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October 30, 2026

Via Email

Earnest Teves
Director, Texas Broadband Development Office
Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts
Broadband Development Office
Broadband@cpa.texas.gov

Dear Mr. Teves:

The Texas Telephone Association ("TTA") appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Texas Broadband Development Office's ("BDO") Strategic Plan Blueprint. TTA has previously provided recommendations to the BDO regarding its strategic planning and operations and has worked with other broadband industry stakeholders to identify reforms intended to improve transparency, stakeholder engagement, accountability, and the efficient use of state and federal broadband funding.[1]

TTA appreciates the significant work undertaken by Comptroller Huffines, you, and the BDO staff to develop the Strategic Plan Blueprint ("Blueprint"). Many of its proposals directly address issues previously raised by TTA and other industry stakeholders. TTA particularly supports the Blueprint's emphasis on transparency, competitive funding processes, stakeholder engagement, protection of existing private investment, post-award accountability, and the efficient use of taxpayer resources.

The Blueprint establishes a strong framework for the BDO's future operations and identifies a number of implementation details that will continue to be developed as the BDO moves toward completion of the final strategic plan. To further enhance that framework, TTA is grateful for the opportunity to provide the below recommendations.

- **Transparency, Mapping, and Challenge Processes.** Further enhance transparency, especially in the mapping and challenge process.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Program Development.** Enhance stakeholder engagement and program development through commitments to meaningfully incorporate and respond to stakeholder input from pre-NOFA conferences, including

[1] *See* Texas Telephone Association, *Comments to Broadband Development Office Request for Input* (July 24, 2026); *see also Broadband Industry Stakeholder Framework for BDO Administration Improvements* (2026).

technical conferences, and ensure stakeholder engagement will occur sufficiently early to influence program design.

- **Competitive Funding and Protection of Private Investment.** Reinforce requirements that projects be competitively bid.
- **Fiber and Long-Term Infrastructure Investment.** Adhere to statutory directives to prioritize broadband infrastructure projects that connect end-user locations using end-to-end fiber facilities, while permitting consideration of alternative technologies in specified circumstances.
- **Broadband Infrastructure Fund and Long-Term Strategic Planning.** Implement an annual cycle to implement four-year infrastructure plans to ensure cohesive planning for broadband program and a structured process to flexibly incorporate new funding sources.
- **Post-Award Accountability and Deployment Coordination.** In addition to planned award monitoring and clawbacks, include a structured process for addressing permitting, infrastructure access, and utility coordination, and
- **Performance Measures and Reporting.** Commit to regular reporting publicly and to the Legislature, including on Key Performance Indicators for any infrastructure plan included in the Blueprint and strategic plan.

TTA encourages the BDO to maintain the collaborative approach reflected in the Blueprint as those implementation details are developed.

I. Transparency, Mapping, and Challenge Processes

TTA strongly supports the BDO's proposed transparency reforms. In its July comments, TTA recommended that the BDO make non-confidential program information readily available to stakeholders, including rules, comments, application information, monitoring reports, and subgrantee agreements. TTA also recommended public posting of funding applications, meaningful challenge procedures, and post-award reporting.[2]

The Blueprint responds directly to many of these recommendations by proposing public-facing project maps and datasets, public posting of executed contracts, accountability dashboards, transparent rule changes, and publicly available challenge determinations. TTA supports these reforms and encourages the BDO to incorporate them into the final strategic plan.

TTA particularly supports establishing a meaningful challenge process before public funds are committed. The final strategic plan should clarify how the proposed standing challenge mechanism will operate, including when project information will be published, what information will be available to challengers, applicable deadlines and reasonable evidentiary standards, and how the BDO will resolve and publicly document challenges before awards are finalized.

TTA also supports the BDO's commitment to utilize accurate broadband data and mapping.

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[2] Texas Telephone Association, *Comments to Broadband Development Office Request for Input*, at 2-3 (July 24, 2026).

In implementing these provisions, TTA encourages the BDO to continue using the Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Data Collection and Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric as the foundational source of broadband availability and location data, consistent with the Blueprint's recognition that Texas law requires compliance with the FCC's mapping methodology, supplemented by reliable state and local information where appropriate. Maintaining consistency with the national broadband map will reduce duplication, provide a common data framework for providers and policymakers, and allow the BDO to focus its resources on identifying genuine gaps in broadband availability.

II. Stakeholder Engagement and Program Development

TTA strongly supports and recommends strengthening the Blueprint's proposal to establish a permanent stakeholder feedback process, regional working groups, regular convenings, and designated BDO contacts for the state's Council of Governments regions. Consistent with TTA's longstanding recommendation that stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to provide input before major programmatic decisions are made, the Blueprint should further commit that the BDO will be accountable for meaningfully incorporating such feedback. The Blueprint should specify that the BDO, in both public reporting and official program documents, will meaningfully incorporate stakeholder feedback and respond directly to comments.

TTA likewise supports the proposed use of pre-NOFA conferences. TTA previously recommended public comment on proposed funding notices before their issuance. Such conferences should include technical workshops, where input will be solicited from technical and engineering experts. Providing stakeholders an opportunity to identify implementation problems from a technical perspective, as well as from a business perspective, before a Notice of Funding Availability is finalized can improve program design, reduce ambiguity, increase participation, and avoid issues that otherwise may not become apparent until applications are submitted.[3]

The final strategic plan should clarify that stakeholder engagement will occur sufficiently early to influence program design rather than simply provide feedback after major decisions have been made. Where practicable, TTA encourages the BDO to publish proposed program concepts or draft NOFAs and allow a reasonable period for written stakeholder input before final requirements are established.

III. Competitive Funding and Protection of Private Investment

TTA strongly supports the Blueprint's proposal to require that projects be competitively bid. TTA previously recommended eliminating no-bid awards to governmental entities and distributing broadband infrastructure funding through competitively awarded NOFAs unless otherwise specifically directed by the Legislature.[4]

Competitive processes help ensure that Texas receives the greatest possible broadband benefit from limited public resources while providing qualified providers an equal opportunity to compete. They also provide important protection against unnecessary public investment in areas

[3] *Id.* at 2.

[4] *Id.* at 3.

where private providers are already providing, or are prepared to provide, qualifying broadband service.

TTA therefore supports the Blueprint's recognition that public subsidy programs can displace private investment and its commitment to guard against that result. The final plan should make avoidance of unnecessary overbuilding and displacement of private investment a consistent consideration across all BDO infrastructure programs.

Accordingly, TTA supports the BDO's decision to reevaluate the Texas Middle Mile Program in light of concerns regarding duplication of existing private facilities.[5] Where existing private infrastructure is available to meet identified broadband needs, scarce public resources should not be used to construct duplicative facilities. TTA supports returning unused Middle Mile resources to the BIF so that those funds remain available to address future broadband needs identified through the stakeholder process discussed below.

IV. Fiber and Long-Term Infrastructure Investment

TTA supports the Blueprint's recognition of the Texas Legislature's statutory preference for end-to-end fiber facilities. Texas law directs the BDO to prioritize broadband infrastructure projects that connect end-user locations using end-to-end fiber facilities, while permitting consideration of alternative technologies in specified circumstances.[6]

Fiber is rightly prioritized where feasible because of its long useful life, scalability, reliability, and lower maintenance requirements. Fiber networks typically last 30–50 years or more because the glass cable itself rarely needs replacement, and research frequently links high-quality fiber access to business formation, job growth, and property value increases, among industrial and commercial benefits. At the same time, TTA has recognized that fixed wireless, satellite, and other technologies can play an appropriate role where the cost of deploying fiber is prohibitive.

TTA therefore supports the Blueprint's proposal to document, project by project, the basis for selecting non-fiber technologies. As Texas considers future infrastructure investments, TTA encourages the BDO to evaluate not merely the initial construction subsidy but also the useful life, scalability, reliability, ongoing capacity, and long-term public value of the infrastructure being funded.

V. Broadband Infrastructure Fund and Long-Term Strategic Planning

TTA appreciates the Blueprint's accounting of existing commitments from the Broadband Infrastructure Fund ("BIF") and supports the BDO's continued careful stewardship of the remaining resources. As TTA previously recommended, decisions regarding future uses of the BIF should be developed through a transparent stakeholder process that allows broadband providers, policymakers, communities, and other interested parties to evaluate the State's

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[5] Texas Broadband Development Office, *Strategic Plan Blueprint*, at 6 (2026).

[6] Tex. Gov't Code § 490I.01062; Texas Broadband Development Office, *Strategic Plan Blueprint*, at 4-5 (2026).

remaining broadband needs before additional programs are established.[7] To ensure prudent management of the fund, the Blueprint should specify that the BDO's strategic plan will include an infrastructure plan, detailing how state and federal funds will be obligated to the maximum extent for the benefit Texans, while specifying any amounts reserved for flexibility, contingencies, or to cover recissions. Infrastructure planning would cover at least a four-year period, to be updated annually.

TTA does not believe that the availability of BIF resources, standing alone, creates a need to *immediately* commit those funds. The BDO has until September 1, 2035 before any unexpended and obligated BIF funds will be returned to the General Revenue Fund.[8] Therefore, Texas is entering an important decade in which billions of dollars in federally and state-supported broadband infrastructure will be constructed, including projects funded through BEAD and other existing programs. The results of those deployments should provide the State with substantially better information regarding where broadband infrastructure gaps remain and where additional state investment can provide the greatest long-term benefit.

An annually updated infrastructure plan provides a structured framework for incorporating new funding sources as they become available, ensuring programs are implemented as part of a cohesive whole, instead of disparate one-off initiatives like the Texas Middle Mile Program. This approach is particularly appropriate given the approximately $2 billion in Texas BEAD funding that remains unobligated. As the Blueprint recognizes, NTIA has not yet issued guidance authorizing uses of those funds beyond additional broadband deployment and has indicated that guidance regarding other permissible uses will follow separately.[9] TTA supports the BDO's stated approach of not designing programs in anticipation of federal permission and believes similar strategic patience is appropriate in considering new commitments of the State's more flexible BIF resources. TTA encourages the BDO, to the extent practicable, to await that federal guidance before making substantial new commitments of remaining BIF resources. Unlike BEAD funding, which is subject to federal requirements governing its permissible uses, the BIF provides Texas greater flexibility to address broadband needs identified by the State. Preserving that flexibility until the permissible uses of remaining BEAD funds are better understood will allow Texas to evaluate its available federal and state resources together and determine where BIF dollars can provide the greatest incremental benefit.

Accordingly, TTA encourages the BDO to preserve flexibility in the use of remaining BIF resources rather than committing those funds prematurely to new programs. Once the permissible uses of remaining BEAD funds are clearer and existing broadband deployment programs are further along, Texas should be in a substantially better position to use a structured planning process to identify needs that remain unmet and determine which funding source is best suited to address them. Planning for and maintaining an available source of flexible state broadband funding would allow Texas to respond to those needs as they become apparent, as

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[7] Texas Telephone Association, *Comments to Broadband Development Office Request for Input*, at 2 (July 24, 2026).

[8] Tex. Const. art. 3, § 49-d-16(h).

[9] Texas Broadband Development Office, *Strategic Plan Blueprint*, at 3, 7 (2026).

technologies and consumer demand evolve, and as the State gains a clearer understanding of the performance and durability of networks constructed with current public funding.

As part of preserving this flexibility, TTA also encourages the BDO to consider reserving a portion of available BIF funding for targeted broadband infrastructure investments that support economic development and critical infrastructure. Certain locations may have broadband service sufficient to satisfy current program requirements but nevertheless have demonstrated needs for greater capacity, reliability, resiliency, scalability, or other network capabilities necessary to support significant economic development opportunities or critical community infrastructure. A targeted funding opportunity could provide the State flexibility to address these circumstances where the capabilities of existing or previously funded service may not adequately meet the particular needs of the location or project.

Any such funding should be based on demonstrated need and objective criteria and should complement, rather than duplicate, existing federal or state broadband investments. TTA recommends that the BDO preserve sufficient BIF resources and flexibility to address these types of needs as they become apparent following completion of currently funded broadband deployments.

This flexibility may become particularly important as Texas evaluates whether today's minimum broadband performance standards adequately reflect tomorrow's needs. Broadband demand will continue to evolve as Texans increasingly rely upon cloud computing, artificial intelligence-enabled applications, telehealth, education, precision agriculture, and other bandwidth-intensive services. The State should retain the ability to consider whether future public investment should support higher-performance, scalable infrastructure capable of meeting those evolving needs.

Similarly, Texas should preserve the ability to evaluate the actual performance of technologies receiving substantial public support through BEAD. The approved Texas BEAD portfolio includes approximately 118,000 locations receiving end-to-end fiber, approximately 70,000 receiving low-earth-orbit satellite service, and approximately 42,000 receiving fixed wireless service. As those projects are implemented, Texas will be in a better position to determine whether additional state investment is warranted in particular areas to provide more permanent, scalable infrastructure.[10]

TTA therefore recommends that the final strategic plan establish a public process for evaluating future BIF investments without presupposing that the remaining balance must be immediately programmed or expended. That process should evaluate demonstrated infrastructure needs, existing and planned private investment, the performance of previously subsidized networks, evolving broadband requirements, the useful life and scalability of proposed infrastructure, and the extent to which a proposed investment would provide benefits that are unlikely to be delivered by the private market without public support.

This approach would preserve the BIF as a strategic asset for Texas while allowing future

[10] *Id.* at 2 (identifying 123,349 locations for end-to-end fiber, 65,977 for low-earth-orbit satellite, and 53,653 for fixed wireless).

funding decisions to be informed by actual experience rather than predictions made before the State's current broadband investments have been completed.

VI. Post-Award Accountability and Deployment Coordination

TTA strongly supports the Blueprint's increased emphasis on what happens after an award is made. TTA previously recommended publicly accessible compliance reporting, an award monitoring and deployment coordination function, and regular meetings among awardees, permitting entities, utility owners, and other stakeholders to identify and resolve barriers to deployment.

The Blueprint incorporates many of these concepts through quarterly progress reporting, published default and cure procedures, clawback provisions, permitting and environmental tracking, scoring transparency, and ongoing monitoring. TTA supports these reforms.

TTA particularly encourages the BDO to continue developing a structured process for addressing permitting, infrastructure access, and utility coordination. For providers actually constructing networks, delays involving federal, state, and local permitting can materially affect project schedules even where funding and construction resources are available. The BDO should seek to facilitate interagency and cross-industry collaboration, efficiently coordinate permitting and access for mixed-utility deployments that will minimize repetitive disruptions for a individual rights-of-way and communities. Regular coordination among the BDO, providers, permitting agencies, and infrastructure owners can help identify recurring barriers and resolve problems before they jeopardize federal or state funding deadlines. While TTA acknowledges the BDO's limited authority, facilitating discussions between stakeholders is an important step and can help reduce barriers to deployment.

VII. Performance Measures and Reporting

TTA supports the proposed public accountability dashboards and Key Performance Indicators. The Blueprint proposes tracking measures including the reduction in unserved locations, cost per location, adoption rates, schedule performance, funds recovered, funds retained, and verified post-construction performance. Key Performance Indicators should also be publicly tracked for implementation of any infrastructure plan, where such is incorporated into the Blueprint and strategic plan,

These measures should provide the Legislature, industry, and the public a much clearer picture of whether Texas broadband programs are achieving their intended results. TTA encourages the BDO to maintain consistent definitions and methodologies so that results can be compared across programs and over time.

TTA also renews its recommendation that the BDO provide the Legislature with a regular report measuring progress against the goals and performance measures contained in the strategic plan. TTA's July comments recommended an annual report identifying progress in closing the digital divide and success in meeting the strategic plan's metrics.

VIII. Conclusion

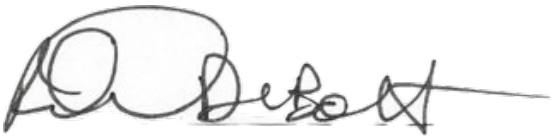
TTA appreciates the substantial effort reflected in the Strategic Plan Blueprint and supports the overall direction proposed by the Comptroller and BDO. The Blueprint incorporates many reforms that TTA and other broadband stakeholders have previously recommended, including greater transparency, meaningful stakeholder engagement, competitive funding processes, stronger challenge procedures, protection of private investment, improved post-award monitoring, and greater accountability for the expenditure of public funds.

The next step will be translating these principles into workable program procedures. TTA encourages the BDO to use the period before completion of the December 1 strategic plan to:

- **Transparency, Mapping, and Challenge Processes.** Further enhance transparency, especially in the mapping and challenge process.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Program Development.** Enhance stakeholder engagement and program development through commitments to meaningfully incorporate and respond to stakeholder input from pre-NOFA conferences, including technical conferences, and ensure stakeholder engagement will occur sufficiently early to influence program design.
- **Competitive Funding and Protection of Private Investment.** Reinforce requirements that projects be competitively bid.
- **Fiber and Long-Term Infrastructure Investment.** Adhere to statutory directives to prioritize broadband infrastructure projects that connect end-user locations using end-to-end fiber facilities, while permitting consideration of alternative technologies in specified circumstances.
- **Broadband Infrastructure Fund and Long-Term Strategic Planning.** Implement an annual cycle to implement four-year infrastructure plans to ensure cohesive planning for broadband program and a structured process to flexibly incorporate new funding sources.
- **Post-Award Accountability and Deployment Coordination.** In addition to planned award monitoring and clawbacks, include a structured process for addressing permitting, infrastructure access, and utility coordination, and
- **Performance Measures and Reporting.** Commit to regular reporting publicly and to the Legislature, including on Key Performance Indicators for any infrastructure plan included in the Blueprint and strategic plan.

TTA appreciates the BDO's renewed engagement with industry stakeholders and looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Comptroller, the BDO, the Legislature, and other stakeholders to ensure that Texas broadband funding is administered transparently, competitively, and in a manner that delivers reliable broadband infrastructure and long-term value to Texans.

Respectfully submitted by,



Richard DeBolt
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TEXAS TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION