

Our wireless proposal would deploy broadband within 8-10 months in the counties of Graham, Swain, Madison, Yancey, Mitchell and Polk. With this ramp-up under our belts, we would be positioned to deploy wireless in the remaining counties of our 14-county service area (Cherokee, Clay, Macon, Jackson, Haywood, McDowell and Henderson) through some combination of new wireless revenue and Rural Utilities Services (RUS) grants and loans.

If the RIAA puts all its eggs into the middle mile basket, broadband access to homes and businesses will be delayed for at least three more years, maybe longer. This runs counter to the RIAA's legislative mandate, and counter to the immediate and pressing needs of our rural citizens and businesses.

Again, we do not oppose a middle-mile buildout. We strongly support Congressman Taylor's middle-mile infrastructure project and the \$15 million already obtained for this fiber buildout across 15 mountain counties. Given this imminent middle-mile investment, we believe the RIAA's funds would be best used in last-mile deployment, which is, after all, the clear intent of the General Assembly. In fact, we believe the RIAA's last-mile focus is a timely complement to the Taylor project's middle-mile buildout.

Organizations which argue that RIAA funding in the west would be best spent solely on the middle-mile should be required to answer the following questions:

1. How long will it take to deploy middle-mile fiber rings across WNC?
2. Once the fiber is there, how much longer will it take to get the last-mile to homes and businesses?
3. Who will provide the last-mile and how? How much will last-mile deployment cost?
4. Are the answers to all the above based on actual experience with building and managing a network?

In summary, it is the position of the Mountain Area Information Network that funding for the middle mile and last mile should not be reduced to an either/or proposition. We need to be devoting funds to both of these critical segments to our rural homes and businesses. We believe that the RIAA and the Taylor initiative together can address both these critical needs.

On behalf of MAIN's Board of Directors, I want to thank you for this opportunity to share our perspective with the RIAA. MAIN stands ready to devote its nearly seven years of rural network management experience to helping the RIAA meet its legislative mandate.

Sincerely,

James L. Stokoe
President
Board of Directors

JS/tj