

MINUTES

Meeting of the Broadband Development Office Board of Advisors

September 21, 2023

Agenda Item I: Call to Order and Roll Call.

The Broadband Development Office Board of Advisors (BDOBOA) meeting was held virtually and in person. Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar called the meeting to order at 2:04 p.m. via Cisco WebEx on Sept. 21, 2023.

Margeaux Mallick, from the Comptroller's Legislative Affairs team, called each member's name. Comptroller Hegar noted a quorum was present.

Members Present:

Comptroller Glenn Hegar

Alonzo Cantu

Greg Conte

Sergio Contreras

Robert McGee

Mari Robinson

Members Not Present:

Rep. Trent Ashby

Adriana Cruz

Dr. Scott Muri

Agenda Item II: Adoption of Minutes from June 13, 2023, meeting of BDOBOA.

Comptroller Hegar moved to approve the minutes from the BDOBOA meeting on June 13, 2023. The minutes were approved.

Agenda Item III: Presentation from Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on digital literacy.

Comptroller Hegar introduced Kerry Ballast from TWC to provide information on the impacts of digital literacy on workforce development.

Ms. Ballast shared how Rider 46 and Rider 47, passed by the 87th Legislature, have influenced the work of TWC. She explained TWC has been reviewing how funds are being used to assist in digital skills training and retraining across the state. These data will help conduct outreach initiatives to targeted populations, including those in training to rejoin the workforce and those on unemployment.

Ms. Ballast further explained that Workforce Development Boards have local flexibility, allowing them to offer activities and resources that help improve a worker's digital skills. She explained that Rider 46 helped develop resource rooms in Workforce Solutions Offices equipped with computers, printers and internet connection.

Ms. Ballast reiterated that the report on digital skills training and retraining required by Rider 47 would help TWC and BDOBOA staff conduct outreach to targeted populations, such as unemployment insurance claimants, to offer digital skills training.

Today, TWC has a presence in all 254 counties and provides adult education and literacy programs that can accommodate many schedules. TWC offers a Distance Education Professional Development Center, Math Assistance Call Center and Distance Education Virtual Providers through partnerships with the University of Texas at Austin and Texas Tech University.

Other programs offered by TWC include the Skills Enhancement Initiative, which includes certification services, tools provided by TWC, Metrix Online Learning and resources to provide options for next steps, explained Ms. Ballast. Finally, TWC developed the Information Technology Registered Apprenticeship Programs, which provide funding to students and the state's workforce.

There were no questions for Ms. Ballast.

Agenda Item IV: Update from Connected Nation on planning activities related to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Comptroller Hegar introduced Molly Weiner, Stephen LaChance and Chris Pedersen from Connected Nation to provide an update.

Ms. Weiner provided an update on the public engagement efforts. The Texas Digital Opportunity Plan (TDOP) Public Engagement included 12 Regional Working Groups, six Task Forces with outcome area expertise from across the state, and a Statewide Working Group comprising Task Force co-chairs, Regional Working Group chairs and Tribal government leaders. The TDOP Public Engagement released the Public Survey and the Digital Resources Mapping Tool Survey (DRMTS), both open from April through August 2023.

The Public Survey was open to all Texas residents and was designed to identify household-level experience and barriers related to broadband access, affordability and adoption. The Public Survey received responses from all 254 counties in Texas, explained Ms. Weiner. The Public Survey received 9,440 online responses in four languages and 1,400 paper responses.

The DRMTS collected data from organizations providing programs, services and tools that enable access to the internet, devices and digital skills training. The DRMTS received 352 responses. The Connect Texas Team (CTT) is analyzing these data, and the results will be incorporated into the TDOP.

Ms. Weiner continued to explain the outreach efforts conducted by the Broadband Development Office (BDO) and CTT. In seven weeks, the BDO and CTT visited 24 cities

across the 12 economic regions of Texas and hosted two virtual meetings. A total of 1,274 participants representing 127 counties attended the meetings. Participants included individuals belonging to, or organizations serving, all covered populations that are a priority for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA's) digital opportunity planning.

Ms. Weiner highlighted key takeaways from the public meetings, including affordability and availability as the primary barriers. Some communities reported having some form of internet, but with speeds that are limited at high use times of the day or when there are multiple users in a location; libraries were identified as key public resources in many regions. There is a need for technical support and infrastructure to continue to grow as communities become more dependent on digital tools.

There were no questions for Ms. Weiner.

After Ms. Weiner, Mr. LaChance provided an update on the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Five-Year Action Plan. The Five-Year Action Plan was the first deliverable for BEAD and was submitted to NTIA on time. The Five-Year Action Plan is a comprehensive needs assessment outlining Texas' goals and priorities to inform the Initial Proposal. CTT and the BDO received input from federal and state data sources, the Public Survey, the DRMTS and the Industry Survey to identify barriers.

Mr. Cantu asked Mr. LaChance how much influence the surveys had on the Five-Year Action Plan, specifically for low to moderate income communities. Mr. LaChance, Greg Conte and Korry Castillo told Mr. Cantu the surveys helped show what issues were impacting specific communities, including low to moderate income, and will inform the broader discussion as the BDO completes the larger plan. After Ms. Castillo and Mr. Conte provided the additional information, Mr. Cantu expressed his gratitude and had no further questions.

Mr. Pedersen provided information on the Extremely High Cost Per Location Threshold (EHCPLT). The EHCPLT is required in the BEAD Initial Proposal to set a maximum cost to build infrastructure, explained Mr. Pedersen. He further explained the importance of selecting the right number, as setting the EHCPLT too low would lead to few projects being completed and setting the EHCPLT too high would exhaust funds quickly.

Mr. Pedersen demonstrated how to use the EHCPLT when deciding between multiple projects. He also demonstrated how a medium threshold can potentially fund fiber, fixed wireless and other technologies.

There were no questions for Mr. Pedersen.

Agenda Item V: Update from the BDO on program developments.

Comptroller Hegar introduced Greg Conte to provide updates from the BDO.

Mr. Conte introduced four new full-time employees: Jesse Troublefield, Erin Benal, Jason Ahuja and Onyinye Ezie. The BDO has been very active in hiring new staff members to fill crucial roles.

Mr. Conte introduced Mr. Ahuja to continue with the presentation. Mr. Ahuja informed the BDOBOA the Five-Year Action Plan was submitted to NTIA on Aug. 28, 2023. The Initial Proposal will be submitted by Dec. 27, 2023. The BDO has requested an extension on the TDOP deadline and, if granted, will be submitted in February 2024. The Initial Proposal and the TDOP will be released for public comment in fall 2023.

Mr. Ahuja provided an update on the use of the American Rescue Plan Act's Capital Projects Fund. The BDO entered into an agreement with the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) on Sept. 13, 2023, to create TSLAC's Library Infrastructure and Facility Access Improvement Grant Program. The Texas Department of Transportation's El Paso District Safety Rest Area Broadband Infrastructure Project (\$6 million) is in the second round of curing. The Texas Department of Agriculture's Texas Rural Hospital Broadband Program completed the first round of curing. Finally, the Texas Pole Replacement Program completed the first round of curing.

The Bringing Online Opportunities to Texas (BOOT) Program's Notice of Funding Availability was released on March 6, 2023. The BDO accepted applications from April 3 through May 5, 2023, and application challenges from July 21 through Aug. 21, 2023. The BDO is reviewing and remedying overlap and reviewing challenges to uphold or dismiss.

Mr. Ahuja provided an update on the Texas Broadband Development Map. The BDO reached out to internet service providers (ISPs) across the state requesting updated service data to improve the accuracy of the map. The time to submit was Aug. 21 through Sept. 15, 2023. As of Sept. 18, 133 ISPs submitted data to the BDO. The updated map will be published on or before Jan. 1, 2024. Failure to provide requested information could negatively impact an ISP's ability to receive grant funding.

Mr. Ahuja informed the BDOBOA that the BDO released a Request for Proposal for the Technical Assistance Program. The Technical Assistance Program would provide resources to create a comprehensive broadband plan for communities identified as needing additional support.

Mr. Ahuja provided information about Proposition 8, a proposed constitutional amendment that would establish the Broadband Infrastructure Fund (BIF), to be voted on during the Nov. 7, 2023, election. If passed, the BIF would be funded by money allocated by the state Legislature, gifts, grants and investment earnings. The proposed amendment would go into effect Jan. 1, 2024, and expire Sept. 1, 2035. Additionally, if approved, House Bill 9 would appropriate \$1.5 billion to the BIF.

There were no questions for Mr. Ahuja.

Agenda Item VI: Update from the BDO regarding proposed changes to administrative rules.

Comptroller Hegar introduced David Cruz from Agency Affairs Legal Services.

Mr. Cruz stated the passing of Senate Bill 1238 made extensive changes to the Broadband Development Map and eligibility requirements, resulting in necessary amendments to the program rules. Proposed updates will be published in the Texas Register on Oct. 13, 2023. The proposed updates will be available for public comment for 30 days. BDOBOA members

will receive an advanced copy before publication and are asked to review and provide comments during the 30-day period.

There were no questions for Mr. Cruz.

Agenda Item VII: Discussion on topics and dates of future BDOBOA meetings.

Comptroller Hegar discussed the BDOBOA's move to semiannual meetings and asked for suggested topics for future meetings.

There were no suggestions or questions.

Agenda Item VIII: Public comment.

Comptroller Hegar opened the meeting to public comment.

Comptroller Hegar called up Llano County Commissioner Peter Jones. He provided the county perspective on broadband expansion and preparing for potential projects. The county completed a study to help challenge the Broadband Development Map and released a Request for Quote to find a partner. The process has since stalled. Commissioner Jones raised questions on the use of Proposal 8 funding and how BOOT could be more lenient on requirements in a second round. Commissioner Jones was seeking clarity on a recommendation that internet service be offered for \$30 per month.

Next, Comptroller Hegar welcomed Jennifer Harris, Texas' NTIA federal program officer, to address the BDOBOA. She thanked the BDO and CTT for the work completed for BEAD and for staying true to deadlines.

There were no other public comments.

Agenda Item IX: Adjournment.

Comptroller Hegar called the meeting to close at 3:08 p.m.