

# Why FTTH ‘Shines’ During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Lisa R. Youngers, president and CEO of the Fiber Broadband Association, delivered this testimony before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation in March.

**T**he Fiber Broadband Association (FBA) appreciates the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. The Fiber Broadband Association is the only association across the Americas dedicated to accelerating the deployment of all-fiber networks to all locations and for all purposes. We have more than 250 members, including broadband service providers, network deployment contractors, equipment vendors and others, all of whom are dedicated to accelerating the deployment of all-fiber networks throughout the country. Fiber is the fundamental network technology for the 21st century, providing the needed underlying infrastructure not just for 5G but for wireless networks, smart communities, smart grids and internet of things (IoT) applications while also providing direct connections to homes, businesses and anchor institutions.

With the help of Congress, FBA members have delivered fiber to more than 46.5 million homes in the United States, up from only 50,000 homes in 2002. While much progress has been made, nearly 63 percent of homes in the United States still do not have access to fiber optic broadband networks, and 24 percent of rural Americans say basic internet access is a problem in their communities. We ask for your continued support as we work to ensure all Americans have access to reliable, future-proof fiber networks and the internet that powers the 21st century.

COVID-19 has made this need even more acute. With three-quarters of Americans

“sheltering in place” to slow the spread of the virus, we are using broadband more than ever. But more than 42 million Americans lack reliable access to high-speed internet at home, creating a severe gap in lifesaving telehealth treatments, online learning programs and jobs in the digital economy. We need to prioritize our communications networks to bring high-quality fiber broadband from coast to coast.

## **BROADBAND IS CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Telecommunications networks are always critical infrastructure but particularly in the pandemic. At-home broadband use is surging; Plume reports more than 100 percent increases in the number of people who are active online during the workday in the United States. This could be for anything from telehealth to distance learning. Virtual medical care is quickly emerging as a critical tool to fight the spread of the virus; one telehealth software vendor reported a 2,000 percent increase in visits to its platform for virtual consultations. Many more Americans are accessing government services online, including applying for unemployment or requesting an absentee ballot. With our schools and workplaces now online, too, 52 million students rely on remote education to finish the school year, and millions more telework from home.

Interestingly, the pandemic has also changed the way we use the internet. Previously,

asymmetrical, one-way download use (e.g., streaming Netflix) took up much of our at-home bandwidth, but now, symmetrical uploads and downloads (e.g., video conferencing) are much more prevalent. Last-mile networks still have a lot of asymmetric technologies, and the upstream gives out first. This is where wireless networks and satellites flounder, but fiber shines, as it can easily handle symmetrical traffic. Meeting today's connectivity demands requires investment in sustainable networks – and that means fiber broadband.

For many decades, our member companies have deployed fiber broadband infrastructure across the country. In 2019 alone, more than 450,000 fiber routes were deployed, and more than 6.5 million new households received access to all-fiber networks, according to FBA data. As a result of industry's investment in innovation, we have seen significant cost reductions in fiber broadband deployment. According to FBA's All-Fiber Deployment Cost Study 2019, fiber operators throughout the United States are reducing deployment costs by lowering the cost of equipment, implementing more efficient products and deployment techniques, and increasing labor productivity.

The Trump administration and Congress have already begun ensuring rural communities have access to reliable and secure high-speed internet through fiber broadband. In 2018, Congress appropriated \$600 million to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for deployment of rural broadband infrastructure. In January 2019, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai issued a report and order to distribute \$20 billion over the next 10 years for rural broadband deployment through the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. Currently, lawmakers are considering the Utilizing Strategic Allied (“USA”) Telecommunications Act, which would direct \$750 million from new auctioned spectrum licenses to create an O-RAN R&D Fund. While we support many provisions in this bill, we urge lawmakers not to limit R&D support to wireless technologies, but to

also include fixed broadband providers. Simply put, secure and reliable 5G is impossible without fiber-rich networks.

### AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JOBS

In the midst of a pandemic and nearly unprecedented unemployment, we see a great workforce opportunity in the fiber broadband industry. Our members are facing a labor shortage, and retaining skilled personnel is among the biggest chokepoints in deployments. There are good jobs with good career paths – something that has never been more important to our economy. The Fiber Broadband Association and our members are committed to tackling this and will work with community colleges and seek solutions for transitional career workforce training from other industries such as oil and gas, infrastructure providers, and the technology sector. We ask for federal support for grants and apprenticeships to get Americans back to work in an industry that will keep us all connected.

We need work to ensure all Americans have access to reliable fiber networks and the internet that powers the 21st century. And it has to be fiber. We believe the accelerated deployment of fiber broadband infrastructure is essential to close the digital divide and build resilience against existential threats such as pandemics. Fiber broadband is a superior technology that provides much greater bandwidth and speeds for more robust video, internet, and voice services. And once we deploy fiber in a community, it is a gift that keeps on giving. Fiber not only connects homes, schools, businesses and anchor institutions to the internet but also provides necessary critical infrastructure for 5G, towers, wireless networks, IoT, and smart-city applications. ♦

*Lisa R. Youngers is president and CEO of the Fiber Broadband Association, which provides advocacy, education and resources to companies, organizations and communities that want to deploy the best networks through fiber.*

## Ready Solutions for Rapid FTTX Deployment



### OHC Outdoor Fiber Hub Cabinets

Flexible fiber distribution from a compact pad, pole or wall mount cabinet. Four sizes for up to 288, 432, 576 or 864 subscribers; with separate front/splice and rear/distribution compartments



### CFIT-Flex Universal Enclosures

Ideal for indoor/outdoor fiber distribution at MDU, businesses and cell sites. Fiber bulkhead provides up to 72 (standard) or 24 (compact) preconnectorized SC, LC or MPO drops



### FSDC Fiber Sealed Drop Closure

FSDC series closures are fully-sealed and may be strand, pole, pedestal or vault mounted. Built-in adapters support up to 16 connectorized drops, with 2 internal splice trays for up to 48 splices

**Charles**

An Amphenol Company

INNOVATIVE ENCLOSED SOLUTIONS™

www.charlesindustries.com