

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Buddy System: Public-Private Partnerships Gaining Steam for Buildouts

When it comes to building out broadband, a number of companies are finding they don't have to do it alone. Add in government money on the table and the attractiveness of public-private partnerships has new players getting into the game.

Take **Cox Communications**. It's at Fiber Connect this week, eager to partner through a lease-operate model in which a municipality, tribal nation or electric co-op can build and own a fiber network down to the premise and Cox would lease it as an exclusive access network. So far, Cox has one partnership in place. It's with Indian Electric Cooperative in Oklahoma and is contiguous with the MSO's existing footprint. The co-op's agreement with Cox, signed in June, is for a three-year buildout to all 14,000+ IEC members across seven counties.

"The reaction we got from the community was tremendous," *Justin Soileau*, Sr. Manager of Strategic Solutions for Cox, said during a Fiber Connect panel Tuesday on public-private partnerships. Social media comments were ecstatic, and he believes that ultimately is because these underserved communities are excited to finally have a solution that works for them.

Under the partnership, customers are 100% Cox customers and Indian Electric owns the infrastructure. "We have a turnkey kind of ISP solution where we'll run the truck rolls, we'll be in a customer's home. When a customer has a trouble call, it goes to our call centers," said Soileau. "That's the part of

the journey that we're trying to simplify for these other owner operators that don't have experience being in the customer's home or running a retention call center."

ALLO Communications has done a variety of public-private partnerships with several different models. Sometimes it owns the customer, sometimes it doesn't. "It's our preference to own the customer if at all possible, but in a situation where 100% of the money is being put up by the entity, that's one of the things they want to do is own that customer," said ALLO External Relations Director *Doc Winger*.

For example, it would be extremely expensive to build out to Breckenridge, Colorado, given its position 9600 square feet above sea level. The city wanted an all-underground network. "When we met with Breckenridge we said, 'we can design it and build it for you, but it is so far outside our ROI that Breckenridge just doesn't make sense for us.' They said we have the money, we'll pay for it if you build it," explained Winger. "So we have a long-term operating agreement, a 20-year operating agreement and we operate the network on their behalf."

A different model is Valentine, NE, where the incumbent cable provider notified the city it was abandoning the system. Rather than decommission the system, the city bought it for \$1, retained the aerial network and sold the rest of the system to ALLO for \$1. "They retained the ownership of the strand wire because they want to make sure this didn't happen to them again—that they would have control of who was coming in," Winger said. "We built Valentine in 60 days [that included

Cablefax Daily

**Partner
with
Cablefax
Daily**

Contact Ellen Kamhi at
917.626.5574 or
ekamhi@accessintel.com



two blizzards!]. We latched fiber over the strand wire... It's a revenue sharing agreement that will more than pay the city back its \$400,000 investment over the 20 years of the agreement, and we will own the entire system at the end of the 20-year agreement.”

As public-private partnerships become more common, some municipalities are getting bigger with their asks. “We’re currently involved in three RFPs right now... where the municipalities aren’t really offering anything, but they’re wanting all kinds of stuff. If you win it, you win the right to spend \$80 million,” quipped Wininger. “They tend to be communities that are not likely to qualify for BEAD and so they’re wanting to get out in front of it... The RFPs have mostly been telling us what you’ll come in and do for us and we’ll try to help you with permitting.”

When it comes to best practices for forging partnerships, build relationships and explain, explain, explain. “The education of the stakeholders is important. After COVID our judge-executive said, ‘we’ve got places that have no connectivity. We need you to build to it immediately.’ But they don’t even understand what that means as far as cost and all that goes into it,” said *Chad Lawson*, Broadband Operations Manager for Murray, KY, cooperative **Murray Electric System**. “Communications is key but make sure they understand what they’re asking for and that it’s not just an overnight, quick fix that you can get somebody hooked up.”

MAD FIGHTS BACK IN BATTLE OVER FOX STATION LICENSE

The **Media and Democracy Project** is doubling down on its argument that the **FCC** should reject the license renewal application for **Fox’s** broadcast license for Philadelphia station **WTFX** for knowingly broadcasting false news about the 2020 election. In reply comments, Media and Democracy Project said Fox’s opposition to its petition ignored the elephant in the room, never addressing what it presented as evidence that *Rupert and Lachlan Murdoch* were aware that allegations that the 2020 presidential election was rigged were false and that **Fox News** anchors were misleading viewers. It also said Fox didn’t address the findings made in a Delaware Court tied to the settlement between Fox News and **Dominion Voting**. “The evidence presented in the Petition and in the Dominion decision establish a substantial and material question of fact, specifically whether Fox’s top management is so avaricious and dishonest that it cannot be relied on to operate a television station in the public interest? If Fox can lie to millions of viewers on its cable channels about something so fundamental to our democracy as a presidential election, what is to stop it from lying to its television viewers?” the response said. “The evidence clearly

demonstrates that Fox is willing to put its corporate self-interest above its obligations as a public trustee.” Former **FCC** Chair *Alfred Sikes* also chimed in to the fight on Monday, saying in his informal objection that the Commission must designate the application for hearing. He believes this is one that should be closely scrutinized both in public hearings and courtrooms. “As chairman of the FCC I opposed the advocacy of those who, for competitive reasons, tried to block Rupert Murdoch’s efforts to launch Fox Broadcasting Company—the long sought fourth network. And I have been a listener/viewer off and on with notable exceptions to Fox News. It is in the promotion business... they choose fiction over non-fiction to make many of its listeners and viewers happy,” he said. “The FCC has allowed the pledge to operate in the public interest to become perfunctory at best.”

MIDCO, PLUME LAUNCH SMALL BUSINESS WIFI SOLUTION

To help with small businesses’ connectivity and security needs, **Midco** is rolling out its Business WiFi Pro product in all of its markets in the Midwest. The solution is driven by **Plume’s** WorkPass network which uses the cloud and AI to bring forth features to enhance operational insights and intelligence. That includes self-optimization of a network, AI-based security, real-time motion awareness and remote management of profiles, security controls and monitoring an individual’s time at work. The service comes with Plume’s SuperPods enabled with WiFi 6, which are placed based on the size of the business location and help with minimizing dead zones on the site. Additionally, business owners will get the Midco Business WiFi Pro Mobile app, which comes with secure, employee and guest WiFi networks to segment information based on job function and for guests.

CMG’S NEW LOCAL NEWS SERVICE

Broadcast station owner Cox Media Group is introducing Neighborhood TV, a free ad-supported streaming news service that focuses on hyper-local content. It’s available on the web or via the CTV app on all major platforms. NTV has been in a test stage on desktop and mobile devices across Atlanta and Charlotte, recording over 100 million impressions monthly. At launch, it’s available in 70 neighborhoods in Georgia and 30 in North Carolina, with plans to extend NTV to Orlando in 4Q23. CMG is also partnering with the newspaper publisher *McClatchy* to further expand in the southeast region and place content on newspapers’ online homepages. Content will be produced by NTV reporters and from local broadcast stations.

NAD ISSUES RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOOGLE, T-MOBILE ADS

The **National Advertising Division** has recommended that **Google** discontinue a claim that **YouTube TV** is “\$600 less than cable.” The comparative price claim appeared in two Google commercials for YouTube TV and was followed by a disclosure that the basis of comparison was comparable standalone cable packages. NAD found the claim reasonably conveys the cost of YouTube TV compared to all cable services, but it may be difficult to identify comparable offerings with identical channel lineups. That potential for confusion led to the recommendation decision, which Google intends to appeal. **Charter** issued the challenge. NAD also advised **T-Mobile** to discontinue a claim that customers who download the T-Mobile Tuesdays App will be able to watch every regular season MLB game live or on demand on **MLB.tv**. The carrier has already responded to the challenge, brought about by **AT&T**, by adjusting the claim to clarify that customers can enjoy every out-of-market regular season game. The statement appeared in an instructional **YouTube** video.

TMT CREATES MEDIAOPS DIVISION

TMT Insights is adding a new division under its umbrella: Media Operations. It'll be led by VP, Media Operations *Brian Kenworthy* and VP, Media Solutions *Chris McCarthy*, who both join TMT from **Amazon Web Services**. The group will focus on resources that enhance the relationship between an organization's engineering and digital content operations teams, while also giving customers access to a team of media experts dedicated to building and maintaining media workflows, distribution and localization onboarding and utilizing research and development initiatives.

RATINGS

It was a week for the news networks in total-day ratings as coverage of former President *Donald Trump's* indictment unfolded. **Fox News** and **MSNBC** were neck-and-neck with 1.1 million and 1 million viewers P2+, respectively, and **CNN** followed in third with 551,000. **ESPN** (451,000) and **HGTV** (438,000) took the No. 4 and 5 spots. It was a similar story in primetime as Fox News' 1.64 million edged MSNBC's 1.61 million. **NFL Network** kept the preseason football momentum going with 1.03 million, while HGTV had 803,000 and CNN had 770,000. – The Aug. 14 premiere of **TLC's** “90 Day: The Last Resort” was the top cable program of the night in key female demos. The episode had a 1.63 L3 rating among W25-54 and a 1.17 L3 rating for A25-54, making it the highest-rated unscripted series premiere since 2020 across those two groups. “90 Day Fiancé: The Other Way” followed as the No. 2 cable program of Aug. 14, boosted by a 1.43 L3 rating among W25-54.

WWC RATINGS

It was a record-breaking FIFA Women's World Cup for **Telemundo**. The tournament averaged a total audience delivery of 167,000 viewers across Telemundo, **Universo**, **Peacock** and Telemundo streaming platforms. Linear ratings were down compared to the 2019 edition of the tournament due to unfavorable time zones, but when weighed up with the 2007 WWC in China, the audience was up 18% from 141,000. The U.S.' match vs Netherlands on July 26 was the most-watched contest of the tournament with a TAD of 1.5 million viewers. U.S. vs Vietnam came second with 1 million viewers, while Spain vs Netherlands became the most-watched non-USA match in WWC history on Spanish-language TV with a TAD of 968,000. The final—which saw Spain defeat England 1-0—recorded 401,000 viewers. The English-language broadcast on Fox had 1.66 million viewers and peaked at 2.45 million from 7:45-8am. Top markets included Washington, D.C.; Austin; San Diego and Boston.

FIBER FRENZY

GCI received a \$35 million grant from the **USDA's** ReConnect Program to bring fiber services to Toksook Bay, Ammonak and Tununak, Alaska. The expansion will come via the **AIRRAQ Network**, a JV between GCI and **Bethel Native Corporation** that brings high-speed broadband to areas in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and offers 2.5 Gig residential internet speeds and unlimited data plans. Phase three of the AIRRAQ Network will bring connectivity to over 1,800 residents in the region. – Northeast provider **Empire Access** is expanding its services across Elmira, New York, with construction slated to be completed in early October. Residential plans begin at \$50/month for 500 Mbps or \$65/month for 1 Gbps, while businesses can get plans with speeds of 300 Mbps, 500 Mbps or 1 Gbps. Empire also offers streaming TV, mobile and IoT security.

PROGRAMMING

Paramount+'s new original comedy “Frasier” will begin its 10-episode season in the U.S. and Canada on Oct. 12 with two episodes. The show will debut in all other international markets the following day. – **INSP** greenlit a fourth season for “Into the Wild Frontier.” – Boxing journalist *Jim Lampley* is joining **PPV.com** to co-host the service's “Canelo vs. Charlo” live viewer chat on Sept. 30. He'll also provide on-site commentary and reports in Las Vegas throughout the week, generating original video content for the web and social media platforms.

PEOPLE

Ilan Eframian was named **Comcast's** new VP, Xfinity Communities. He'll oversee the company's growth strategy for multifamily properties and residents through partnerships with other Comcast divisions and partners. Eframian was previously **Google Fiber's** Head of Multifamily and spent 17 years at **Verizon** working multiple roles across sales, operations, finance and legal.