



TACIR

The Tennessee Advisory Commission
on Intergovernmental Relations



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Commission Members

FROM: Cliff Lippard
Executive Director

DATE: 5 November 2020

SUBJECT: Public Chapter 228, Acts of 2017 (Status of Broadband Internet Deployment, Availability, and Adoption)—Panel

The Tennessee Broadband Accessibility Act (Public Chapter 228, Acts of 2017) directs the Commission to update its 2017 report on broadband deployment, availability, and adoption in Tennessee. The Commission at its December 2019 meeting heard presentations both on the state's Broadband Initiative—including the state's grant program for expanding broadband access in unserved areas—and on the cost-related barriers to deploying broadband infrastructure. Since that meeting, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened public awareness of broadband's importance and drawn attention to the disparities in access affecting some communities in Tennessee.

For today's update, representatives for broadband providers will participate in a panel discussion on the progress that has been made in expanding broadband access since the Commission's 2017 report, as well as the challenges faced when trying to fill the state's remaining coverage gaps. Panelists include

- Andy Macke, Vice President of External Affairs, Big South Region, Comcast;
- Jeremy Elrod, Director of Government Relations, Tennessee Municipal Electric Power Association;
- Joelle Phillips, President, AT&T Tennessee;
- Lisa Cope, General Manager and CEO, Ben Lomand Connect; and
- Mike Knotts, Vice President of Government Affairs, Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association.

The state continues to support the deployment of broadband through its Broadband Accessibility Grant Program, which is in the process of reviewing applications for its fourth round of funding, with awards to be announced in late February 2021. The three prior rounds awarded a combined total of more than \$44 million to 39 projects that, when completed, will result in more than 26,000 locations gaining broadband access. Additionally, in August, the state awarded more than \$61 million in grants funded via the state's share of federal funding received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The awards will help fund 62 projects across the state and will expand broadband access to almost 24,000 locations.

The Broadband Accessibility Act directs the Commission to transmit the update of its 2017 report to the General Assembly by January 15, 2021.