

MEMO

To: TJPD Commissioners
From: Stephen Williams, Executive Director
Date: August 31, 2009

Re: Status Report on ARRA Broadband Initiative

Purpose: To brief the Commission on the status of regional initiatives related to broadband which are proposed to be funded through competitive grants from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

Background: At previous meetings the Commission directed staff to work with member governments to develop regional proposals for funding for broadband from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (stimulus package). The Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the ARRA Broadband Infrastructure Funds was released in early July, 2009. Three meetings have been held with member localities to identify and develop an approach to a regional application.

Issues: Based on a review of the NOFA with member localities it was agreed that it was not possible for the region to produce the specific plans and cost estimates necessary for a regional application. Representatives of the members governments agreed that the only parties with the expertise to produce the required application are the private providers. In addition, the NOFA required an explicit commitment to a 20% match which neither the members nor TJPDC could provide. But at the same time, it was also recognized that there would be multiple providers who would want to apply and that those providers would have varying abilities to provide broadband service in the region. Attendees at the meeting also identified the fact that if there were multiple applications that proposed to provide service in the region that a cooperative relationship between the local governments and one of the providers could make the difference between funding being awarded for a project in this region or not. As a result, it was agreed that the best strategy the region could pursue would be to identify the most capable provider through a Request for Proposals process and then to work with that provider to prepare an application based on a public-private partnership agreement. It further was agreed that it was not possible to meet the August deadline for the first round and that the group would work towards an application for the second round of funding. Finally it was also agreed that TJPDC would take the lead in preparing and releasing the Request for Proposals/Qualifications.

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The attached Request for Proposals (RFP) was developed by TJPDC staff and reviewed by representatives of member governments at two meetings. The RFP was sent to a list of broadband internet providers on August 20 and advertised in the Richmond Times Dispatch on August 23. Since the release of the RFP, TJPDC has received 5 requests for the RFP in response to the advertisement and has also been informed by several providers that they will not submit proposals. The next event in the RFP process is a Pre-proposal meeting that will take place on the afternoon of September 3. Proposals are to be submitted by 4:00 pm on September 16. Following receipt of the proposals, TJPDC staff and the committee will select and interview finalists and make a recommendation on the most qualified respondent to the TJPDC Commission. Staff will then work with the most qualified respondent to develop an agreement for the public-private partnership which will be submitted to the Commission for approval at the October meeting. TJPDC staff and the committee will then work with the selected provider to prepare all required aspects of the Broadband Infrastructure Funding Application and submit it for consideration in the second round. We anticipate that the earliest possible deadline for second round submittals will be November 30, 2009.

Staff will keep the Commissioners informed on the progress of the Broadband Initiative.