



Power and Communications Contractors Association
Broadband Deployment and the Importance of Fiber Infrastructure
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Background

The Power & Communication Contractors Association (PCCA) represents construction contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers that build and repair America's power and communications infrastructure, including broadband, electric transmission, distribution, and substation facilities, telephone, and cable television systems. PCCA members provide the manpower and expertise needed to install the infrastructure for significant broadband deployment across America. As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and lawmakers in Congress evaluate effective ways to reform existing funding programs and streamline the process of getting federal resources where they are needed most, PCCA encourages policymakers to focus on building fiber-based infrastructure and avoid repairing antiquated copper systems and becoming mired with bureaucratic hurdles that continue to obstruct effective broadband deployment.

Robust Fiber Deployment Needed

In 2016, FCC indicated that 39% of rural America and 41% of those living on Tribal land lacked access to advanced broadband (defined as 25 Mbps/3 Mbps). This means that 10% of the country lacks access to high-speed broadband, leading many in federal, state, and local governments to call for expedited expansion of broadband service. Fiber optic is increasingly becoming the material of choice in internet deployment, and for good reason. Fiber offers significantly faster speeds over much longer distances than traditional copper-based technologies, such as DSL and cable, and is considered the most "future-proof" broadband infrastructure available. Fiber allows users to transfer large amounts of data quickly and seamlessly, and data flows over great distances with little interference. As communities across America outgrow old copper-based infrastructure, policymakers should facilitate the process of replacing it with superior fiber networks.

While PCCA generally supports federal funding programs such as FCC's Universal Service Fund (USF) and Connect America Fund (CAF), the agency's past goals to achieve broadband speeds have not been nearly aggressive enough to meet growing demand. The biggest obstacle of widespread adoption of fiber-based broadband is the cost of implementing new fiber lines when old systems are still able to serve customers. However, policy that allows for simple repair and refurbishment of antiquated copper systems serves as little more than a "Band-Aid." In fact, use of CAF resources to rebuild old copper systems in high-cost areas actually perpetuates the underlying problem. Federal policy should encourage use of the only material available that can provide broadband service that will meet current and future demand by encouraging the replacement of old systems with contemporary fiber networks.

While the USF and CAF programs as well as funding from the USDA's Rural Utilities Service have made progress, a range of reforms are needed to get federal resources out the door quicker and to the right places. PCCA believes policy should focus on broadband speeds and that FCC's goal of providing 25/3 Mbps is already obsolete. Achieving speeds of 100/100 Mbps would allow use of technology needed for equipment and machinery to better communicate through telematics and meet demand for the simultaneous use of multiple mobile devices in businesses, schools, and homes today and into the future. As Congress and federal agencies develop plans to effectively deploy broadband across America, PCCA encourages foresight and the political will to provide sustainable broadband service for years to come. Efforts to simply direct resources exclusively to the USF and other traditional programs would be shortsighted.

As debate continues over a range of communications issues, PCCA encourages Congress and other policymakers to keep their eye on the prize and look to the future. High-speed internet is no longer a convenience – communities across America, large and small, urban and rural, are clamoring for better broadband service not because they enjoy it, but because they *need* it. Every day, more American businesses rely on superior broadband service, as do critical institutions such as hospitals, first responders, and schools. Therefore, public policy should encourage the installation of fiber systems across the country if we are serious about providing future-proof broadband systems.