



1129 20th Street, NW | Suite 350 | Washington, D.C. 20036
202.872.0030 Phone | 202.872.1331 Fax
utc.org | networks.utc.org

March 13, 2018

**Utilities Technology Council
Statement for the Record
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation
Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet**

Hearing on Rebuilding Infrastructure in America: Investing in Next-Generation Broadband

The Utilities Technology Council (UTC) thanks the Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet for the opportunity to submit these comments for the record regarding the above-referenced hearing. As the Subcommittee considers policies on America's broadband infrastructure, UTC members are supporting broadband deployment by both providing access to utility infrastructure for third-party broadband providers and, where allowed, deploying broadband services in unserved and underserved areas. UTC therefore supports the development of policies which promote utility broadband deployment and infrastructure access.

Established in 1948, UTC is the global association representing energy and water providers on their needs related to the deployment of reliable and resilient information and communications technology (ICT). Energy and water providers use ICT networks as the backbone for the infrastructure that delivers safe, reliable, and secure energy and water services. These networks are essential for reliability, safety, resiliency, and security.

UTC applauds the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing. Our membership represents energy and water entities of all sizes and ownership types, from investor-owned utilities to publicly and consumer-owned utilities located in small towns and rural areas. Although our membership is diverse, they all share the belief that access to affordable and reliable broadband is a key economic driver for our nation.

Indeed, electric utilities, in particular, enable broadband access in multiple ways. In many cases, where not prohibited by state or local statute, a number of utilities are actually providing broadband in locations where private firms have decided not to deploy such services. Most of these locations are in rural, unserved or underserved areas.

For electric utilities, the decision to provide broadband services to their customers and beyond is a natural progression because in most cases these utilities have already built communications networks to enhance electric reliability and resiliency; these networks include wireline and wireless services that have narrowband and broadband features. Therefore, electric utilities can use both their existing knowledge and, in some cases, their infrastructure to deliver broadband. As such, electric utilities can deploy future-proof, often fiber-based, networks offering robust, affordable and reliable broadband to potential customers inside and outside their service territories. Importantly, the services these electric utilities provide are reasonably comparable to the cost and quality of broadband available in urban areas.

In addition, some electric utilities are willing and able to provide wholesale services and infrastructure access to third-party commercial communications service providers to enable broadband deployment. As



1129 20th Street, NW | Suite 350 | Washington, D.C. 20036
202.872.0030 Phone | 202.872.1331 Fax
utc.org | networks.utc.org

stated above, electric utilities have extensive infrastructure that includes wireline and wireless communications networks, as well as power poles and rights of way. Many utilities offer wholesale capacity and dark fiber services over their communications infrastructures at rates, terms and conditions that are just and reasonable.

As this Subcommittee addresses broadband issues, we urge acknowledgement of electric utilities as key partners in bringing broadband to all Americans. Utility-owned infrastructure is an important piece of the broadband-deployment puzzle, as power poles are not only essential for delivering electricity, they are also used by third parties to enable voice, data, and broadband services. Power poles are designed first to deliver electricity to homes and businesses, and in so doing they also power the carrier-provisioned telecommunications services which cannot operate without electricity. These poles are built to withstand tough weather conditions and hold equipment that transforms high-voltage electricity into lower voltages safe for homes and businesses.

With the advent of 5G wireless technologies, policymakers and industry are looking at new ways to reduce pole-attachment costs and expedite the regulatory process. This “race to 5G” is seen as the next wave of broadband development that will enable greater communications access to more people. Again, power poles play a key role in the deployment of this technology, as small cellular wireless devices that can be attached to electric infrastructure will be used to bring 5G service to the nation. These devices can weigh as much as, if not more than, a pizza oven or a full-size refrigerator. In addition, different companies will want to attach their own “pizza ovens” to power poles or other devices, not necessarily recognizing that adding so much weight to a pole could interfere with its first responsibility—delivering the electricity that fuels everything from our homes to the devices and systems 5G technology is intended to serve.

UTC recommends this Subcommittee, as it looks to encourage broadband deployment, consider the following:

- Supporting broadband-funding programs that promote the deployment of future-proof networks which provide robust, reliable and affordable broadband services to all Americans;
- Supporting pole attachment policies that promote safety, reliability and security of electric utility infrastructure while accelerating broadband deployment; and
- Passing rights-of-way legislation that would clarify that electric utilities may use their existing rights-of-way for communications purposes. Doing so would promote broadband deployment by preventing class-action lawsuits against electric utilities that offer these services.

Ensuring that all Americans have access to affordable, reliable broadband is just as important today as electricity was for the growth of the nation a century ago. Now as then, electric utilities are critical partners in doing so and stand ready to assist.

UTC thanks the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing and appreciates the opportunity to submit this statement. We look forward to working with you and the full Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee in ensuring that all Americans have access to robust, affordable and reliable broadband networks and services.