

March 28, 2018

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania
Attn: Mr. Barry Denk, Director
625 Forster St. Rm 902
Harrisburg, PA 17120

RE: Rural Broadband Testimony

Dear Director Denk,

On behalf of SEDA-COG and the nearly three quarters of a million residents of our region, thank you for this opportunity to share our perspectives on Broadband infrastructure needs in our region.

My name is Scott Kramer, Principal IT Specialist of SEDA-Council of Governments, a regional Local Development District (LDD), serving 11 Counties in central Pennsylvania. We are predominately rural, historically defined by agriculture, anthracite coal and manufacturing. Today we are challenged to redefine ourselves by maintaining and growing our manufacturing sector while building our service industries. We look to the federal and state government to partner with us as we confront these challenges. Roads, bridge, water/sewer and rail are important, but not to the exclusion of highspeed broadband in our 18th and 19th century communities. Data shows that over 800,000 Pennsylvanians still lack access to robust, reliable, High-Speed Internet. Over 520,000 residents without access reside in rural areas and over 250,000 reside in urban areas.

While areas that are in close proximity to large populations, employers, hospitals, and schools generally have adequate access to highspeed broadband, we've found that those residing in the surrounding rural markets have inadequate or no highspeed internet access. Providers tend to focus their efforts on areas that are in high demand/profitable, rather than the rural areas. Less demand means a lower return-on-investment by the for-profit providers and thus a lower likelihood of interest in servicing that last mile market.

While rural markets go unserved, advances in tele-medicine and online classrooms continue to become more common place. School age children are now given laptops/tablets for school work and are required to complete homework assignments and projects using broadband. This is not a scenario that is unique to rural Pennsylvania. Communities across the United States have found themselves in similar situations and have gone to great effort to aggregate the remaining demand so that it becomes one loud voice, rather than many weak voices pleading for help. Some of them have even taken matters into their own hands, literally, and created the infrastructure to provide broadband to their residents.

Allow me to share a few examples concerning Rural Broadband in our region.

Mifflin County had concerns in part due to Penn State University's decision to discontinue credit courses in Lewistown for Spring 2017, in favor of the internet-based World Campus approach. In response to this decision by Penn State, they learned of the inadequate internet service in the rural areas of Mifflin County. This situation meant that there was no longer a Penn State University presence in Mifflin County and the residents are unable to access the World Campus for accredited programs without having to travel to a Penn State Campus. Mifflin County staff formed an Internet Advisory Committee to bring local government, business owners, and providers together to address the issue.

The Advisory Committee asked each municipality in the County about their Internet access. The responses ranged from multiple dead spots to having to rely on dial up internet service. It was also revealed that the Mifflin County Library had approximately 18,000 people that used the public library for computer services and over 9,000 used the library's Wi-Fi services. In other words, there were people and businesses in the community that didn't have adequate access to high speed internet services.

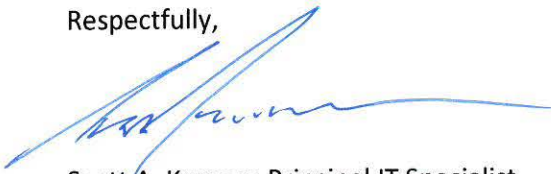
Gilson Boards, a manufacturer of world-renowned snow boards is located near New Berlin in Union County. They located here in part due to the availability of the local hardwoods necessary in the manufacturing of the boards. SEDA-COG's Export staff provided considerable support in developing their export trade. A large amount of their domestic and international business is managed through the internet. Unfortunately, neither broadband nor high-speed internet is available in much of our region.

Until recently, when Gilson Boards staff needed to print a large web-based document, the service was so slow that they copied it to a thumb drive and drove to Lewisburg to print the documents. A one hour plus, round trip, was faster than printing in house! Today through the efforts of Pen Tele Data, Service Electric and Gilson Boards, we have addressed Nick Gilson's problem. But the solution was a \$40,000, 2.5-mile-long wire, to the Gilson facility.

In conclusion, how do we build a 21" century infrastructure for America? In central Pennsylvania, it is through federal, state, local and private partnerships that protect and enhance the infrastructure in which we have already invested, and by complementing that investment with new infrastructure that allow the region and its industries to remain competitive.

Thank you for this opportunity to share.

Respectfully,



Scott A. Kramer, Principal IT Specialist
SEDA Council of Governments