Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE GROUP, LLC

Project Title: South Alabama Rural Connection (SARC)

Project Type: Comprehensive Community Infrastructure

Executive Summary

CIG, an Atlanta-based developer of multi-provider communications infrastructure, proposes to construct a 31-tower wireless broadband economic development platform in seven economically distressed Alabama Counties. Verizon Wireless has committed to provide broadband services from the tower locations. Construction of this network will increase the breadth and speed of data and voice services and provide a sorely needed economic development tool to foster a robust local economy. a. SARC proposes to bring broadband services to seven economically distressed Alabama Counties, Marengo, Wilcox, Perry, Dallas, Butler, Coffee and Covington, which are either in or adjacent to the area known throughout the world as 'the Black Belt.' The 'Black Belt', an area originally named for its rich top soil that made its cotton planters among the wealthiest in the United States before the Civil War, is now recognized for its poverty and chronic social problems. Though Selma, Alabama in Dallas County, and the surrounding counties were at the center of the African-American efforts to achieve civil rights in the 1960's, the area has garnered few economic benefits from expanded civil rights. Most of the proposed service area is majority African-American with almost all the descendants of freed slaves living in mostly rural areas of pine trees and catfish farms. These area residents suffer a plethora of problems related to the absence of economic development and the opportunity it brings: grinding poverty, high unemployment, substandard medical care and education, poor housing, high rates of crime, and a declining population. There are no ready solutions to these massive problems, but it is clear that the absence of broadband services in the area has made economic development and the jobs it brings impossible, denied area residents distance learning and telemedicine capability, and hampered public safety and emergency response. As evidenced by the letters of support attached to this application, the local education and health care providers, public safety, and community anchor institutions are squarely behind this initiative as a tool to unlock economic opportunity for area residents and businesses. b. The proposed funded service area consists of 31 rings 3.0 miles in radius located in the seven counties described above. There are 43 communities in the proposed service areas and the region has a total population of 196,593. The counties within the service area are among the poorest in the state and in the country. More than 23% of the families in the proposed service areas live below the poverty level (more than 250% greater than the national average of 9.2%). Similarly, an average of more than 27% of the individuals in the service area live below the poverty level (218% greater than the national average of 12.4%). Wilcox County, the most economically challenged in the area, has a median household income of $16,646 with 36.1% of the families living below the poverty level. Further, almost 40% of the individuals measured are living below the poverty level. c. There are 6,067 households and 224 businesses located within the proposed 31 rings. Additional information can be found in the CCI Service
There are 78 community anchor institutions passed immediately by the reach of the proposed tower network. Of these, 47 are community support institutions including churches, 9 are schools and libraries, 2 are health care facilities, 6 are public safety entities and 14 are other government facilities. See attached spreadsheet identifying each of the anchor institutions and their locations.

SARC proposes to construct 31 communications towers to serve seven economically challenged Alabama counties and the critical community facilities and anchor institutions located therein. It is understood that Verizon Wireless will locate on the tower to provide broadband and wireless services in the area. The towers will also accommodate up to five other tenants to provide different or competitive services to Verizon Wireless. Installation of these additional communications towers will benefit underserved, vulnerable rural populations by providing improved access and delivery of healthcare, distance learning, local government and educational services. It is anticipated that public safety entities will use the towers to expand the reach of their services, and hoped that local schools and colleges as well as hospitals and health care institutions will make use of the capability as needed. It is expected that network construction will facilitate wireless data and voice services at broadband speeds in locations where no service previously existed and the new service offering will provide a much enhanced product over anything otherwise offered.

CIG’s proposed Alabama tower network will offer an open and technologically neutral telecommunications network for all broadband providers to use to offer service to unserved and underserved rural areas. This system meets all interconnection, non-discrimination, and network management practice obligations established by the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). CIG proposes multi-tenant towers through which consumers can access lawful internet content through their choice of providers in compliance with the guidelines of the FCC’s Internet Principles. These towers will be capable of maximizing the number of carriers per tower, though still complying with all structural and zoning requirements. By proposing multi-tenant towers, CIG provides competition among network providers and servicers and gives the end user a variety of internet applications and devices to choose from. By offering an agnostic shared platform, CIG would reduce the cost for all competitors to deploy their services. By proposing multi-tenant towers, CIG proposes to construct 31 communications towers in the seven Alabama counties listed above, and Verizon Wireless has committed to offer broadband and possibly wireless voice service enhancements from the constructed towers. This will bring broadband to those in the area who currently do not have access to high-speed internet services and will provide significantly enhanced breadth and speed to those who already have limited internet access.

The proposed project would be realized through the financial and technical collaboration of CIG and WFI. CIG is an experienced developer of multi-provider communications infrastructure and WFI is a broadly experienced network infrastructure design, deployment, program management, quality assurance and maintenance service provider. WFI has engineered and successfully, rapidly and cost-effectively developed more than $2 billion in telecom infrastructure since 1994. Verizon Wireless, one of the largest and most respected companies in the industry, has vast experience providing data and voice transmission services from the tower site to the community.

As shown on the attached Broadband Subscriber Estimate, SARC will have 3643 residential, 139 business, and 7 community anchor subscribers by the 4th quarter of Year 8. Direct Jobs: (job-years created in the actual government-sponsored project) Estimated at least fifty (50) jobs to be created per year per tower, for each of the first two (2) years. Thirty-one Towers are planned for the SARC. This equals more than 1,550 jobs per year for two years to include manufacturing jobs for towers.
and components, installation/construction, professional services and other jobs. Indirect Jobs: (job-years created at suppliers who make the materials used in the project) The Applicant estimates at least fifty (50) additional jobs will be created per year per tower, for each of the first two (2) years, at the facilities of suppliers who make the parts and materials used in the construction of the actual towers, electrical components, cable, fencing, etc. Thirty-one towers are planned for the SARC. This equals more than 1,550 jobs per year for two years, and includes manufacturing jobs for towers and components, professional services jobs and other jobs. Induced Jobs: (job-years created elsewhere in the economy as increases in income from the direct government spending lead to additional increases in spending by workers and firms.) The Applicant estimates at least 5,000 permanent jobs will be created within five years of completion, as a direct result of the services delivered by SARC. This includes IT jobs, jobs in the communications and information services sectors, small business/commerce related positions, education and professional services jobs and other jobs.