



July 9, 2021

Senator Susan Collins
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Pending Infrastructure Legislation – Maine Municipality Support for Broadband

Dear Senator Collins:

I am writing on behalf of the Midcoast Internet Coalition, a group of a dozen Maine municipalities committed to a regional broadband utility to deliver high-speed internet. The goals we support as Coalition members include: (1) open access with consumer choice and lower cost through competition; (2) universal access that includes all homes and businesses within the service region; (3) building municipally-owned state-of-the-art fiber optic infrastructure with internet services delivered by professional Internet Service Providers (ISPs); and (4) creation of local skilled jobs through a homegrown workforce.

The regional utility was legally established, pursuant to State law, as of June 2021 as the Midcoast Internet Development Corporation (MIDC). The creation of the regional utility had the overwhelming support of the voters in the first five municipalities adopting it: 91% of Camden voters, 79% of Rockport voters, and 82% of Thomaston voters. Additionally, the residents of Cushing and South Thomaston voted at their annual meetings to authorize adoption of the MIDC, in some cases by unanimous vote of those present.

Importantly, the regional utility will be funded without local taxes or increases in our mil rates. To achieve success, we must raise significant seed money, and seek municipal loans and / or issue revenue bonds. The more funds the utility raises without debt, the broader its service region will be, benefitting more Maine residents and businesses. Unlike the profits that are directed to corporate shareholders, revenues and profit will be re-invested into the fiber optic network's expansion.

For too long Maine residents have suffered from the decisions of large telecoms and cable providers who cherry-pick the most densely populated areas and leave other residents and businesses behind. Maine deserves better. The overwhelming vote in favor of the MIDC in June reflects the fact that Maine voters and taxpayers – whether Republican or Democrat – whether on the coast or inland – understand that our municipalities must build the infrastructure while letting the ISPs deliver the internet services. We can no longer allow taxpayer funding to be used to enhance the shareholder profits of large telecoms and cable companies at the expense of our citizens. Economic development in the 21st century must be achieved through broadband infrastructure, and it will not be universally available when corporate interests decide who gets access and who does not. We must close the digital divide – and our economic future requires that we close it now. The only way this can happen is to ensure that publicly funded infrastructure results in public-ownership. Our roads and railroads were built on this model – and we cannot allow any less for our broadband infrastructure.

In nearly every conversation we have across our counties and the State – the one *universal* sentiment is that taxpayer funding should result in taxpayer-owned infrastructure. As one municipal leader has noted: “[O]ur regional utility] has constructed the network, maintains and operates the network leaving ISPs an open

road to compete. We have reduced their costs by 2\3 effectively dismissing their long-held argument that it was too expensive for them to bring better broadband to rural Maine. Networks like [regional utilities] expose telecoms' true nature, which is to build the minimum, charge the maximum and own the turf."

The fact that support for municipally and regionally owned infrastructure is widely supported throughout your State of Maine is evidenced by the membership of the following municipalities who are members of our Coalition as well as the municipalities who are members of other similar coalitions and regional utilities throughout the State of Maine. This is not only a trend in the State of Maine – it is a movement – and one that urgently needs your support. Our coalitions are composed of our current and former municipal Select Board members, citizen Broadband Committee members and a host of volunteers that are working hard every day to make municipal and regionally owned broadband a reality throughout the State of Maine. Please support our efforts and include funding for municipal/regional broadband efforts in the pending infrastructure legislation.

By supporting these efforts and allowing federal infrastructure funding to be used for these community driven efforts, you do not have to preclude those communities that choose to partner with private ISPs to build and own the broadband infrastructure from seeking funding for those efforts. We simply urge you not to take a position in the federal infrastructure bill that precludes funding for community driven and owned broadband infrastructure, which is strongly and actively supported by many of your Maine constituents and more than 50 municipalities in your State.

Regards,
Debra J. Hall
Chair, Midcoast Internet Coalition
President, Midcoast Internet Development Corporation
Former Chair, Rockport Select Board

Midcoast Internet Coalition Municipal Members

<https://midcoastinternet.com/>

Camden
Rockport
Rockland
Thomaston
Lincolntonville
Owls Head
Cushing
South Thomaston
Union
Hope
Northport

Please note the following additional Maine broadband coalitions and regional utilities that, by their existence, evidence support for municipal / regional broadband efforts:

Southwestern Waldo County Broadband Association

<https://www.swwaldobroadband.org/>

Freedom
Liberty
Montville

Palermo
Searsmont

Western Kennebec Lakes Community Broadband Association

<https://www.wklcba.org/>

Fayette
Leeds
Mount Vernon
Readfield
Wayne
Vienna

Downeast Broadband Utility

Calais
Baileyville
Alexander

Katahdin Region Broadband Utility

<https://katahdinbroadband.com/>

https://www.ourkatahdin.com/katahdin_region_broadband_utility_update

Millinocket
East Millinocket
Medway

Peninsula Broadband Coalition

<https://sedgwickbroadband.org/peninsula-broadband-coalition/>

Brooklin
Brooksville
Sedgwick

Peninsula Utility for Broadband

<https://www.peninsulautility4broadband.org/>

Penobscot
Blue Hill
Stonington
Deer Isle

Other municipalities in other counties are in the process of forming broadband coalitions or seeking to join/expand the Midcoast Internet Coalition for similar purposes.

Additionally, numerous towns throughout the State of Maine have formed or are in the planning process to form municipal broadband networks. A few are included below for illustrative purposes:

Rockport (partial town open access network built in 2014)

Searsport
Ellsworth
Bar Harbor
Islesboro
Georgetown
Arrowsic
Roque Bluffs

Monhegan Island
Southport
Cranberry isles
Cliff Island
China
Hampden
Vina Haven