

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

BEAD Update: NTIA Preparing Guidelines for Alternative Technologies

NTIA isn't veering away from its preference for fiber in the BEAD program, but it is opening the door for other technologies to be utilized to connect the most remote portions of the country. "Nothing has changed in our approach since the beginning. We are fiber forward," NTIA Administrator *Alan Davidson* said during a fireside chat at **Fiber Connect** on Monday. "But there will be places, we know, that will be incredibly difficult to reach, that are very expensive, the deployments are hard and there will be other technologies that we'll be using from state to state."

He announced that in the coming weeks, NTIA will be releasing a guideline document that outlines a process for the use of alternative tech including unlicensed wireless or LEO satellite. It would be a notable evolution in the BEAD program rules. When NTIA first released the BEAD Notice of Funding Opportunity in May 2022, fiber projects were given preference through the "priority broadband projects" classification. In times when factors prevent a fiber buildout, the agency has said other reliable broadband technologies including terrestrial fixed wireless dependent in some way on licensed spectrum and cable modem/hybrid fiber-coaxial deployments can be utilized. When it came to locations served exclusively by satellite or services using entirely unlicensed spectrum, however, the agency said those locations would be seen as unserved.

Davidson has in the past said NTIA has always known that it would take a wide mix of technologies to entirely close the

digital divide, and this guidelines document will formalize that position. "We really invite all of you to take a look at it, make sure we've got a good process in place for the states and comment on it. We will be moving quickly to get that guidance out, so stand by," he told the audience.

At this point, NTIA has publicly announced the approval of BEAD initial proposals for 26 states and territories, and there's been a steady increase in the cadence of plan acceptances over the last few weeks. Davidson said the agency is on track to approve all state plans by the fall, and that sets up 2025 to be the year that funding starts flowing through the states and to providers.

"When we get together a year from now... BEAD deployments will be happening. Funding will be out there. Shovels will be in the ground," he said.

It's impossible to ignore the noise around the political season and the impending election in November, and a potential change in administration always raises questions about what policy shifts could come with it. Davidson is barred from making any comments on any campaigns or the election in general, but he has full confidence that the programs NTIA is currently running will remain stable through potentially turbulent times.

"I'm feeling very confident about the future of BEAD and the future of our Internet for All programs because they really have bipartisan support. They're the product of the bipartisan infrastructure bill," he said. "There are people, I talk to them every day, every week, on both sides of the aisle who really care about each of these programs, so I'm confident about that because it



NOMINATE NOW

Cablefax recognizes the 2024 Most Powerful Women for outstanding qualities including influence and leadership within the cable and broadband industry, as well as dedication to empowering other professionals to grow and thrive. Join us in honoring these women who break boundaries and set new standards.

has a lot of support, because the need is real, because all of you are here and will make sure that these programs continue.”

.....

BALLY SPORTS NETWORKS RETURNING TO COMCAST

Diamond Sports sounded [optimistic](#) in court last week that it would get a deal done with **Comcast**. It wasn't just bravado, with the two announcing an agreement that will see all 15 **Bally Sports Regional Networks** return to the Comcast customers' lineup on Aug. 1. The RSNs, which have been dark on Comcast since May 1, are moving from digital basic to the less widely distributed Ultimate TV tier. Comcast said that most customers who were avid viewers of the nets already have the Ultimate TV package, but it will offer a three-months-free promo for customers wanting to upgrade to the Ultimate package (getting them through the MLB season). “We appreciate Diamond Sports working with us to reach a solution that returns the Bally Sports RSNs to our Ultimate TV customers in a way that reflects the changing video marketplace for local sports,” *Greg Rigdon*, President of Content Acquisition for Comcast, said in a statement. Comcast has been systematically moving RSNs as deals come up to less widely distributed packages, striking such pacts with **MASN** and **SportsNet Pittsburgh**. Its own **NBC Sports** RSNs haven't come up for renewal yet. Xfinity Ultimate TV customers will also be able to stream Diamond's RSN content by authenticating using their Xfinity credentials on the Bally Sports app. Diamond said the deal was a critical step in its restructuring effort. “With certainty on our distribution, we are focused on finalizing an agreement with the **NHL** and resolving our ongoing negotiations with the **NBA**. We are mindful that time is of the essence with basketball and hockey seasons fast approaching, and once agreements with our team and league partners are complete, we intend to move expeditiously to present a plan of reorganization to the Court,” CEO David Preschlack said.

.....

FCC SMACKS CHARTER ON LACK OF 911 OUTAGE NOTIFICATIONS

The **FCC** announced a \$15 million settlement with **Charter** related to an investigation into its compliance with 911 and network outage notification rules. As part of the settlement, Charter admitted to violating the agency's rules regarding notifications to public safety officials and the Commission in connection with three unplanned network outages and hundreds of planned, maintenance-related network outages that occurred last year. In one instance, the FCC said Charter failed to notify more than 1,000 emergency call centers of a service disruption impacting 911 service. In addition to the civil penalty, Charter will implement a robust compliance plan

that includes the first-of-its-kind application of certain cybersecurity measures—including network segmentation and vulnerability mitigation management—related to 911 communications services and network outage reporting. The settlement concerns an outage experienced by Charter on Feb 19, 2023, when its network was the target of a minor DoS attack. It also includes two additional outages on March 31, 2023, and April 26, 2023, and hundreds of planned maintenance-related outages that Charter failed to report to the FCC. “We're glad to have resolved these issues, which will primarily result in Charter reporting certain planned maintenance to the FCC,” the company said. “The fine has nothing to do with cybersecurity violations and is attributable solely to administrative notifications. No provision within either the CISA Cybersecurity Best Practices or the NIST Cybersecurity Framework would have prevented this attack, and no flaws were identified by the FCC regarding Charter's cybersecurity practices. We agreed with the FCC that we should continue doing what we're already doing.”

.....

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

The 2024 Paris Olympics have officially begun, and **NBCUniversal** started the Games off with a ratings bang. It recorded a total audience delivery (TAD) of 28.6 million viewers for the Opening Ceremony, according to custom fast national data from **Nielsen** and **Adobe Analytics**, making it the most-watched Summer Olympics Opening Ceremony since London 2012. That's also a 60% jump from the 17.9 million recorded for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Opening Ceremony and an 8% increase compared to the Opening Ceremony for Rio 2016 (26.5 million). The Spanish-language presentation on **Telemundo Deportes** garnered 666,000 viewers. It was **Peacock's** most-streamed Opening Ceremony ever with over 2.5 million viewers, becoming the streamer's No. 1 entertainment event in history as well. Paris Olympics streaming consumption across NBCU platforms surpassed 1 billion minutes through Friday. Then on Saturday, NBCU had a TAD of 32.4 million viewers across **NBC**, **Peacock** and other NBCU networks and platforms. Peacock had 4.7 million viewers who streamed Saturday's coverage. Saturday was also Peacock's second-best day in engagement. TAD is based on live-plus-same-day custom fast national figures from Nielsen and digital data from Adobe Analytics. – While the Opening Ceremony brought in plenty of ratings, there was some controversy during certain portions, and **C-Spire** decided to take action. “We were shocked by the mockery of the Last Supper during the opening ceremonies of the Paris Olympics. C Spire will be pulling our advertising from the Olympics,” the company [said](#) on X.

.....

FIBER CONNECT NOTEBOOK

Fiber Connect opened Monday in Nashville, and the Music City

gathering has attracted more than 5,000 attendees, according to **Fiber Broadband Association** President/CEO *Gary Bolton*. Exhibitor spots in the Expo Hall sold out a year in advance and the waiting list continues to grow. “Our goal in the next three days is to really raise the bar and deliver the best fiber broadband event in the world this year,” Bolton said during the show’s opening session. FBA has added 56 members since December. The organization also offered an update on its Optic Path fiber technician training program, which has seen 485 graduates to date. The group expects to have 1085 graduates from the program by the end of the year, and 87% of those are veterans. The end goal is to have these training programs in all 56 states and territories and to put 75,000 fiber optic technicians into the field.

WNBA MEDIA DEAL INCLUDES PRICE RE-EVALUATION

More details are trickling out about the **WNBA’s** new 11-year, \$2.2 billion media rights deal that was announced last week. **CNBC reports** that **Disney**, **Amazon** and **NBCUniversal** each agreed to a price re-evaluation after the 2028 season, according to people familiar with the deal. It’s not surprising considering the league’s ascent in popularity in recent years, but **CNBC’s** report does point out that the **WNBA** worked with **Endeavor Group’s** media consulting team, and their analysis had the league’s rights valued at about \$125 million. It was the **NBA**—which negotiated the **WNBA’s** deal during its own talks—that pushed for a higher value. Once that 2028 season wraps up, the **NBA/WNBA** will work with a third party to look at potential increases in value. Such an increase would be determined by TV ratings, expansion franchises and any alterations to the length of the regular season and/or postseason. Another facet will be that the **WNBA** plans on adding more media partners as of the 2026 season.

NTIA’S MIDDLE MILE DASHBOARD

NTIA unveiled a [dashboard](#) for its Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program. For each grantee, the dashboard shows the award amount, the project location, and percentages of procurement, permitting and construction completed. The dashboard will be updated every six months to reflect the semi-annual “progress to completion” updates provided by awardees. Later this summer, **NTIA** will launch similar dashboards for its Connecting Minority Communities pilot program, Broadband Infrastructure Program, and the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, with the **BEAD** and Digital Equity Capacity, and Digital Equity Competitive program dashboards to follow in due time.

SAN DIEGO COMIC-CON NEWS

There was no shortage of announcements made at San Diego Comic-Con over the weekend. **Showtime** is bringing back *Michael Hall*—who arrived in person to deliver the news—in a new “Dexter” series “Dexter: Resurrection” as well as the previously announced

show “Dexter: Original Sin.” Premiere details are still to come. – **Max** set the premiere date for “Gremlins: The Wild Batch”: Oct. 3. Additionally, *Simu Liu* will join the main cast, and John Glover will return as a guest voice after starring in the “Gremlins” film sequel. **Max** also gave a [first look](#) at an animated series it’s working on with **Cartoon Network**. “Iyanu,” which is rooted in Nigerian culture and mythology, is slated for release in the U.S. in 2025. – **Paramount+** took the time to release the [trailer](#) for its original movie “Star Trek: Section 31,” which is set to premiere in early 2024. Speaking of Star Trek, a slew of veterans from legacy franchise programs will join the cast of Season 1 of “Star Trek: Starfleet Academy.” *Tig Notaro*, *Oded Fehr*, *Mary Wiseman* and *Robert Picardo* will have various roles and guest appearances. Production will begin next month. – **CW Network** joined the sneak peeks and offered a [look](#) at the final season of “Superman & Lois.” The two-hour Season 4 premiere will kick off Oct. 17, time TBD. – **AMC Networks** took over Comic-Con on Saturday with “The Walking Dead,” hosting a panel for “The Walking Dead: Daryl Dixon – The Book of Carol” ahead of its Sept. 29 debut on **AMC** and **AMC+**. The panel featured showrunner and EP *David Zabel*, EP/Director *Greg Nicotero*, EP/Stars *Norman Reedus* and *Melissa McBride* and cast member *Louis Puech Scigliuzzi*, who offered the first look at the Season 2 [trailer](#).

FIBER FRENZY

Breezeline was chosen to provide connectivity solutions for multiple schools in two districts across New Hampshire and Virginia. The company will provide a dedicated 1 Gbps internet access connection for NH’s Somersworth High School. It’ll also build a fiber network connecting the high school, two elementary schools, a middle school, district administrative offices and City Hall. The school district covers approximately 1,336 students. **Breezeline’s** work in Virginia will include a 5 Gbps internet access connection for the Colonial Beach School District, which holds nearly 600 students.

PEOPLE

Comcast tapped *Lance West* as its next EVP, Federal Government Affairs and Head of the company’s office in D.C. Reporting to Chief Legal Officer/Secretary *Tom Reid*, West will begin Sept. 3 and oversee Comcast’s legislative and regulatory initiatives. He’ll also manage the company’s advocacy strategy and guide relationships with external partners. West was most recently VP, Federal Government Relations at the American Petroleum Institute, and before that he served as Chief of Staff to Sen. *Joe Manchin* (I-WV), where he worked on legislation including the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. – *Tom McLaughlin* will be the next CEO of **ATX Networks**, replacing *Dan Whalen*, who is stepping down effective immediately after a nearly four-year stint. *McLaughlin* arrives from **Advanced Media Technologies** where he was President/CEO, and prior to that he spent time with companies including **CommScope**, **Arris International** and **Motorola**. *McLaughlin* will be tasked with helping **ATX Networks** sustain profitable growth while focusing on innovation and operational execution.