

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

March 2, 2010

Mr. Lawrence Strickling
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
United States Department of Commerce
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Strickling:

Thank you for your continued efforts to promote broadband connectivity. Texas has been working to move forward with state mapping and planning efforts since the announcement of the State Broadband Data and Development Grant Program (SBDDGP) in Summer 2009.

However, due to the size of the Texas project and the delay in funding of the mapping project, Connected Nation will soon request NTIA provide additional time for the development of Texas' final broadband availability map. Please know the Texas Department of Agriculture would prefer this extension not be necessary, but our top priority is for this effort to yield a map that is accurate and that will provide true value to broadband expansion efforts.

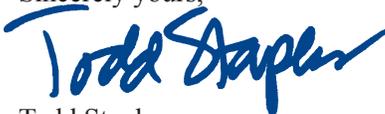
As the state's designee in the SBDDGP and the consultative process of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), the Texas Department of Agriculture often hears concerns of the public about these two programs. First, applicants continue to request mapping resources to assist in the BTOP application process; however, as you know, the federal award timelines moved BTOP funds before mapping projects could be complete. Therefore the state's mapping data will not be available until after the application window for the final funding round of BTOP closes. This creates concerns among applicants that BTOP may be used to build duplicative infrastructure and that unserved and underserved areas with the greatest need may not benefit as intended from these programs.

Secondly, entities that have not received funding or have not been rejected for funding during the first round of BTOP and the Broadband Initiatives Program are seeking direction about making application in this second funding cycle. Therefore, I encourage you to quickly act to finalize and announce awards from round one and to provide appropriate guidance to those applicants who are in limbo between the two funding cycles.

Finally, concerns remain about the timelines of SBDDGP and BTOP. Understandably, NTIA faces significant challenges in distributing funding in accordance with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA); however, applicants and states, in their consultative BTOP roles, need appropriate and consistent timetables and guidelines as the remainder of the ARRA funding is distributed. For BTOP, Texas encourages expeditious funding decisions to support sustainable projects in areas of the state that are truly unserved and underserved.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these concerns. I appreciate your consideration and your efforts to move forward in expanding broadband services to all Texans.

Sincerely yours,



Todd Staples

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