

Date: 11/06/2021

To: Chair and Directors, Committee of the Whole

And To: Choose an item.

From: John MacLean, Chief Administrative Officer

Date of Meeting: Committee of the Whole_Jun17_2021

File: Cariboo Connectivity

Short Summary:

Cariboo Connectivity Report Prepared and Finalized by Tanex Engineering in May, 2021

Background:

The Board established a Strategic Objective and Tactical Goal to look at connectivity (both broadband and cellular) in the Cariboo Chilcotin. The CRD retained the services of Tanex Engineering to prepare the report.

We have attached the presentation made to the Board in April of this year as well as the final report. Additional confidential background information is included as part of the Closed Agenda for this meeting.

The following are the recommendations made by the Consultants for the Board to consider:

9.1 Next Steps

Based on the information gathered during the course of this project, the following provides a summary of the recommended next steps for the Regional District.

Fundamental Tasks

- Establish a CRD broadband working group focused on the connectivity challenge.
- Identify a lead internal staff resource to manage and advance connectivity initiatives.
- Establish Regional District's priority areas using the identified projects.
- Inventory CRD assets that may lower barriers to service delivery.
- Reach out and collaborate with other local governments, including municipalities, other Regional Districts and First Nations to identify and solve a larger problem for more people. Seek opportunities to partner or complete joint initiatives as often costly infrastructure can be leveraged if the costs are rolled into a single initiative.
- Align with other Regional District initiatives that may be ongoing.

- Actively provide intervenor feedback to the CRTC in collaboration with other local governments.
- If not already, become a member of the BC Broadband Association.
- Participate in broadband conferences, especially those focused on rural and remote communities.

Determine the Role of the Regional District

- Identify what contribution the Regional District will make to solving the connectivity challenge. These may include:
 - o Advocate/facilitate/lobby
 - o Contribute capital to third party. Establish a method and Regional District commitments and guidelines for facilitating this. While federal and provincial funding programs are available, they often have requirements, timelines, heavy participation and are often over-subscribed.
 - o Partnership with a service provider.
 - o Construct and own infrastructure.

Determine specifics of how that role will be fulfilled:

- o If, for example, CRD decides that its role is to contribute capital, how will that be accomplished.

Prioritize the Project Areas

- Create criterion for prioritizing the potential projects identified in this report.
 - o A list of criteria that identify how each potential project will be assessed which should include identification of projects where collaboration with First Nations or neighbouring Regional Districts is available.
- Complete the prioritization of the potential projects.

Create an Action Plan

- Identify project specific steps to address each priority area.
- Communicate priorities to service providers.
- Provide specific information about CRD's priority areas to providers for both internet and cellular.
- Develop a process and minimum service levels for responding to requests for letters of support to ensure that CRD's priorities are being addressed.
- Identify the specific barriers to service delivery in each priority area and determine whether the CRD can do anything to lower or remove them.
- Obtain proposals with pricing for priority project areas.

9.2 Implementation Recommendations - Cellular

If the Regional District wishes to drive cellular coverage improvements which are outside the carriers' normal business planning and implementation processes, it is recommended that the CRD undertake a coordinated facilitator's role and initiate the following discussions/activities.

Carriers

- Initiate detailed planning discussions with both Telus and Rogers to attempt to start the planning and costing elements for this expansion.
- Consider an RFP for carrier services to these areas if sufficient financial incentives can be obtained from various sources.

Federal Government

- Explore funding opportunities for grants or subsidies which are available to offset the capital costs. Particular emphasis should be placed on improving rural connectivity and safety along the highways.
- Explore interest from federal agencies requiring communication service (e.g. RCMP, etc.) that could be a tenant on the site infrastructure for their own private communications systems (cost offsets).
- Support for permits on Crown land.

Provincial Government

- Explore funding opportunities for grants or subsidies which are available to offset the capital costs. Particular emphasis should be placed on improving rural connectivity and safety along the highways.
- Explore interest from Provincial agencies requiring communication service (e.g. Highways, BC Sherriff, BC Hydro, BC Ambulance Service, etc.) that could be a tenant on the site infrastructure for their own private communications systems (cost offsets).
- Offset cost for rural power line extensions by BC Hydro (Crown corporation) to cell sites.
- Support for required land use permits.

First Nations Governments

- Explore funding opportunities for grants or subsidies which are available to offset the capital costs. First Nation groups have additional funding sources and may receive priority in provincial and federal funding programs. Particular emphasis should be placed on improving rural connectivity and safety along the highways.
- Obtain support to assist with lobbying Federal and Provincial governments.
- Support for land use permits.

Local Governments

- Explore funding opportunities for potential improvement fees, grants or subsidies which are

available to offset the capital costs. Particular emphasis should be placed on improving rural connectivity and public safety.

- Gain support from local communities and residents to assist with lobbying and to reduce likelihood of objections to the installation of cellular infrastructure.
- Support for land use permits.
- As a last resort, use a referendum to obtain authority to levy a local tax for service. The local government can they take out an infrastructure loan that is repaid over time from the tax revenue.

Public Private Partnerships

- If sufficient guarantees are in place for capital recovery, even if over a long period of time, there may be commercial entities willing to finance projects.

Additional information:

There are options for the Board to consider when looking for financial resources to facilitate any activity that the Board may decide to undertake:

1. Any costs associated with the capital development of a broadband/cellular network is eligible for funding from the Community Works Fund.
2. The Board has the ability to establish services, much like the Natural Gas Utilities established to facilitate the development of natural gas services in some of our communities.
3. Significant grant opportunities exist.
4. It should be noted that significant projects in the Forest Grove/Canim Lake and Horsefly Corridor have recently been announced.

We are seeking guidance and direction as to the actions the Board wishes to take in regards to fostering and facilitating broadband and cellular services in the Cariboo Chilcotin.

Attachments:

1. Cariboo Strategy – May 19, 2021
2. PowerPoint Presentation – Cariboo Strategy