

Strength in Numbers

The Fiber to the Home Council advocates for an all-fiber future.

By Heather Burnett Gold / FTTH Council Americas

I had the pleasure of participating with the Coalition for Local Internet Choice for a day of learning and discussion at the Broadband Communities Summit in Austin. My panelists and I were charged with explaining how communities could advocate and overcome legal or political barriers to get better broadband. I was glad to share what we've learned at the Fiber to the Home Council in years of advocacy promoting all-fiber deployment to communities.

For 15 years, the FTTH Council has delivered the same message: Communities need fiber, and there are a host of ways they can organize to make that happen. In fiber-to-the-home communities, today's problems can get relief, and leaders from the public and private sectors can start to capitalize on tomorrow's opportunities.

This message resonates far and wide. That's good, because advocating effectively for advanced communications networks takes more than just the council's voice. It takes diverse partnerships, research and willingness to look at problems from all angles. Let me offer a few recent examples.

Local Internet Choice. The FTTH Council is network ownership agnostic. It has long supported and championed the creative partnerships that communities have forged with private companies – incumbents and competitors – and with nonprofits to bring fiber to homes. That was a message we could uniquely deliver as the Federal Communications Commission and the Obama administration considered questions of local choice and regulation over the last year. At issue was whether state laws hampered communities' digital futures by preventing them from having broadband networks that use public assets.

We at the council were proud to support members in their FCC filings and their widespread public advocacy to deliver the following message: From Chattanooga, Tenn., to Kansas City, Mo. and Kan., from Smithville, Ind., to Quitman, Miss., every community has a unique set of assets that can accelerate investments in essential, all-fiber networks – and every community must be able to use those assets in the manner best suited to its economic situation and citizens. The council submitted filings to the FCC, made itself available to talk about all business models of fiber deployments and amplified members' voices as part of a broad coalition. In February 2015, the FCC announced its decision to accept the petitions from two FTTH Council members, Chattanooga, Tenn., and

Wilson, N.C., granting them federal relief from state laws that inhibited the expansion of successful gigabit Internet networks.

Battery Backup. In 2014, the FCC proposed new battery backup rules for customer-premises equipment that would have imposed additional, unnecessary costs on fiber providers and hindered deployments and upgrades. The council collected information from members to show that service providers and vendors were behaving responsibly, providing sufficient customer notice and capabilities – and that consumers were (and are) not reporting any adverse effects. The council also submitted information from FTTH providers and vendors demonstrating the reliability and resilience of fiber and commissioned additional research by Mike Render of RVA LLC on how Americans use communications services in emergencies. This advocacy – driven by the stories of council members – resulted in an acceptable compromise in new rules from the FCC.

One Touch Make-Ready. Last fall, the council released guidance on streamlining make-ready policies for pole attachments to accelerate the deployment of high-performance broadband networks. The council proposed that communities adopt “one touch” policies to allow a single construction crew with sufficient skill and experience, approved and chosen by the pole owner, to complete all the work to ready a pole for a new attachment. One touch accelerates deployment and reduces the disruption and inconvenience of multiple construction crews performing make-ready to move existing attachments and a final crew to attach the new entrant. One touch is equitable because its use of a recognized, authorized contractor protects pole owners and other entities that have equipment attached to poles and because all communications attachments have the same right to use the one touch process. We'll continue to advocate for this issue in our quest to make building fiber better and faster.

Fiber speeds will benefit communities' citizens, businesses and economies for years to come. It will take more voices than the council's to build this all-fiber future, but we look forward to the work ahead. ❖

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