

September 4, 2018

Memorandum to the Northern and Remote Forum

DECISION MEMO: Northern and Remote Components of a National Broadband Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FCM has long advocated for increased federal involvement in developing the telecommunications infrastructure that is critical to the social, cultural and economic vibrancy of Canada's rural, northern and remote communities. However, it is increasingly evident that a more coordinated and assertive approach is needed to ensure that Canadians can in fact get the broadband internet services they need, and in a timely fashion.

While the Rural Forum, by way of a separate decision memo, is considering the principal components of a proposed National Broadband Strategy, the Northern and Remote Forum is being asked to amend the northern and remote policy statement on social and economic development to ensure that particular northern considerations are reflected in the broader Strategy moving forward.

DECISION HISTORY

The Board has previously taken the following decisions on this topic:

- At the September 2015 Board of Directors meeting, the Northern and Remote Forum considered a decision on broadband priorities. This memo can be viewed [here](#).

BACKGROUND

Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)

- In December 2016, the Commission announced a universal service objective for telecommunications: Canadians in urban as well as rural and remote areas should have access to voice services and broadband Internet on fixed and mobile networks. Associated with this objective was the Commission's creation of a new broadband fund of \$750 million over the first five years to focus on underserved areas of Canada. The Commission has yet to finalize the design details for this fund.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED)

- In July 2018, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) launched a consultation on changes to the 3500 MHz spectrum band. FCM made a [submission](#) underlining the need for ISED to ensure rural and remote communities do not suffer from a loss of access, or decrease in quality of service, when changes to the use of spectrum are considered.
- In December 2016, the Government of Canada announced that their new broadband program, *Connect to Innovate*, would invest up to \$500 million by 2021 to bring high-speed Internet service to rural and remote communities in Canada. FCM engaged with ISED during consultations in 2016 on the design of the new program. ISED has finalized the selection of projects, and has announced almost all the successful applications over the last 6 months. The program had an initial target of reaching 350 communities;

however, it is now projected to reach approximately 800 communities due to contributing investments from the private sector and other orders of government.

- The Auditor General of Canada is scheduled to table a report on “Broadband in Remote Regions” in November 2018, and FCM intends to launch a public campaign on this issue ahead of this report.

Past Updates

- Updates are provided to the Board of Directors regularly through the monthly distribution of the *Advocacy Updates* to the Committee of the Whole, as well as to the Standing Committee as part of the advocacy update portion of the agenda.
- The Northern and Remote Forum received an [update](#) report on Broadband at the March 2018 Board meeting.

ANALYSIS

The National Broadband Strategy memo being brought forward to the Rural Forum contains a broader analysis of the Strategies’ key principles and core elements. Please refer to that Rural Forum memo for comprehensive background, context and details regarding the Strategy as a whole.

While advancing this Strategy is a shared priority across all FCM standing committees, the stark difference in the service and affordability of broadband when compared to southern Canada, makes advancing northern aspects of this work through the Northern and Remote Forum an important component of the Strategies overall development. Moving forward, it is proposed that the Northern and Remote Forum continue to be the principal venue for advancing northern and remote specific policy of the National Broadband strategy. As such, the key elements of this strategy should be reflected immediately in Forum’s current policy statement.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

- [FCM Submission to CRTC Review of basic telecommunication services – 2015](#)
- [FCM Submission to CRTC Review of basic telecommunications services – 2016](#)
- [FCM Submission to Development of the CRTC’s broadband funding regime – 2017](#)
- [FCM Submission to ISED’s 600MHz Spectrum Auction – 2017](#)
- [FCM Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology – 2017](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Northern and Remote Forum:

- 1) Adopt the following policy position, through an amendment to the Policy Statement on Northern and Remote Social and Economic Development:

1. Broadband Internet

...

1.7 The federal government should take a leadership role and develop an ambitious, comprehensive and long-term national broadband strategy, in consultation with relevant departments and agencies, including the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, provinces/territories, municipalities, Indigenous communities, the private sector and civil society.

This strategy should ensure that the specific needs of northern and remote communities are addressed, including an appropriate cost-share for satellite-dependent and remote communities, consideration of affordability in a northern context, and transparency in the selection of projects and in the evaluation of project outcomes.

2) Receive this report.

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