

**Before the  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Wireline Competition Bureau Seeks	)	WC Docket No. 22-251
Comment on the Interagency Broadband	)	
Coordination Agreement	)	
	)	

**COMMENTS OF  
NTCA–THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION**

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association (“NTCA”)<sup>1</sup> hereby submits these Comments in response to the Public Notice released by the Wireline Competition Bureau (the “Bureau”) in the above-captioned proceeding. The notice seeks comment on the interagency agreement established between the Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (“USDA”), and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (“NTIA”) pursuant to the Broadband Interagency Coordination Act of 2020 (“BICA”),<sup>2</sup> so that the Commission can submit a report to Congress on the effectiveness of and possible improvements to the agreement.

In BICA, Congress directed and established parameters for greater collaboration among these federal agencies most actively involved in financing or supporting broadband. BICA requires that the agreement to formalize such coordination at a minimum include provisions for the sharing of data on funded projects and other available information regarding existing broadband services in

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<sup>1</sup> NTCA represents approximately 850 independent, community-based companies and cooperatives that provide advanced communications services in rural America and more than 400 other firms that support or are themselves engaged in the provision of such services.

<sup>2</sup> 47 U.S.C. § 1308.

given areas.<sup>3</sup> In turn, the interagency agreement entered into between the Commission, USDA, and NTIA affirms that the agencies will share the kind of information specified by BICA and that the agencies will use such information for the purpose of coordination in distributing funds as contemplated by BICA.<sup>4</sup>

The measures identified in BICA as memorialized in the interagency agreement provide a useful compass for coordination in the administration of various federal broadband funding programs. NTCA recommends, however, that future iterations of the interagency agreement go beyond capturing the basic constructs of BICA and instead spell out in somewhat greater operational detail as to how information will be shared among the agencies and used by them. Of course, there is no need to go into extensive detail with respect to the act of sharing data; to the contrary, it is important that the agencies retain a degree of flexibility to ensure timely, effective, and thorough interaction among their respective staffs in specific cases and in response to specific inquiries. But some greater level of visibility into how the agencies will systematically share information – and how interested stakeholders of all kinds might have access as well to certain data in the interest of transparency and further enhancing coordination – would be appropriate and useful in subsequent versions of the interagency agreement. For example, NTCA recommends the following framework for inclusion in the interagency agreement going forward, outlining a baseline means by which data will be systematically shared and made available so that both the agencies *and* the public can easily see both where these various programs are working to improve and sustain broadband access, as well as any gaps in potential coordination:

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at § 1308(b)(3).

<sup>4</sup> *See* Public Notice Appendix.

1. The agencies should develop and post on their respective websites a common tracking chart listing all of the programs across these three agencies that have enforceable commitments to deliver broadband services that meet certain performance parameters. The tracking chart should indicate the levels of performance required under each such program and the timeframes for performance of those obligations. Each agency should commit to consult this tracking chart in making funding decisions, in addition to making any other inquiries or sharing of data between them.
2. The agencies should develop and post on their respective websites a common map depicting the areas in which the enforceable commitments apply under the programs overseen by these agencies. Such an “enforceable commitment map” would serve as a useful complement to the map being prepared by the Commission pursuant to the Broadband Data Collection, which will show where services are already available – put another way, the combination of these maps would show both where broadband *is* and where it *is required to be* by a date certain. Each agency should commit to consult this enforceable commitment map in making funding decisions, in addition to making any other inquiries or sharing of data between them.
3. The tracking chart referenced above should include a specific and clear indication of any program that does *not* respect enforceable commitments in other programs (both with respect to other agencies’ programs or even within an agency’s own programs) when awarding funds.

Relatively simple measures such as these would add an appropriate and reasonable level of detail to the interagency agreement, indicating the means by which certain baseline information on various federal broadband funding programs will be shared, ensuring such information will be shared systematically without the need for specific inquiry, and also making such information available publicly for all stakeholders ranging from congressional officials to agency representatives and broadband service providers to consumer interest organizations. At the same time, the level of information contemplated here should not be overwhelming for the agencies to gather or publish since it involves data regarding programs they oversee in the ordinary course of their business, nor would this approach tie the agencies’ hands by precluding further collaboration or sharing of different or additional information upon specific request as contemplated by BICA and the current provisions of the interagency agreement.

NTCA therefore recommends that future iterations of the interagency agreement contain provisions such as those suggested herein to memorialize a more systematic framework for common data-sharing.

Respectfully submitted,

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Dated: August 1, 2022