

Opening Statement

Three years of extensive analysis and testing has revealed that Manitowoc County Internet customers, primarily Charter/Spectrum but also true for Comcast and AT&T, are not getting the speed level of service that is being advertised and billed for. This is occurring despite the monopoly's own technical knowledge of this. In addition, vast parts of the county, especially in the north, have little or no connectivity.

The recent Federal Infrastructure package allowed for about \$40 billion dollars for rural broadband expansion in the states. About \$1 billion of that is available to Wisconsin residents and about \$10 million to Manitowoc County residents. This is via the BEAD program.

There is currently a county broadband task force that meets to discuss this funding, but these meetings have only been noticed recently as public meetings at my insistence. I have attended a number of these meetings and am profoundly disappointed in the direction taken, as well as the lack of inspiration and perspiration applied to this once in a lifetime opportunity to improve the prospects for this generation and beyond. This task force will most likely leave a majority of these monies on the table, unused.

What is missing here is the key to all significant human endeavors, imagination.

Providing rural broadband is a difficult and expensive proposition, which is why it has not been done in the past thirty years despite an approximate \$1 trillion in public spending towards that goal. But so was rural electrification difficult but prior generations managed to do it anyway in about 20 years.

Beyond the kind of imagination, the kind which carried my great grandfather across an ocean one hundred and fifty years ago, what is missing is government regulation and marketplace competition.

I have spoken with and evangelized broadband connectivity for their citizens complete with Federal funding to local governments in Francis Creek, Mishicot, and Two Rivers and the response has been mostly crickets. I have also lobbied the City of Manitowoc and the county to basically no effect.

While there is little we can do regarding legislative regulation, we can insist on competition with Open Access Networks as is being done across this nation and around the world.

Middle mile networks, the fiber optic cable that sits in-between the Internet backbone and the last mile connection to the consumer within this county can and should be built with local funding enhanced with grants and loans, and then leased out to the incumbent Internet providers. It is clear that they have refused for decades to make these investments.

Every county road, north to south and east to west should have fiber optic cable run along them. They should then be interconnected to provide for redundancy and reliability.

We can also explore municipal and nonprofit delivery of these services, as is being done in more than 500 communities across this nation, to avoid the continual price increases of the monopoly corporations as demanded by Wall Street. Manitowoc Public Utilities has the legal status of become one of these.

As our President has recently stated “Capitalism without competition is exploitation”

We need to end this exploitation for future generations.

Take questions