AT&T Comments on the BDO's Strategic Plan Blueprint

AT&T appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Texas Broadband Development Office's ("BDO") Strategic Plan Blueprint. The Blueprint thoughtfully establishes clear priorities for Texas broadband policy and promotes transparent, accountable, and fiscally responsible administration of substantial federal and state investments, with appropriate emphasis on unserved and underserved areas.

AT&T particularly supports the Blueprint's recognition that public broadband funding should complement, not displace, private investment, as well as its emphasis on meaningful stakeholder engagement, transparent processes, reliable data, and efficient administration. As the BDO finalizes its strategic plan and puts these principles into practice, AT&T offers the following recommendations.

I. AT&T Strongly Supports the Blueprint's Commitment to Protecting Private Investment

A central principle of the Blueprint is that taxpayer-funded broadband programs should address proven market gaps, not subsidize facilities or services the private sector already provides or is prepared to provide.

This principle appears throughout the Blueprint. The Executive Framework acknowledges that public subsidies may displace private investment, while the section on potential uses of BEAD non-deployment funds states that proposals should not proceed if they would duplicate private investment, create recurring State obligations, or fail to deliver a meaningful return on public funds. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 2, 7.)

AT&T strongly supports this approach and urges the BDO to apply the principle of avoiding unnecessary subsidized duplication across all broadband funding programs.

In applying this principle to future funding decisions, the BDO should consider not only operational facilities, but also existing network capacity, binding deployment commitments, and commercially reasonable private investment that is planned or underway. Public funding should target locations or infrastructure needs the market is not reasonably positioned to serve.

For future programs, the BDO should determine before subsidizing new facilities whether existing or committed privately funded infrastructure or capacity can reasonably meet the identified need.

This approach would extend limited public funds, preserve incentives for continued private investment, and keep broadband funding focused on Texans who would otherwise remain unserved or underserved.

II. AT&T Supports Reassessing Middle-Mile Funding and Conducting a Thorough Review of Existing Infrastructure

The Blueprint appropriately addresses concerns about duplicating existing private middle-mile facilities. It explains that the BDO is reviewing previously announced Texas Middle Mile projects for consistency with the statutory goal of connecting unserved and underserved locations and may discontinue the current program if continued funding would subsidize duplicative facilities. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 6.)

AT&T supports this reassessment.

Middle-mile infrastructure can be valuable when a genuine gap prevents service to unserved or underserved locations. However, publicly funded construction may unnecessarily duplicate substantial private investment when existing facilities or capacity can meet the identified need.

Before approving future middle-mile funding, AT&T recommends that the BDO thoroughly assess existing infrastructure and available capacity and allow private providers to identify, on a confidential basis, facilities, capacity, or commercially reasonable alternatives that could achieve the project's objective without duplicative taxpayer-funded construction.

This approach would still allow the State to support middle-mile facilities where they are truly needed, while distinguishing genuine infrastructure gaps from projects that would merely duplicate existing private networks.

III. Improved Mapping Should Use Reliable, Validated Data

AT&T supports the BDO's efforts to maintain accurate broadband maps and improve the information available to policymakers, providers, local communities, and the public.

The Blueprint proposes combining semiannual FCC data from internet service providers with consumer-submitted speed tests in a pilot forecasting map. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 3.) Although consumer data can provide useful context, individual speed tests alone should not determine whether a location is classified as served, underserved, or unserved.

Consumer speed-test results may reflect factors unrelated to network capability, including the customer's service tier, Wi-Fi performance, router placement and quality, device limitations, in-home wiring, congestion within the premises, use of a virtual private network, and the selected test server.

AT&T therefore recommends that any BDO methodology incorporating consumer-submitted tests apply appropriate validation standards and distinguish network availability from an individual consumer's observed performance.

Before consumer-submitted data affects a location's classification or funding eligibility, providers should receive notice of the relevant information and a reasonable opportunity to respond with technical evidence. Crowdsourced data may appropriately prompt further review, but public-funding decisions should rely on validated, technically sound evidence.

IV. A Standing Challenge Process Should Provide Clear Standards, Predictable Procedures, and Finality

AT&T supports the BDO's effort to strengthen challenge procedures for broadband infrastructure programs. The Blueprint proposes supplementing the existing statutory protest process with a standing mechanism for state-funded programs and publicly reporting accepted, rejected, and pending determinations. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 3-4.)

A fair, accessible challenge process can improve program accuracy and help prevent funding from going to locations that are already served.

However, a standing process should not create ongoing uncertainty about location eligibility or repeatedly reopen resolved issues.

AT&T therefore recommends that the final plan establish clear evidentiary standards; reasonable deadlines for challenges and responses; an opportunity for affected providers to review and address evidence about their service areas; protections for confidential and proprietary information; and reasonable finality after the BDO resolves a location's status, unless materially new evidence or changed circumstances arise.

These safeguards would promote transparency while giving providers the certainty needed to plan private investment and execute grant-funded projects.

V. Transparency Should Protect Proprietary and Critical Infrastructure Information

AT&T supports the Blueprint's strong emphasis on transparency. Publishing project information, program metrics, grant decisions, scoring details, and performance data can strengthen public confidence in the administration of broadband programs. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 4, 9.)

The final strategic plan should also expressly protect information that is proprietary, competitively sensitive, a trade secret, security-sensitive, or otherwise exempt from public disclosure.

For example, portions of grant applications, engineering materials, challenge submissions, financial records, detailed network designs, deployment plans, capacity data, and cybersecurity information may contain material that should remain confidential. Providers must submit much of this information to participate, and it does not lose its protection under the Public Information Act, including Government Code §§ 552.101, 552.110, 552.1101, and 418.181, because a program requires it.

The BDO can provide meaningful transparency by explaining its decision-making, publishing appropriate metrics and outcomes, and identifying the standards it applies—without publicly disclosing sensitive provider information. Before releasing any provider information, including in posted grant agreements, the BDO should give the provider notice and an opportunity to seek protection under Government Code § 552.305. When it submits provider information to the Attorney General for a ruling, the BDO should also state its own position where the information is confidential by law, such as critical infrastructure information, or where its release would harm the State's interest in future competitive funding rounds.

AT&T therefore recommends that the final plan confirm that all transparency initiatives will comply with applicable protections for confidential, proprietary, competitively sensitive, and network-security information.

VI. Grant Administration Should Be Rigorous, Efficient, and Risk-Based

AT&T supports the Blueprint's emphasis on accountability and responsible stewardship of public funds. Its proposed milestones, reporting, financial and engineering reviews, performance security, default procedures, and ongoing monitoring serve legitimate objectives. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 8-9.)

However, these requirements should be tailored to each applicant and the risks involved, rather than imposed through unnecessary one-size-fits-all processes.

For example, the Blueprint contemplates independent CPA review of applicants' financial information and verification of engineering blueprints. For providers with audited financial statements, the BDO should consider

whether existing disclosures and appropriate engineering certifications can meet these objectives without duplicative reviews.

Similarly, the BDO should coordinate quarterly state reporting with existing federal BEAD and other reporting requirements whenever possible. Providers should not have to submit materially identical information in multiple formats or through overlapping systems.

Risk-based oversight can give the BDO the information needed to protect public funds while lowering administrative costs for the State and participating providers.

VII. Technology Policy Should Emphasize Performance and Statutory Standards

The Blueprint appropriately reflects the technology framework established by Texas law, including the statutory preference for end-to-end fiber and the circumstances permitting alternative technologies. It also recognizes fiber, fixed wireless, and low-earth-orbit satellite solutions in the current deployment portfolio. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 5.)

AT&T supports administering broadband programs in accordance with the technology preferences and exceptions adopted by the Legislature.

The final strategic plan should continue to prioritize statutory eligibility, service performance, reliability, scalability, sustainability, and cost, rather than prescribe technologies beyond state or federal requirements. This approach would help the BDO select the best solution for each geography while respecting the Legislature's policy choices.

VIII. The BDO Should Continue Reviewing the Pole Replacement Program With Provider Input

The Blueprint reports that approximately $51 million remains in the Pole Replacement Fund and that the Comptroller plans a third, retroactive funding round for qualifying projects completed through July 31, 2026. It also states that, while reevaluating the program, the BDO does not currently plan a fourth round for poles replaced on or after August 1, 2026. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 6.)

AT&T supports this reevaluation and encourages the BDO to consult broadband providers before concluding that no further funding round is needed.

Pole replacement costs and schedules can significantly affect broadband deployment, especially in rural and high-cost areas. As BEAD and other construction accelerates, targeted pole-replacement assistance may remain an efficient way to remove deployment barriers.

Before deciding whether to offer future rounds, the BDO should assess providers' actual experience, projected deployment needs, and the availability of remaining funds.

IX. AT&T Supports Expanded Stakeholder Engagement

Finally, AT&T strongly supports the Blueprint's commitment to structured, ongoing engagement with providers and other stakeholders.

Pre-NOFA conferences, regular stakeholder convenings, regional points of contact, subgrantee meetings, and post-NOFA discussions should improve program design and execution. AT&T also supports public accountability dashboards reporting project milestones, cumulative funds awarded, locations connected and aggregate fiber miles deployed and cost per location, with project-level data published only to the extent program rules require, as well as the BDO's plan to model its rule-change process on successful practices at other agencies. (Strategic Plan Blueprint at 4, 8.)

Early engagement is especially valuable in complex broadband programs because providers can identify implementation issues before requirements are finalized. Continued engagement during deployment can likewise resolve operational, permitting, environmental, and administrative issues before they jeopardize project deadlines.

AT&T encourages the BDO to formalize these practices in the final strategic plan and continue giving industry and other stakeholders meaningful opportunities to identify implementation challenges and propose practical solutions.

Conclusion

AT&T appreciates the BDO's work on the Strategic Plan Blueprint and supports its focus on connecting unserved and underserved Texans, protecting taxpayer funds, promoting transparency, and avoiding unnecessary displacement of private investment.

As the BDO finalizes the plan, AT&T encourages it to advance these goals by basing mapping and challenge processes on validated evidence, safeguarding proprietary and critical infrastructure information in transparency

initiatives, maintaining efficient, risk-based grant administration, and directing public investment to demonstrated broadband gaps.

AT&T looks forward to working with the BDO to expand broadband deployment across Texas and ensure that public and private investment together provide sustainable, reliable, and cost-effective connectivity.