Wireless Broadband Advisory Committee
May 16, 2007   10:00 am
Speaker's Conference Room, 6th Floor, General Assembly Building

- **Call to order, roll call, chairman's welcome.**

Delegate Joe May called the meeting to order, and Senator Wampler joined the meeting via teleconference from Bristol, Virginia. The members of the advisory committee and the JCOTS staff introduced themselves.

- **Overview of the role of JCOTS advisory committees:**

JCOTS staff provided an overview of the role of JCOTS in establishing science and technology policy in the Commonwealth, and how the various advisory committees work with JCOTS in establishing this policy. A copy of this presentation is available on the JCOTS website.

- **Overview of Broadband Issues:**

JCOTS staff provided an overview of recent legislation and policy issues relating to the provision of broadband, and highlighted the issues to be addressed by the Advisory Committee. Of particular note was HB 2381 (May) and HB 2385, both adopted by the General Assembly. HB 2381 clarifies that the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act (PPEA) can be used for wireless broadband deployment, and that the Virginia Resources Authority can be used to facilitate financing of such projects. HB 2385 allows localities to classify property owned by certain wireless broadband providers as a separate class of property for taxation purposes. A copy of the overview presentation is available on the JCOTS website.

- **Discussion & formulation of work plan:**

Delegate May opened the discussion by suggesting the development of a template for getting high-speed broadband access to underserved areas. He also emphasized that many underserved areas are not rural. He indicated the need to foster communication between local governments

and companies with technological capabilities to provide access. The communication should be focused on local governments' communication of identifiable need and commercial entities providing appropriate services.

Senator William Wampler, chairman of the advisory committee, stated that the largest challenge in deployment of high-speed access are "last-mile" applications of fiber.[1] The challenge is elevated by businesses that demand access to broadband by fiber optic, rather than via wireless technologies.

The members of the advisory committee provided an overview of their specialties and current fields of occupation. Members shared their diverse interests and backgrounds in the field of wireless broadband networks.

Delegate May stated that the emphasis is not to reallocate current resources, but instead to cover the areas that have the greatest need. He suggested that a template be developed which localities may use to initiate partnerships in wireless broadband development.

Senator Wampler expressed the benefits of redundancy in broadband availability. He also recognized that the larger the number and diversity of service providers, the greater the benefit to consumers within the Commonwealth. He stressed the importance of recognizing that there is no "one size fits all" approach or answer.

Members discussed the need to develop a list of the roadblocks which prevent further deployment by private companies. Solutions may be found by identifying current obstacles of stakeholders.

Members also discussed the formulation of a census recognizing under-served areas to help commercial providers best recognize need. One member stated that the development of a census would help businesses aggregate demand and provide services where they are both needed and profitable. Businesses must be able to calculate the amount of customers before they can expand their areas of service.

Delegate May discussed the similarities of the historic need for electricity and the emerging necessity of high-speed internet access. He cited as an example, the Rural Electrification

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[1] **Last-mile** refers to the connection of communication technology from a commercial entity to a residence or business, especially in rural or underserved areas.

Association Model as an early government effort of encouraging businesses to deliver needed services to underserved areas.[2]

Members discussed the capabilities of WiMAX deployment as a possible substitute technology to enable delivery in last mile areas. The members discussed the capabilities, costs, and frequency bands which are needed for WiMAX. The cost issue centered on the price of building towers and the required take rate to insure sustainability and profitability. A member stated that it is important to discover what spectrums are currently used and unused within the Commonwealth.

Members reached a consensus that multiple maps are needed to best discover underserved areas and enable businesses to aggregate demand. Members also discussed the ability to create a map which shows the current licensed and unlicensed spectrums within the Commonwealth.

Chairman Wampler made closing remarks that the role of the advisory committee is to consider how to facilitate investment in communities.

- **Public comment:**

No public comment was received.

- **Actions for next meeting.**

The committee identified several potential agenda items for future meetings, including:

- Development of a template to be used by local governments as an aide to attaining broadband service form commercial entities;
- Assessing spectrum allocation across the Commonwealth and the methodology of acquiring needed spectrum from the Federal Communications Commission;
- Inclusion of the Virginia Association of Counties or the Virginia Municipal League in future meetings;
- Presentations concerning the current deployment project in Appomatox; and
- Studying and identifying the applicability and feasibility of emerging technologies.

- **Adjournment.**

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[2] For information on the Rural Electrification Association see; Lawrence J. Malone, *Rural Electrification Association*, *available at* http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/malone.electrification.administration.rural .