

**Baltimore Broadband Coalition  
5115 Roland Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21210**

July 18, 2015

Honorable Stephanie Rawlings Blake  
Office of the Mayor  
250 City Hall, 100 N. Holliday Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Dear Madam Mayor,

The Baltimore Broadband Coalition is a citywide multi-community organization with nearly 1100 backers to date. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Mayor's Smart City Task Force Report.

You asked your task force to create a strategic plan for our city. While the report acknowledges the importance of broadband, a plan must articulate a clear organizational model, vision and specific actionable items. In this respect, the report falls short. The Broadband Coalition offers these suggestions to help complete that plan.

What is most important is for city government to decide on the role it wishes to play. Will it lead the development of a municipal broadband utility or will it actively facilitate efforts to create an entity outside city government, such as a non-profit? There must be effective leadership, delineation of entity scope and adequate funding. The Coalition wishes to participate in this effort and to help lead.

The vision must include deployment of fiber to homes, businesses and institutions throughout Baltimore; otherwise, the plan will not be future proof. The fiber infrastructure must be open to promote effective competition among Internet service providers.

All must benefit. We should begin by targeting our schools and libraries and areas of concentrated aggregate demand for broadband as identified by the Broadband Coalition. Our crowd funding campaign demonstrates sufficient demand to warrant fiber investment in multiple neighborhoods in north Baltimore and within other micro-pilot zones throughout the city and we strongly encourage the city to facilitate that deployment now.

A balanced plan must provide low cost connectivity options for those with low incomes. We should create free Wi-Fi zones in public spaces such as within parks or areas of large

public gathering and around schools and libraries. We should offer commercial stakeholders and anchor institutions connectivity options superior to existing choices.

The entity leading the city effort must collaborate with multiple stakeholders and rapidly complete the broadband plan. It must then oversee the ongoing deployment of fiber infrastructure and subsequent fiber network operations. Timely execution is critical.

There must be an understanding that deployment of fiber requires public and private investment. Fiber deployment like other infrastructure is expensive but is necessary and economically wise.

City and school system processes to facilitate fiber deployment must be improved. Fiber deployment costs can be markedly reduced by an effective city dig-once policy. The schools and city must more effectively cooperate as they compete for and use available federal dollars including for example, the E-Rate and ConnectHome programs.

Comcast and Verizon will likely continue to be part of the available options. It is imperative within the ongoing re-negotiations of the television franchise with Comcast for the city to explore how quality of service and performance expectations are included and that there are appropriate remedies for failure to perform. While it is simply a television franchise, the majority of Baltimore currently uses the same cable for its Internet. Newly negotiated agreements including the distributed antenna systems (DAS) should consider the city's need for future broadband options, and therefore should not be "rubber-stamps" of prior agreements.

While the Task Force appropriately acknowledges the importance of city owned conduit, fiber and vertical city assets, expecting that the leveraging of those assets alone will be a sufficient city broadband plan, is not the case.

Accompanying this letter are the results of our Baltimore Broadband Coalition survey from over 1100 respondents (appendix A is an extract of summary data and Appendix B, free form respondent comments). Our survey shows the following:

- Dissatisfaction with available broadband choices in Baltimore is striking  
Respondents primarily receive Internet service from Comcast (75%) or Verizon DSL (18%) and dissatisfaction with both companies exceeds 95%
- Respondents believe broadband choices available in Baltimore as compared to other cities are inferior
- Because of poor connectivity, some choose not to locate their business in Baltimore or to move their business from Baltimore
- The problem affects all generations

We are concerned that Baltimore has fallen woefully behind other major American cities in development of this now-essential technological asset. The city's economic and social progress is at stake. We also have tremendous hope that well-conceived and timely implemented broadband could serve as a turning point for improving the quality- indeed the fabric- of our dear city. Hence, it is critical the City waste no time to decide its approach, facilitate the development of a comprehensive and actionable plan, and importantly, move quickly to action. Broadband represents an information-rich future Baltimore must embrace quickly and passionately to prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The first step is often the most difficult. There is so much opportunity for progress.

Sincerely yours,

Philip Spevak

Also signed by other leaders of the Coalition including Ian MacFarlane (Roland Park), Anthony Gill (Guilford), Stan Wilson (Homeland), Rosie Smith (Poplar Hill), John Taylor (Roland Springs), Lydia Wilson (Hoes Heights), Peter Wayner (Wyndhurst), Jere Morrel (Mt. Washington), Shelley Sehnert (North Roland Park), Dan Lemkin (Keswick)

Attachments:

Appendix A – Summary data from Baltimore Broadband Coalition as PPT presentation

Appendix B – Free text comments provided by survey respondents

CC: Council President Jack Young and Members of the City Council  
Deputy Mayor Colin Tarbert  
Mr. Jason Hardebeck

*Letter sent by paper mail to above addressees and electronically. Letter also submitted electronically to [info@smarterbaltimore.org](mailto:info@smarterbaltimore.org) and has been posted along with appendices at <http://baltimorebroadband.org/index.htm>*