CONTEXT

Recognizing the increasing importance of capable broadband networks, the Central Alberta Economic Partnership (CAEP) together with the Battle River Alliance for Economic Development (BRAED), completed initial studies focused on identifying municipal and regional broadband opportunities and options in 2017. In that study, the MD, Irma, and Edgerton were interested in learning more about partnership and resource availability opportunities related to enhancing broadband availability throughout their footprint, and all were interested in regional collaboration to help make it so.

According to the followup 2018 roundtable discussions, communities in the Wainwright area are interested in developing their own strategic plans should a regional collaboration not move forward. The largest community, the Town of Wainwright, has sufficient broadband for its current needs but is willing to assist and partner with the region in developing an overall strategy. Outside of the town, the minimal 50 Mb/s downstream by 10 Mb/s upstream CRTC basic (residential) Internet service objectives are not met anywhere withn the MD.

A followup BRAED/CAEP study recently provided communities interested in moving forward with a more indepth review of the available options. Seven studies were completed and the one prepared for the Wainwright area is availble here:

https://www.dropbox.com/s/93nly57pwvn2djl/Wainwright_Final_190308.pdf?dl=0

BRAED/CAEP REPORT FOR THE WAINWRIGHT REGION

While a variety of options are available to the Wainwright region, the report recommends the development of regional utility in which broadband connectivity is made available on a wholesale, open-access basis for all service providers to use to deliver enhanced service-sets to residential and commercial premises throughout the region. Indeed, Internet services up to 40 Gb/s would be supported.

Two approaches are outlined:

- Deploy a backbone route to connect the three ICE communities as well as MD facilities, hamlets, and fixed wireless ISP towers that are in need of additional backhaul capacity. This would reduce the backhaul connection fees in each of a population centres and improve services in the truly rural areas.
- Deploy access networks in each of the region's three villages.

Though the backbone deployment does not have a positive payback, fibre deployments within the three community members do, though margins are tight. In fact, if the network were to be deployed in the communities, the operation would likely go cashflow positive within five years. Operations could be outsourced and management issues amongst the members would be minimal.

RECOMMENDATION

In light of the critical importance of capable broadband services to the future of the Wainwirght region, we recommend that the MD and ICE communities move to have a broadband Business Case developed. Whereas the above results are based on typical figures of merit and default business, financial, and operational assumptions, the Business Case would complete conceptual level designs for each community to refine the capital estimates and work with the communities to align the business, financial, and operational options with the longer term vision of the communities. Together, the communities would then have solid numbers on which to develop a longer term broaband strategy.