



**Brad Little**, Governor  
**Tom Kealey**, Director

### Idaho Broadband Advisory Board Meeting

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Idaho Capitol Building

Room WW53 and via Zoom

| Idaho Broadband Advisory Board Members            | Idaho Commerce Staff   |
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| Chairman Rep. John Vander Woude, Idaho Legislator | Director Tom Kealey, Idaho Department of Commerce              |
| Vice-Chair Sen. Doug Ricks, Idaho Legislator      | Ramón Hobdey-Sánchez, State Broadband Program Manager          |
| Margie Watson, JC Watson & Company                | Jake Reynolds, Business Development & Operations Administrator |
| Sen. James Ruchti, Idaho Legislator (Z)           | Kim Glineski, State Broadband Project Manager                  |
| Sen. Treg Bernt, Idaho Legislator                 | Krista Baker, State Broadband Project Manager (Z)              |
| Rep. James Holtzclaw, Idaho Legislator (Z)        | Alexis Malcomb, Grants Specialist (A)                          |
| Rep. Brandon Mitchell, Idaho Legislator           | Sarah Lawrence, Bespoke GIS Solutions (Z)                      |
| Andrew Emerson, MH Solutions                      | Jackie Reader, Bespoke GIS Solutions (Z)                       |
| Rick Belluzzo                                     | Jeremy Collier, Idaho Department of Commerce                   |
| (Z) denotes via Zoom<br>(A) denotes absent        |  |

To view/hear entire meeting A/V, please click [LINK](#).

**Call to order:** Chairman Vander Woude called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. with a quorum present.

#### Opening Remarks

Ramón Hobdey-Sánchez, State Broadband Program Manager, and Chairman Vander Woude, welcomed the new members to the board: Representative James Holtzclaw, Representative Brandon Mitchell, Rick Belluzzo.

Approval of Meeting Minutes October 16, 2024

**Motion by:** Senator Doug Ricks

To approve meeting minutes.

**All in favor:** Motion passes

#### Idaho Commission for Libraries Update

Dylan Baker, Deputy State Librarian, presented an update on the Idaho Commission for Libraries. Mr. Baker reviewed the history of the Idaho Commission for Libraries, noting the importance of the Digital Equity Act (DEA) Programs funded by the Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act. He noted DEA's aim to ensure all communities have the skills, technology and capacity to engage with the digital economy.

He reviewed the timeline the Idaho Commission for Libraries has been working, starting in November 2022 running through October 2024.

Mr. Baker gave an overview of the Digital Access for All Idahoans Plan. He explained the five goals of the plan are to increase adoption and affordability of broadband technology, to improve online accessibility and inclusivity, increase digital skills, spread awareness of cybersecurity and increase the availability of digital services. Mr. Baker explained the Idaho Commission for Libraries funding request, explaining statewide initiatives, digital navigator programs, and website accessibility.

In response to questions from the Board, Mr. Baker advised the Idaho Commission for Libraries does not yet have the final numbers for subgrantee applications but a couple of dozen were expected. He noted key metrics and performance indicators were outlined in the Digital Access for All Idahoans plan. He noted the whole plan is about 200 pages, with a 20-page summary document available digitally and in print. Mr. Baker advised sub-granting out funds was fosters regional approaches to distribution and allocation. He stated the Commission is taking a regional, local, approach to spending funds. He noted spending will go into training and spending on modern devices that are usable for the whole family. He noted they were focusing on non-infrastructure elements. Mr. Baker advised that performance and accountability metrics came in the form specific reporting requirements including interim reports every 6 months explaining progress. He added federal metrics were also being used, alongside a rigorous application process. This would ensure efficient deployment of resources.

Mr. Baker noted the balance between rural communities was struck. He stated the Commission works with all 105 libraries regions throughout the state, noting the majority of these were in rural areas. He noted the Commission has acted as an intermediary to address the capacity of smaller districts. He noted templates, direct support and a variety of resources are available to support rural communities. He noted subgrants were designed to meet a wide range of communities to ensure funding is equitably available. He noted there were applications from the very smallest communities including school districts and adult education organizations. He noted money can be clawed back if grantees are found to be misusing the money. He advised there was no match element to the funding.

### **Avista Utilities**

Paul Kimmell, Business & Public Affairs, Avista Utilities; and Jesse Butler, Scott Meredith, Joint Use Administrator, presented an update on Avista Utilities. Mr. Kimmell noted his role on the Governor's Economic Advisory Council.

Scott Meredith, Joint Use Team Leader, Avista Utilities, gave an overview of Avista's Joint Use Program. He advised members of the factors that drove their Joint Use Program: Cooperation, safety, and protecting ratepayers. He added that the current code must be complied with, and the requester must subsidize the cost of construction to protect rate payers. He continued, explaining the attachment request process. Noting the role of the licensee (a company with an attachment agreement with Avista) being to identify where they want to utilize Avista poles and submit technical designs and proposals in the form of an application. He reviewed the Prepared Response readiness at Avista, noting team growth from 2 in 2013 to 21 in 2024. He noted that Avista must also ensure the costs associated with processing projects are borne by the licensee, not the ratepayers, who are protected from costs. He gave a review of Avista's External Joint Use Website, noting the importance of public information to new or existing licensees during the BEAD process. The website is accessible to the public and holds program and contact information.

Jesse Butler, Avista, reviewed the actions of the Biden Administration in supporting broadband deployment. He explained state and federal agencies are now considering broadband essential to modern life targeting areas with lower quality broadband provision. He added that rural areas have difficult terrain to cover and noted the compliance process for serving these areas. He noted grant recipients are often unaware of associated costs to bring their poles up to code. He noted successful partnerships in Adams County and Lincoln County. He advised the Board on the challenges experienced by Avista. He noted increased demand in Idaho.

In response to questions from Board Members, Mr. Butler noted that he encouraged grant recipients to reach out to Avista to help estimate potential make-ready costs for projects. He noted Avista's system includes the age of the poles. Mr. Kimmell added that earlier conversations can lead to more accurate outcomes and encourage the marrying of other programs into the programs. Sen. Ricks added he appreciated their willingness to investigate the variables involved, and he hoped they'd continue to work with providers and those that were putting out bids.

### **Rocky Mountain Power**

Lisa Walker, Distribution Support Director, Rocky Mountain Power; Siu Kee Wong, Joint Use Manager, Rocky Mountain Power; and Alexandra Starr, Joint Use Manager, Rocky Mountain Power; presented an update on Rocky Mountain Power.

Lisa Walker gave an overview of PacifiCorp itself, noting it's regional presence, number of distribution polls and joint use attachments. She noted they operate out of 4 districts in Idaho. She reviewed PacifiCorp's application process including Contract execution, Application submission (including pre-inspections, make ready work for communications and power; and transmission), Permit granted applicant construction and post-inspections. She noted there were added layers of scrutiny required for certain types of applications.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Walker stated Rocky Mountain Power has wanted to make sure projects can be conducted in a streamlined manner and they have several tools that can be provided to each of the applicants including a comprehensive application package, explaining rules and registrations, tools to access the necessary information.

### **Idaho Power**

Taylor Yost, Joint Use Program manager, Idaho Power, presented an update on Idaho Power and Broadband Funding.

Ms. Yost gave an overview of joint use department at Idaho power. She noted they manage all the foreign attachments to their poles. They must have an agreement in place to attach to Idaho power facilities. Works to accommodation attaching broadband on existing infrastructure, rural connections are key. She gave an overview of their Joint Use Application Process including application submission, processes and rejects depending on completion, guidance on what needs to be adjusted, assignment of a designer & fielding. She reviewed Idaho Power's challenges which included Magnitude & timing of new licenses and attachment requests and a misunderstanding and lack of consideration for project-related engineering and make ready costs. She noted Idaho power has streamlined application processes and implemented new software to provide transparency and clarity.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Yost acknowledged past challenges with licensee processing, noting that significant improvements have been made. She stated Idaho Power is now meeting timelines and processing applications as they come in. Staffing has increased, including a new hire in her immediate team, and regional resources are being actively reallocated to manage shifting workloads. All regional offices now have designers, allowing more flexibility in handling regional attachments and opening opportunities for increased joint use as demand fluctuates. She noted Idaho Power is working with senior leadership to secure additional resources to meet expected demand. Costs vary by project type and duration, but high-level estimates are available. Software upgrades are on track for implementation. Although she could not commit to a specific timeline, Ms. Yost emphasized that cost quotes are targeted to be issued. She concluded by reaffirming Idaho Power's commitment to improvement and collaboration with licenses.

### **Idaho Broadband Fund (IBF) Update**

Krista Baker, Idaho Office of Broadband Project Manager, presented an update on the Idaho State Broadband Fund and an Overview of the Idaho Broadband fund and the Capital Projects Funds.

She reviewed the Port of Lewiston's IBF, noting there were multiple sources of funding for the project including the U.S. Economic Development Administration. She advised the project has re-routed from the original design, which originally crossed reservation land. She advised the design and permitting phase has reached 98% completion and all Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) permits have been acquired. Ms. Baker gave a review of the route taken by the project and explained to the Board the various local and tribal government boundaries that intersected within the Port of Lewiston Project Area. Ms. Baker continued, reviewing the IIG/IRON Project's IBF. She reviewed the design, permitting and construction had been segmented into three sections running South to North. She advised one segment would run from Star to Cascade, the other from Cascade to New Meadows and the third from New Meadows to Grangeville. She stated the permitting phase has necessitated rerouting various parts of the project, noting it is currently working through permitting challenges.

In response to questions from the Board, Ms. Baker advised that segmenting out the project to take one section at a time, rather than waiting for 100% of the route to be completed, was done as a result of the permitting requirements in particular project areas. She advised procedural bottle necks are occurring across the country, and the Idaho Broadband Office has been able to confirm that other Broadband Offices are experiencing the same delays. Chairman Vander Woude stressed the critical importance of expertise and processing Broadband Projects in a timely manner.

Ms. Baker advised Capital Projects Fund funding for 18 projects, connecting 35,000 locations. She noted projects are in various stages of design & permitting, construction and some projects are in a winter pause. Idaho Office of Broadband Project Managers Krista Baker updated the Board on the Capital Projects Fund (CPF) Programs in Northern Idaho. Starting with Idaho County, she noted the project was 100% on tribal land and had completed the cultural review finding no adverse effects. She noted the project has submitted their documentation to the State Historic Preservation Office. Construction for the project is set to begin in November 2024.

### **Idaho BEAD Program Update**

Ramón Hobdey-Sánchez, State Broadband Program Manager presented an overview of the Challenge Process for the Idaho BEAD Program. He explained the process by which the portal and project areas

were programmed. He reviewed the scope of the BEAD Program's work. He summarized the methodology, additional thought and strategy of the program.

Jackie Reader, Bespoke GIS Solutions, updated the Board on the BEAD Eligibility Map. She noted the need to hear back from experts on the ground regarding feasibility. She noted the comment closure date and reviewed the clusters of eligible census blocks. Tribal locations are indicated using dashed outlines. The project faces challenges due to the large size of census blocks, especially in northern Idaho, which affects the feasibility of including certain areas. A one-page methodology overview is available. This data includes full details of the project area, such as the total number of eligible Broadband Service Locations (BSLs), the application project area number, and the total square mileage. All relevant project information is accessible through the provided dataset. Sarah Lawrence, Bespoke GIS Solutions, updated the Board on the methodology of the navigation tool and the comments process. She explained the user interface of the site and the purpose and intentions behind the collection of public comments.

Ramón Hobdey-Sánchez, State Broadband Program Manager, concluded the remarks by emphasizing the strategic use of remaining funds by identifying extremely high cost locations, and potential additional middle mile projects. IN response to questions from the board, he advised he did not want to lose sight of the money that remains and emphasized support for small communities.

**Next IBAB Meeting:** Not currently one scheduled. Session making scheduling trickier. Late January, early to mid-February to reconvene. Team can follow up to nail down date.

**Adjournment:** Meeting adjourned at 12:13 PM.