**Governor’s Task Force on Broadband**

**Wednesday August 6, 2025**

**2:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

Minnesota Farmfest, Redwood County, MN

Wick Buildings' Farmfest Center

28269 MN-67, Morgan, MN 56266

**Task Force Members in Attendance in Person**: Teddy Bekele; Briana Mumme; Adam Hutchens; Marc Johnson; David Wolf.

**Task Force members Absent**: Ini Augustine; Bruce Crane; Steve Fenske; Gail Hedstrom; Brian Hood; Daniel Lightfoot; Paul McDonald; Phil Stalboerger; John Twiest; and Melissa Wolf;

**Others in Attendance in Person**: Bree Maki; Commissioner Thom Petersen; Miles Kuschel; Anne Schwagerl; Karrie Janse; Megan Messerole; Kristina Ruport; Carol Bossuyt; Anna Norcutt Preuss; and members of the public attending Farmfest.

**I. Welcome**

Chair Bekele called the meeting to order and did introductions of the Broadband Task Force members that were present, as well as a background on the Task Force.

**III. Relationship between agriculture in Minnesota, and fast, reliable broadband**

A panel with Commissioner Thom Petersen (Commissioner, Department of Agriculture), Miles Kuschel (Board of Directors, District 6, Minnesota Farm Bureau), and Anne Schwagerl (Vice President, Minnesota Farmers Union) discussed the connection between broadband and agriculture and impacts of fast, reliable broadband on agriculture moving forward. Questions were asked on discussing what the relationship of broadband and agriculture could look like, and the future ideal, including the impacts of AI on agriculture, and importance of continued broadband expansion.

Miles discussed some of the usages of AI in agriculture, and how it can be used for monitoring crops and monitoring livestock. Commissioner Petersen discussed how in Minnesota, there are growing numbers of farmers, but translating information has been a barrier for farmers in Somali and Hmong populations, and that AI can expedite translations and getting information and communication out to mitigate this. Anne shared how farmers were getting pitched on utilizing AI more frequently, and that farmers are skeptical of AI and recognize that it is a tool, and it can be used well, or it can be used poorly. There’s a want to ensure AI does not limit the participation of smaller scale farmers, and that there needs to be holistic conversations about where the energy will come from to power AI.

Questions from Task Force members building on the importance of continued broadband expansion included those around issues with latency; how the Task Force can support efforts of the panelists; and what support from the legislature could look like moving forward. There was the consensus that fiber optic proved more effective in reliability, and that latency issues are impacted by the task at hand, like checking emails versus autonomous operations. Support from the Task Force could come from looking to update threshold needs and moving towards speeds of 100 Mbps up and down, as well as continued last mile efforts. In legislative efforts, it was mentioned that the need for broadband looking forward is only going to continue to grow so there is an ask for flexibility in solutions, as well as the recognition that with limited funds, targeted requests can be more successful in getting changes made.

Questions from attendees were around potential concerns of the impact of data centers moving closer to homes and farms in Minnesota, specifically environmental impacts; the future movement or opportunity for RDOF funds; and paths for fiber-to-the-premises for smaller communities. On data centers and AI specifically, panelists agreed there is a level of skepticism from farmers about the addition of data centers where concerns about the availability of water is already top of mind. Chair Bekele added there are needed concerns and attention to be paid to the push and pull between manmade and natural resources driven by AI usage.

Executive Director Bree Maki fielded questions on RDOF and fiber to the premises, and explained that Minnesota had RDOF early on, and is working to ensure OBD is capturing that in BEAD numbers where we could and continuing to document new defaults to update the maps.

The panel concluded with last thoughts on why panelists are passionate about this topic, and why broadband is important to them personally: for Miles, the ability to learn and self-educate; for Commissioner Petersen the way new technology is expanding farming for younger generations; and for Anne additionally the next generation in careers where you see more growth and younger generations staying and raising families in rural Minnesota.

**IV. Office of Broadband Development Updates**

Bree Maki (Executive Director, OBD) gave an overview of the Office of Broadband Development and updates on office initiatives. The OBD has state programs with funding dollars across the state through Border-to-Border (B2B), Low Density, and Line Extension. For these state programs currently, OBD is busy completing compliance and site visits. For these, OBD staff goes out to test speeds at homes and businesses to ensure that ISPs have achieved what was planned ahead of closeouts. In total, OBD has had 10 grant rounds, and Rounds 7 through 10 currently have projects open.

Recently, Senator Putnam and Representative Nelson, as well as non-partisan staff went out to a site from East Central Energy to see what speed testing looks like and give people the opportunity to understand the work and what is happening in the field. OBD is also working on a fourth round of Line Extension, as the Capital Projects Fund dollars need to be expended by the end of 2026. OBD is moving forward with work from our team’s new Land Use and Permitting Coordinator on state historic land use components and increasing coordination with other agencies.

On the federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, which was part of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) passed many years ago, currently the office is in a round of Direct Negotiation, which will close at 11:59pm CST on Friday August 8. The team is also working on deconfliction of applications received during the Restructured BEAD Round. Yesterday, OBD received new guidance from NTIA, so keeping up to date with these changes has been a challenge for the team and providers. OBD will enter a public comment period on the Final Proposal, which is due to NTIA on September 4, and will be posted for public comment on August 28 to meet the 7-day public comment period. Information on this will be shared via a webinar and updates will be shared via the OBD biweekly email blast. With the BEAD Final Proposal, the OBD is soliciting letters of support from communities across Minnesota, and groups like local EMS, childcare providers, etc., to show the need for fast, reliable broadband. The letters of support will also ensure OBD makes sure next year, the legislature can understand the parameters we have with this program, and why state programs like Line Extension and other funding may be necessary to continue to expand broadband access. Minnesota has statues, speed goals, and definitions of what broadband and reliable broadband means, and these are different than the BEAD program.

**VI. Other Business, September Meeting Plans, Wrap-up**
Chair Bekele opened the floor for questions and comments for Task Force members and others attending, there were no questions.

Finally, Chair Bekele updated that the Task Force would begin preparing for the annual report for the end of the year, including updates on group assignments, and the September meeting itself will address with Task Force members next steps to work with groups on convening and outlining and preparing recommendations.

The meeting adjourned around 3:40pm.

*A recording of the meeting was made available by Farm fest, and posted here:* [*https://www.farmfest.com/broadband-meeting/*](https://www.farmfest.com/broadband-meeting/)