/Directors/Majority) CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

The following was discussed:

- Costs to establish and develop the Regional Broadband Infrastructure Service
- A requirement for the establishment of a service is sustainable funding
- A region-wide service establishment bylaw and service establishment bylaws for each electoral area
- Giving first and second reading to the Bylaw at the June 24th Board meeting
- Village of Granisle
 - o Its own Internet Service Provider (ISP)
 - o Participation in the service
- RDBN and CityWest Partnership Agreement.

RDBN Connectivity Strategy Discussion

Moved by Director Lambert
 Seconded by Director Greenaway

BBC.2021-3-4

“That the Connectivity Committee receive the Manager of Regional Economic Development’s RDBN Connectivity Strategy Discussion memorandum.”

(All/Directors/Majority) CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Discussion took place regarding:

- Priority Projects
 - o Electoral Area “C” (Fort St. James Rural)
 - Roberts Road
 - Airport Road
 - o Staff will follow-up with Director Greenaway to ensure all projects are identified
- Scientific process to determine regional and local priorities
 - o Discuss with CityWest and Tannex the best approach to identify projects
- Need for increased cell service in Electoral Area “E” (Francois/Ootsa Lake Rural)
- Grant funding applications
- T.V. Rebroadcasting Services
- Developing a flexible strategy moving forward
- Funding alternative considerations
- Utilizing Federal Gas Tax funding

REPORTS (CONT'D)

Alternative Connectivity Funding

Moved by Director Greenaway
 Seconded by Director Lambert

BBC.2021-3-5

“That the Connectivity Committee receive the Manager of Regional Economic Development’s Alternative Connectivity Funding memorandum.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Discussion took place regarding the potential for Local Governments to borrow from MFA or other sources and contribute the funding to a third party (where a partnering agreement exists) for the purpose of financing capital costs for high-speed internet service for areas where high-speed service is not available. Ensuring that funding is returned to the RDBN and the limitations to the RDBN’s borrowing power was also discussed.

Grant Application Advocacy

Moved by Director Lambert
 Seconded by Director Parker

BBC.2021-3-6

“That the Connectivity Committee receive the Manager of Regional Economic Development’s Grant Application Advocacy memorandum.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Internet Speed Test Study Update

Moved by Director Parker
 Seconded by Director Lambert

BBC.2021-3-7

“That the Connectivity Committee receive the Manager of Regional Economic Development’s Internet Speed Test Study Update memorandum.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

ADJOURNMENT

Moved by Director Lambert
 Seconded by Director Greenaway

BBC.2021-3-8

“That the meeting be adjourned at 2:59 p.m.”

(All/Directors/Majority)

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

Michael Riis-Christianson, Chair

Wendy Wainwright, Executive Assistant



Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Connectivity Committee Memorandum

To: Chair Riis-Christianson and Committee
From: Nellie Davis, Manager of Regional Economic Development
Date: October 7, 2021
Regarding: **RDBN Connectivity Funding Strategy Discussion**

Recommendation:

Discussion.

Background:

Staff continue to work on developing a Connectivity Strategy for the RDBN. Some key RDBN Board decisions are assumed in this process:

- The RDBN undertook a thorough report, completed by TANEx Engineering, that explored both the technical aspects as well as the business models available for consideration when making decisions about broadband infrastructure. That report continues to guide staff and Directors in our evaluation of potential project work and in the development of long-term strategies.
- After consultation and receipt of the report, the RDBN has chosen to pursue a business model that includes partnerships with established Internet and Telecommunications Providers for the provision of connectivity infrastructure in the Region.
- The Board has recognized that not only broadband, but also cellular infrastructure construction is a priority in the region and has amended the work of the Committee to reflect that priority. In this and other RDBN documents, 'connectivity infrastructure' includes fibre, wireless and cellular infrastructure.
- Work is underway to establish a Regional Connectivity Service that will enable the RDBN to enter into Partnership Agreements, which are the mechanism by which the RDBN can financially contribute to the capital costs of connectivity infrastructure.
- Ongoing communication with CityWest and other potential partners continues to explore opportunities for the RDBN to influence the design and rollout of connectivity infrastructure.
- As per the development of our partnership with CityWest, they will have first right of refusal for all transport and last-mile fibre projects proposed.
- Wireless and cellular solutions will be explored with capable service providers and proposals that provide best value while meeting the needs of rural residents will be considered for partnership/funding contribution opportunities.

As the RDBN has chosen to pursue a partnership role in connectivity infrastructure construction, staff do not believe that procuring technical expertise outside of potential partners is required at this time. Potential partners for fibre, wireless and cellular projects employ and rely on internal technical teams to develop the most suitable solution for an area, and third-party technical design or cost estimates

will not provide a benefit to those relationships or project development. Staff therefore recommend dedicating internal resources to drafting a Connectivity Funding Strategy for the RDBN.

Funding Strategy Discussion Items:

As Electoral Areas, by and large, remain eligible for senior government funding opportunities, staff recommend developing partnership projects that will take advantage of the Provincial and Federal commitments to funding essential infrastructure in rural communities. These funding programs have timelines which are subject to factors such as annual fiscal allocations, grant program parameters, election cycles and internal capacity to facilitate.

The RDBN and CityWest developed several partner applications that were submitted to both the Connecting British Columbia (CBC) Program and the Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) in March of 2021. The CBC, administered by NDIT, expects to have completed project announcements before the end of 2021. The Provincial and Federal funding programs maintain frequent communication, so projects not yet confirmed through the CBC are not at risk of decreased funding potential through the UBF. In addition to the detailed review required for technical applications of this nature, the Federal election caused a delay in the potential announcement process. The Universal Broadband Fund is anticipated to make most of its announcements in early 2022.

For projects where grant funding is not a reasonable expectation, the RDBN will also explore alternative funding options. Those options may be considered on a project-specific basis, and not for the Region as a whole.

Staff will be planning follow-up calls with Electoral Area Directors to collect information on preferred funding options for individual Electoral Areas or projects. These options will include (but may not be limited to):

1) Federal Gas Tax

Rural Directors may consider allocating Federal Gas Tax funds to support the construction of connectivity infrastructure. Directors will be asked to indicate the project budget or maximum dollar value they would be interested in allocating to connectivity projects.

2) Taxation

Taxation to fund connectivity infrastructure is not part of the current Regional Connectivity Service establishment. To fund infrastructure through taxation, services must be established based on project boundaries as those contributing to the service must be the residents who are eligible to receive the service. Because the taxation level required to fund infrastructure would be over \$0.50/\$1,000 a referendum would be required. Process and timelines for this will be available for discussion with each Director.

3) Borrowing from MFA

Local Governments are eligible to borrow from MFA and contribute the funding to a third party (where a partnering agreement exists) for the purpose of financing capital costs for high-speed internet service for areas where high-speed service is not available. Under this model, the RDBN would borrow through MFA and, through an Indebtedness and Project Description Agreement, a partner would provide full reimbursement of all costs incurred by the Regional

District with respect to such borrowing, including annual principal and interest payments over the life of the debt. This option would not result in residents being taxed for the service.

In addition to alternate funding options, alternate technology options for service provision will also be explored with partners. Wherever possible, other cost-reduction possibilities will also be considered, such as mobilizing community contributions to project elements (for example: donations of cost-recovery wages for machine time for construction).

Conversation also took place at the September Rural/Agriculture Committee meeting regarding the possible use of COVID-19 Relief funds to support connectivity projects in the region, as member municipalities have recently done. A few different considerations apply in a Regional District context.

- A. The first is that Municipalities, under the Community Charter, are not required to have an established service to enter into a Partnering Agreement with a third-party provider. Under the Local Government Act, the RDBN is required to establish a service in advance of entering into a Partnering Agreement. The Director of Corporate Services' Memo on the September 23 RDBN Board Agenda indicates that we anticipate that the Alternative Approval Process to establish a Regional Connectivity Service, if successful, will be adopted by the Board in March 2022. The RDBN will not have a mechanism to financially support connectivity infrastructure until that time., which may impact the ability to use COVID-19 Relief Funds
- B. Another consideration is that the decision for a community to fund a significant portion of a connectivity infrastructure build is often made in the absence of Provincial or Federal contributions to the project, especially where the project has been deemed ineligible for senior government funding opportunities. Though challenges exist in planning strong project applications in rural areas, all RDBN Electoral Areas remain eligible for senior funding opportunities. Work continues at the staff and Connectivity Committee level to explore opportunities to find and fund solutions for rural areas.
- C. Additionally, in the case of a municipality, which only has to consider one build, population density justifies a higher contribution threshold on the part of a partner ISP. While the details of a project budget will differ on a project-by-project basis, for rural builds the business case for ISP contribution can be much lower. Projects budgets, in general, can be calculated at cost per mile of cable/ homes served. Staff are prepared to discuss potential project costs with individual Directors as part of the funding strategy development process.

Previous strategy considerations remain largely unchanged at this time:

Vision: That all citizens in the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (RDBN) will have access to High-Speed Internet and cellular connectivity.

Commitments – That the RDBN will:

- 1) Pursue connectivity solutions that are reliable, affordable and that meet or exceed the recognized minimum standard of service (currently 50Mbps download and 10Mbps upload).
- 2) Advocate for Fibre to the Home solutions wherever possible, and wireless or alternative technology solutions where a fibre solution is prohibitively expensive.
- 3) Actively pursue connectivity solutions, in the order prioritized by the Board, until all citizens have access to cellular and broadband service.
- 4) Include partners, Staff and Directors in the process of project development in a collaborative manner.
- 5) Communicate and collaborate with First Nations partners to pursue partnerships where applicable to ensure all residents have access to service.

Goals:

- 1) That the RDBN will develop partnerships to ensure technical expertise is a key component in project development.
- 2) That the RDBN will, wherever possible, pursue grant opportunities for connectivity infrastructure to reduce the burden on alternate funding options.
- 3) To work with applicable agencies to ensure accurate mapping of broadband service delivery levels to enable grant eligibility.
- 4) To work with applicable agencies to correct inaccurate home count data to support grant applications.

Project Development:

Due to the geographic scope, project development will be approached by Electoral Area. Projects will be identified initially by broad geographic description, and service area boundaries will be determined in collaboration with partners with technical expertise. Due to the competitive and sensitive nature of the grant application process, early and middle stages of project development may not be shared publicly.

This strategy is meant to be a living document that evolves with information and over time. Project priorities may change without public notice as a result of funding opportunities, awards granted to other entities not in partnership with the RDBN, or other factors unknown at this time. In many cases, project priority order will be determined by a sequential approach to building upon existing infrastructure.

The following Priority Project Areas include broadband priorities. Upcoming strategy development will include meetings with Directors and CityWest to review project areas and refine priority order within individual Electoral Areas. These priorities will guide ongoing resource allocation for developing technical solutions and budgets for specific projects, both internally and for our partners. Where applicable, meetings will also develop additional cellular project priorities.

Electoral Area A Priority Projects:

- Lower Hudson Bay Road
- Upper Viewmont
- Coalmine Road
- Raceway Road / Jane Haven Road / Nouch Frontage Road Area
- Tyee Lake Loop

Electoral Area B Priority Projects:

- Highway 35 to Area E boundary and Eagle Creek
- Tintagel
- Highway 16 to Decker Lake and Wet'suwet'en
- Palling

Electoral Area C Priority Projects:

- Sowchea Bay Road Area
- Mt Pope Area
- Roberts Road Area
- Airport Road Area
- Necoslie Road Area

Electoral Area D Priority Projects:

- East End Francois Lake
- Fort Fraser
- Lily Lake Road Area
- Telegraph Road Area
- Endako
- Savory Rd Area

Electoral Area E Priority Projects:

- Hwy 35 to Francois Lake
- Tchesinkut Lake Road Area
- North Shore Francois Lake
- Southbank and Grassy Plains Area
- Tatalrose Rd Area
- Uncha Lake Area
- Takysie Lake Area
- Ootsa Lake and Wisteria Area

Electoral Area F Priority Projects:

- Cluculz Lake Area
- Sturgeon Point Road Area
- Sackner Road Area
- Prariedale Area
- Braeside Area
- Mooney Pit Road Area

Electoral Area G Priority Projects:

- Buck Flats
- Mountainview Dr / Vanderplog Rd / Hazel Rd Area
- Topley
- Teer Road / Bold Rd / Harding Road Area
- Perow

Documents available for additional review include:

[RDBN Broadband Study – TANEx Engineering, July 2019](#)

[RDBN Connectivity Committee Terms of Reference](#)



Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako Connectivity Committee Memorandum

To: Chair Riis-Christianson and Committee
 From: Nellie Davis, Manager of Regional Economic Development
 Date: October 7, 2021
 Regarding: **Regional Service Establishment Communication Update**

Recommendation:

Receive.

Background:

As per the Director of Corporate Services' RDBN Board Memo of September 23, 2021, the anticipated timeline for the Regional Broadband Service Establishment is as follows:

<u>Schedule</u>	<u>Action</u>
September 24, 2021 -	Bylaw is forwarded to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs for approval
January 12, 2022 -	First publication of AAP notice
January 19, 2022 -	Second publication of AAP notice
February 21, 2022 -	Deadline for Elector Response Forms
March 2022 (date tbd) -	If elector approval is received, Board adopts bylaw

In addition to publishing the AAP notices in all newspapers across the region, staff recommend the following public engagement process to support a successful AAP.

Start date will be once the bylaw approval is received from the Province and continue into early December 2021- (In lead-up to the launch of the AAP process) and from early January – mid-February (during the elector response period)

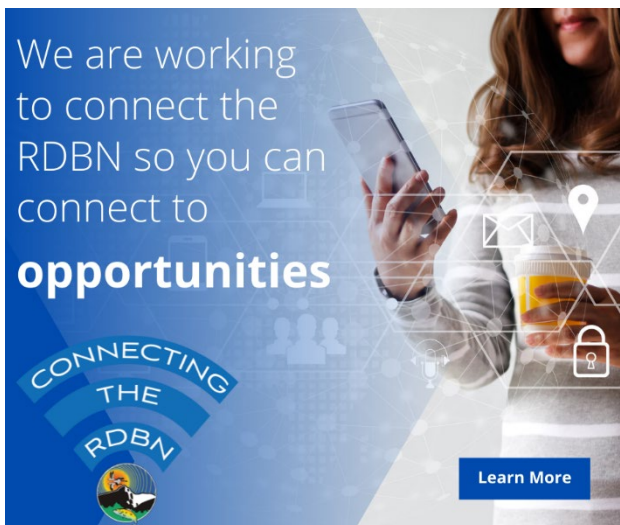
- 1) Paid Social Media Awareness Campaign (Budget \$500.00)
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - LinkedIn
- 2) Website Information Page and Question Opportunity
- 3) Voyent Alert Information System (General Messages)
- 4) Feature in Board Highlights

Staff will curate a series of Social Media posts to increase resident awareness of RDBN participation in improving connectivity and the potential benefits of improved connectivity. Unifying taglines to frame the campaign include:

‘We are working to connect the RDBN so you can connect to...’

- Healthcare
- Education
- Friends and Family
- Emergency Information
- Government Programing
- Each other
- Opportunities
- The world
- What is important

Draft examples include:




Post text: The RDBN is pursuing partnerships to ensure that all residents have access to high-speed internet and cellular connectivity. In the New Year, you will see information about our proposed service establishment. This service is proposed at minimal taxation and is an important step in our ability to develop partnerships. This

service WILL NOT be taxed to pay for connectivity infrastructure but will allow us to use grant funding to contribute to improving service in the region.

For more information, or to let us know what your questions are, please visit <https://www.rdbn.bc.ca/departments/economic-development/connectivity-rdbn>

Information and question opportunities will also be available via the RDBN website, as directed by the link above. Draft RDBN website page:



Connecting the RDBN

- 2021 Photo Contest
- Assistance for Business
- Assistance for Non-Profit Societies
- BC Provincial Nominee Program Entrepreneur Immigration - Regional Pilot Introduction Page
- Bulkley Nechako Directory
- Business Forum and Contest
- Connecting Consumers and Producers
- Connecting the RDBN**
- Short Connectivity Survey
- Grant Services
- Links

The RDBN is pursuing partnerships to ensure that all residents have access to high-speed internet and cellular connectivity. In the New Year, you will see information in your mailbox about our proposed Regional Connectivity Service Establishment.


This service is proposed at minimal taxation and is an important step in our ability to develop partnerships. This service WILL NOT be taxed to pay for connectivity infrastructure but will allow us to use grant funding to contribute to improving service in the region. Do you have a question for us? Feel free to contact us or let us know via the form below:

Phone: 250-692-3195 Email: economic.development@rdbn.bc.ca

Let us know your question: Required

If you would like a response via email, please provide your email address:

If you would like a response via phone, please provide your phone number:

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September 2, 2021

Ref: 115407

Gerry Thiessen and Michael Riis-Christianson
Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
37 3rd Avenue, PO Box 820
Burns Lake, BC VOJ 1E0

Via email to Nellie Davies: nellie.davis@rdbn.bc.ca

Dear Gerry Thiessen and Michael Riis-Christianson:

Thank you for your letter dated June 30, 2021 regarding Provincial funding timelines for applications submitted on your behalf by CityWest. It is always a pleasure to hear from your district and I am happy to respond to your questions regarding timing of funding announcements.

I appreciate that connectivity planning and funding applications submissions represent a great deal of work by the many people and organizations involved in the process. This was made very clear to me in the concerns raised by local government officials in the recent round-table sessions in May and June that I had the privilege to take part in. Community leaders such as yourselves are working hard to bring innovative solutions to leverage broadband opportunities that would bring greater economic diversity, resiliency, and prosperity to your communities.

The federal Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) program was extremely popular and received more than 2,500 applications through their last intake. Applications received by the UBF program for co-funding opportunities with the Connecting British Columbia program are currently under review with the federal government. Please know that application approval from Northern Development ensures that the Connecting British Columbia program has allocated money to these projects as we await funding decisions from the UBF program. Although the announcements for funding have paused during the federal election period, we anticipate that the projects with provincial funding will likely be prioritized for assessment. We anticipate more project announcements to resume this fall.

If you would like to receive further information on the Province's activities to expand high-speed internet connectivity or status updates, please contact Howard Randell, Executive Director, Network BC at 250-415-6867 or NetworkBC@gov.bc.ca.

.../2

Gerry Thiessen and Michael Riis-Christianson
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Thank you again for reaching out and I look forward to hearing about your progress as these projects to connect your region move forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Beare". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" and last name "Beare" clearly distinguishable.

Lisa Beare
Minister

pc: Connected Communities
ConnectedCommunitiesBC@gov.bc.ca