

Resolution Supporting Energy Company Communications Infrastructure for Broadband Expansion

Whereas electric utilities are considering or making investments in their own private wired and wireless broadband communications infrastructure to enhance reliability, security, and modernization of the grid (as discussed in the *Utility Rural Broadband Playbook* (09/16/2021 edition));

Whereas the lack of broadband options in some communities reflects the reality of the high cost of rural buildout and the customer density-dependent business models of traditional consumer broadband offerings, a challenge similar to that faced by efforts to bring electric service to rural communities 75 years ago;

Whereas to safely and efficiently modernize the grid to accommodate the two-way flow of electricity increasingly required by distributed and intermittent energy resources, and to realize the manifold benefits of new digital technologies, utilities must obtain broadband capabilities for mission critical grid control applications, and some utilities will opt to build their own secure and resilient wired and/or wireless broadband networks for this purpose;

Whereas in constructing wired and/or wireless private broadband networks for grid modernization, utilities will deploy certain infrastructure that provides “middle mile” connectivity (not extending to the customer premises), such as fiber optic cable, radio towers, power connections, etc.;

Whereas an energy company constructing such a network could share or augment certain “middle mile” infrastructure for lease by a consumer Internet Service Provider, leveraging the energy company infrastructure to reduce the cost of bringing broadband Internet access to unserved or underserved communities;

Whereas those communities in which the “leveraging” approach is implemented will benefit from both the increased availability of consumer broadband and the increased grid efficiency, reliability, safety, and security made possible by the new energy company broadband network deployed for critical grid communications;

Whereas the NARUC supports “non-traditional broadband providers, electric co-ops, municipal utilities, and Investor Owned Utilities providing service in unserved and underserved areas to quickly close the broadband availability gap.” (NARUC Resolution Supporting Recommendations from the Broadband Expansion Task Force, July 27, 2021); *now therefore be it*

Resolved that, the Board of Directors of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, convened at its 2021 Annual Meeting and Education Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, encourages regulators and industry to support and facilitate the deployment by utilities of wired and wireless secure, reliable broadband networks for critical grid communications; *and be it further*

Resolved that, in the planning of such networks, energy companies should to the extent that they are authorized and it is feasible, consider sharing or making available wired and wireless “middle mile” communications infrastructure to support the expansion of consumer broadband access; *and be it further*

Resolved that, to the extent feasible, and if determined to be in the best interest of customers, during the planning of any wireless portion of such networks, energy companies should coordinate to reduce equipment costs and enable provision of network services to other utilities with overlapping service territories; *and be it further*

Resolved that, to the extent permissible, State legislatures and appropriate agencies and commissions should consider identifying and mitigating any overly burdensome legislative or regulatory obstacles to the expeditious deployment of energy company wired and wireless networks for critical grid communications and work to encourage the leveraging of “middle mile” infrastructure for broadband expansion in unserved and underserved communities.

Sponsored by the Committee on Telecommunications.

Adopted by the NARUC Board of Directors on November 9, 2021