



**Power and Communications Contractors Association
Position Paper: Fiber Versus Unproven Technologies
May 2020**

The Power & Communication Contractors Association (PCCA) represents contractors, manufacturers, and suppliers that build and repair America's power and communications infrastructure, including electric transmission and distribution lines and substations, and broadband, telephone, and cable television systems. PCCA has long supported the construction of fiber-optic systems to deploy broadband in all areas of the country. As the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) continues its work to keep America connected during a national crisis, PCCA supports policy that encourages the build-out of fiber networks and restricts consideration of unproven technology.

The digital divide is hitting Rural America especially hard. According to the Internet and Technology division of the Pew Research Center, the percentage of adults in the U.S. who have broadband service has increased from 52 percent to 90 percent since 2000. While rural Americans have made gains in adopting digital technology over the past decade, for the most part they remain less likely than urban or suburban adults to have home broadband or own a smartphone. As of May 2019, only about two-thirds of rural Americans indicated that they have broadband access at home. Increased fiber deployment will change that statistic.

For years, PCCA has encouraged policymakers to focus on policy that encourages the use of fiber optic cable based networks to achieve higher speeds. This will deliver "future-proof" broadband infrastructure to the extent possible. Providing speeds of 100/100 Mbps will allow the technology needed for equipment and machinery to serve businesses, hospitals, schools, and homes today and into the future.

Consider the alternatives. Producers of "low-earth-orbiting satellites" are claiming they are capable of generating low-latency signals and have petitioned FCC to consider them as part of the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). Allowing unproven technology in FCC auctions would be a mistake. PCCA was particularly pleased with proposed incentives provided in the RDOF for carriers to provide higher broadband speeds in order to gain RDOF resources. PCCA is concerned that allowing satellite companies to qualify as low-latency service providers will undermine the true intent of the RDOF.

Another carrier, which recently filed for bankruptcy, has implied that copper-based DSL technologies suffice in providing adequate broadband access. These claims are disingenuous at best, and forgiving carriers who are providing minimal service to secure federal funding is undermining efforts to deploy future-proof broadband. While PCCA fully supports both the establishment of RDOF and the Universal Service Fund, the biggest challenge to nationwide broadband access continues to be the cost of implementing fiber-optic systems. Federal policymakers should do whatever they can to change that.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a national shutdown, and the closure of hospitals, schools, and other fundamental institutions underscores the need to keep America connected. At a time when the country is practicing physical distancing and avoiding in-person conversations, access to broadband service continues to be a national priority. 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.

PCCA members provide the skills, expertise, equipment, and manpower to deploy the broadband Americans need. Public policy should do everything possible to support their efforts.