**Governor’s Task Force on Broadband**

**Thursday May 15, 2025**

**10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

Virtual

**Task Force Members in Attendance Virtually**: Teddy Bekele; Ini Augustine; Bruce Crane; Gail Hedstrom; Brian Hood; Marc Johnson; Paul McDonald; Briana Mumme; John Twiest; Dave Wolf; and Melissa Wolf

**Task Force members Absent**: Adam Hutchens; Steve Fenske; Daniel Lightfoot; and Phil Stalboerger.

**Others in Attendance Virtually:**  Bree Maki; Kristi K. Westbrock; Ann Treacy; Jill Huffman; Roxanne K. Hacker; Steven Kraus; Sheri Dankert; Carol Bossuyt; Karrie Jansen; Beth Kivett; Joe Buttweiler; Kristina Ruport; Samantha Ernst; Emily Feeley; Megan Moudry; Hannah Buckland; Michael Wimmer; Tom Dankert; Michael Deneen; Todd Kruse; Megan Messerole; Rebekah Crosby; Anna Norcutt Preuss; and Teresa A Ferguson

**I. Welcome**

Chair Bekele called the meeting to order, roll call was taken, and an overview of the agenda provided.

**II. Approval of minutes from the April Task Force Meeting**

Meeting minutes were approved from the April Task Force meeting.

**III. Hopkins Digital Access Initiative**

Rebekah Crosby (Co-Founder, Connecting to Thrive), Carolyn Leslie (Co-Founder, Connecting to Thrive), and

Beth Kivett (Activity Center Program Coordinator, Hopkins Activity Center) presented on a collaborative community effort to develop a digital access plan in Hopkins. The Hopkins Digital Access Initiative is a multi-dimensional approach that incorporates hyper-local research and deep engagement to inform a plan that will help ensure community members have the essential digital skills, tools, and support needed for everyday living in our digital world. A Hopkins Digital Access Steering Committee was formed to inform actions that work to address aspects of health and wellness, social connection, employment and finances, housing and transportation, education and learning, and daily tasks and activities. Currently, the Initiative is working on a low-cost, sustainable, and replicable blueprint and are between the “engage” and “assess” phases. The core of the approach relies on connection between key partners and to direct digital resources to where they are needed the most. The assess phase includes asset mapping, sector identification, continued stakeholder engagement, focus groups, surveys, and community outreach. The goal of this initiative is to create a replicable blueprint for other small communities in the future.

Task Force members had questions on barriers to digital access, the work around digital navigators, timelines of the initiative, and attendees asked about how internet service providers (ISPs) have engaged in community efforts and outreach. When asked what the key priority could be here, and statewide, it was answered that Digital Navigators and funding for these roles rise to the top of conversations and investment in that is top priority for success.

**IV. Women in Broadband Leadership Panel**

Jill Huffman (Chief Executive Officer, Spring Grove Communications + MiBroadband) and Kristi Westbrock (Chief Executive Officer/General Manager, Consolidated Telecommunications Company) provided their perspectives as industry leaders on women’s role in broadband and the telecom industry in a panel discussion. Jill and Kristi both gave backgrounds on their work and on the work of their organizations. Statistics were provided on an overview of how women remain underrepresented in the telecom industry, and that while 10-40% of the global telecom workforce are women most companies report women making up less than 40% of their workforce. Jill and Kristi discussed how women are well situated to face changes in the industry head on with diverse work experience, including challenges around increased expansion into competitive areas, workforce challenges, quickly advancing technology changes, and regulatory challenges and opportunities. Roles that women have taken on have been across leadership and policy, digital inclusion and equity, corporate leadership, technical and operation roles, and industry advocacy and networking.

A resource shared was the NTCA Women in Telecom (WIT) program, which is dedicated to supporting and advancing women in the rural broadband through professional growth, networking and leadership development. The program provides a space to connect, share experiences and navigate challenges together. By fostering mentorship, networking and recognition, WIT members aim to create a more dynamic and inclusive industry where diverse perspectives contribute to progress. Three components of the program are the (1) Mentoring Program, where you can connect with a colleague on the rise or share your knowledge and experience with a female seeking guidance; (2) the Book Club, where you can read the latest or recommended literary works of art that inspire, motivate or help you to discover your potential or reach your goals; and (3) the WIT Fly-In, which takes place during the summer and offers an opportunity for women executives to advocate on behalf of their communities, share ideas, and network with others in leadership positions.

Questions from the Task Force were around follow-up on the information presented; the timing of when individuals may enter into this career; and future actions that can be made to support. It was answered that continued advocacy on a state and federal front is vital, and that keeping the equity and diversity programs for industry front, and center is also important. Further, helping to highlight efforts like the WIT program keep these actions top of mind, and sharing information that the program exists, and the tools and the resources are there.

**V. Legislative Updates**

Bree Maki (Executive Director, Office of Broadband Development) provided legislative updates on broadband. There are still no budget targets, and there is the possibility of a special session. However, general funding and additional pipeline safety funding was approved for broadband in both committees, with no changes.

The Safety Qualified Underground Telecommunications Instructor Certification Program saw a bipartisan team work together and there were some changes to the legislation, and with partner effort and bipartisan compromises it is on its way to the Governor for signature after going through legislative processes. Changes include that the certification deadline for workers in the metro of July 1, 2025 would be extended, and there would be a reduction on the amount of training hours to get your approved training certification card.

**VI. Office of Broadband Development Overview + BEAD and Digital Opportunity Updates**

Bree Maki (Executive Director, OBD) provided updates on BEAD, Digital Opportunity, and general OBD updates.

With BEAD, there is uncertainty from the national level. While there was the potential for announcements this week on changes to BEAD, nothing has happened and those announcements may get pushed to June or July, but that is unconfirmed. OBD closed round 11a of the BEAD subgrantee selection process on April 21. In that first application period, OBD received around 108 applications for fiber or 52% of around 79,000 BEAD eligible locations, and there was a lot of competition for those eligible locations. Currently, OBD is moving forward with the approved Volume 2 plan that we do have from NTIA, and OBD does not want to create additional workloads for applicants so the opening round date for 11b is pending. OBD was hopeful we could do review in a few weeks, but given the nature of the applications more time is needed. On May 20, instead of an opportunity to preview round 11b, it will be an opportunity to give updates on what round 11a looked like and take questions. The Office Hours for May 27 and June 3 will be cancelled, and OBD will update that as we decide on the next round opening. OBD wants to be practicable and thoughtful on keeping doors open and keep engaged with grantees. As a reminder to the group, the requirement of BEAD is to get every location that is eligible for service. We do not know what changes are coming, but there is the potential that changes will allow BEAD to align more with the state’s Border-to-Border program.

On the Digital Equity Act and Digital Opportunity work OBD does, last week OBD received a letter on Friday May 9 at 5:38pm CST that the grant for the Digital Equity Act was terminated effective May 9. This was a decision made by the Commerce Secretary and President, and OBD does not know what possible avenues will be yet explored or taken nationally. OBD is looking at navigating what will be next for the office and immediately, it is the loss of $12M awarded by NTIA through an executed agreement. It would include later on the next 2 rounds of funding OBD could work to receive over the next few years, to the total of about an additional $10M. OBD must look at how the work can be done without funding, and a lot of work was put into grassroot efforts to create Minnesota’s Digital Opportunity plan for the state. OBD currently does not have the funding to implement the activities outlined in the plan. Given the timing of receiving the notice, and the legislative session slated to end in Minnesota next week, there is not time for OBD to make legislative asks in what remains of the scheduled session. This could be addressed in through recommendations for the annual report.

Questions from the Task Force included follow-up on what could happen legislatively to bridge the gap, or potential legal action; an estimation on timelines for action moving forward; and a question from attendees on the updated timeline for opening round 11b, and clarification on the process for how OBD will define the project areas, and how fiber scoring will work on round 11b.

Updates on Border-to-Border (B2B) and the Line Extension Connection Program were provided. The team is busy doing site visits and documentation around both close-outs and compliance throughout the process. OBD works with a mapping vendor, Connected Nation, to do the verification process, and mapping of locations and speed tests. OBD does not have a final funding number for Line Extension Round 4, but information on that will be coming. All of the money from B2B and Capital Projects Fund (CPF) needs to be expended by 2026, so that funding will be rolled-up and reallocated, so all funding is spent by the deadline. B2B has projects in rounds 7-10 open, totaling about 130 active projects/grant agreements, with some pending closing, but a huge workload for the grants to manage.

General updates include a thank you to the OBD team and the work they do, and an introduction from OBD’s new team member, Megan Messerole the Broadband Environmental/Land Use Coordinator.

**VII. Other Business, June 12 Meeting Plans, Wrap-up**
Chair Bekele opened the floor for questions and comments for Task Force members and others attending. There were none. Chair Bekele provided updates on the meeting in June and reminded Task Force members to provide topics or speakers for the June agenda.

The meeting adjourned around **12pm**.