

ATTN: Sara J. Clark, Secretary of the Department

TO: Commissioner Charles Peterson

RE: MBI PUBLIC COMMENTS:

For the reasons that appear below, I support the Matrix proposal of a fibre optics internet system for the underserved portions of Montague and Hardwick. Please recommend this option to the MBI Board of Directors and to the Executive Committee of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MassTech) Board of Directors

Dear Commissioner Peterson,

Internet access for everyone is a *necessity* now, not an option. Traditional means of participation in the business of daily life are being discontinued: banks, utilities, tax collectors and retailers are requiring that business with them be done online. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is certainly part of this cost-cutting surge, but some at the state level either don't understand (still!) or don't care (worse!) that a lot of its citizens are stranded without this crucial element of twenty-first century life.

Here's what using the internet means to many of us here in western Massachusetts:

- pack up a laptop and drive miles to a public connection (laundromat, café, library)
- after closing time, work behind the steering wheel, often freezing in the dark
- use a non-secure connection and cross your fingers
- make do without access to a printer or to materials stored at home

Even this scenario only works for those who can leave the house and who have transportation. Others are cut off from even this restricted access, making it difficult or impossible for them to fully participate in society *and meet its expectations*:

- schoolchildren assigned internet homework
- employees expected to work from home
- parents caring for babies at home
- elderly people who no longer drive
- people with disabilities
- those who don't own cars

Unless reliable internet access that can handle the required large amounts of data at the required speeds can be routinely expected in all of our towns, new business will not locate here and existing businesses will leave; tax revenues will suffer, jobs will be lost and unemployment will depress the economy. Towns won't be able to attract anyone to move here – who will want to buy a house without a fast, reliable internet connection?

Montague's Broadband Committee has worked for years, and joined forces with Hardwick and later Petersham, to put together a fibre optics internet solution for our towns. I have attended meetings of the committee over several years and have been impressed with the work they've done to bring us the Matrix solution. This is the level of technology that makes sense when installing new infrastructure in underserved towns.

Compared with the Comcast coaxial cable solution, fibre is the only option of the two that is “future-proof” because it can be upgraded over the coming years to deal with the increased speed/data demands that will be placed on it. It makes no sense to install the coaxial cable option being offered by Comcast, since it is already outmoded compared to fibre optics, and can't be "fixed" to perform as needed in years to come.

At the May 24 meeting with the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, we heard that the MBI funds available were “limited”, and that this is an argument for choosing Comcast's coaxial cable. The real waste is to spend taxpayer money to build a new project using technology that is already on its way out – frustratingly shortsighted! Hardwick is facing a hospital closing and will *soon* have a real need for a telemedicine system that connects doctors with people in their own homes. This is the sort of internet use that will be required by all of our towns eventually, and fibre optics is the option that can handle the job. On top of all this, with the Matrix option the town could choose to own the system itself at the end of twenty years.

Montague and Hardwick each chose the Matrix fibre optics system because Matrix outscored Comcast on almost all of the relevant criteria, including the ultimate percentage of households ultimately served. I have confidence in the work done by our Broadband Committee, and have been disheartened by the ever-increasing number of instances they've reported of information ignored by MBI, correspondence never responded to by MBI, conflicts of interest involving the companies MBI chose to evaluate Matrix, and general MBI stonewalling.

After Tuesday's meeting, I hope that MBI will think hard about why people who have been *told* that they have a choice chose to reject Comcast, loathed nationwide by so many of its customers. I hope MBI will think hard about what the western towns will need in the coming years, and work to help them achieve it instead of throwing up obstacles. A healthy western Massachusetts is a benefit the whole commonwealth; a western Massachusetts condemned to second-class citizenship is a betrayal by the state.

This is our only shot at state funding to help our underserved towns become full participants in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; those left behind will never recover. Please, Commissioner Peterson, recommend the Matrix proposal.

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