

**Before the
Office of Management and Budget**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Information Collection Being Submitted For)	81 Fed. Reg. 96453
Review And Approval To The Office Of)	OMB Control No. 3060-XXXX
Management And Budget)	ICR Reference No: 201612-3060-022

**PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT COMMENTS
OF
NTCA–THE RURAL BROADBAND ASSOCIATION**

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association (“NTCA”)¹ hereby submits these comments in response to the Notice of Information Collection (“Notice”)² regarding the Paperwork Reduction Act (“PRA”)³ burdens arising out of an Information Collection adopted by the Federal Communications Commission (“Commission”) in March, 2016.⁴ The Notice seeks comment on the Universal Service Administrative Company (“USAC”) created High-Cost Universal Broadband (“HUBB”) electronic filing portal through which rate-of-return carriers must report on their progress toward meeting buildout obligations adopted in the *Rate-of-Return Reform Order*.

In a December 8, 2016 Public Notice,⁵ the Commission’s Wireline Competition Bureau (the “Bureau”) provided guidance to rate-of-return carriers with respect to their broadband

¹ NTCA represents more than 800 independent, community-based telecommunications companies. All NTCA members are full service local exchange carriers and broadband providers, and many of its members provide wireless, cable, satellite, and long distance and other competitive services to their communities.

² Information Collection(s) Being Submitted for Review and Approval To The Office of Management and Budget (“OMB”), 81 Fed. Reg. 96453 (published Dec. 30, 2016) (“Information Collection”).

³ Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law No. 104-13, 109 Stat. 163 (May 22, 1995), *codified at* 44 U.S.C. §3501, *et seq.*

⁴ Connect America Fund, et al., WC Docket No. 10-90, et al., Report and Order, Order and Order on Reconsideration, and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 16-33 (rel. March 30, 2016) (“*Rate-of-Return Reform Order*”).

⁵ Wireline Competition Bureau Provides Guidance to Carriers Receiving Connect America Fund Support Regarding Their Broadband Locations Reporting Obligations, Public Notice, WC Docket No. 10-90, DA 16-1363 (rel. Dec. 8, 2016).

deployment obligations adopted in the *Rate-of-Return Reform Order*, including the definition of the term “location” as used in the order. That Public Notice and additional guidance made available by USAC⁶ set forth the dates and procedures by which rate-of-return carriers must geocode and report through the HUBB online portal their progress toward meeting buildout obligations.

Unfortunately, the Commission’s estimation of the burden of complying with the reporting requirement is vastly understated. In addition, the overly restrictive definition of the term “location” as described by the Public Notice in interpreting and attempting to implement the *Rate-of-Return-Reform Order* could create confusion as carriers plan, complete, and report on their progress toward meeting their deployment obligations.⁷ NTCA thus urges the OMB to decline to approve the Information Collection unless and until the Commission revises the estimated reporting burden to more accurately reflect the reality of geocoding and reporting on hundreds and in some cases thousands of individual locations in rural areas.

As an initial matter, the Commission’s analysis of the reporting burden at issue herein is greatly understated: the Commission estimates that rate-of-return carriers will expend between 8 and 30 total hours per year complying with the requirement. However, it appears that this estimate may only account for one small portion of the requirement – specifically, the Commission looks only to have included in its estimate the burden of physically entering the latitude and longitude coordinates of locations into the USAC HUBB portal. However, this is

⁶ Geolocation Methods: A guide to successfully collecting broadband deployment data, Universal Service Administrative Company, available at: <http://www.usac.org/res/documents/hc/pdf/tools/HUBBGeolocationMethods.pdf>.

⁷ See, Application for Review of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association, WC Docket No. 10-90 (fil. Jan. 9, 2017) (challenging the categorical exclusion of three specific kinds of locations from the universe of potential reportable locations).

the least time-intensive portion of the process, as the requirement to geocode (or capture the latitude and longitude coordinates) of each individual location will consume a significant amount of staff resources above that required for the comparatively simple act of entering such coordinates once captured into the HUBB portal.

Rate-of-return carriers operate in some of the most sparsely-populated rural areas of the nation, and geocoding individual locations that are often miles apart will typically require the dispatch of a technician to each and every individual location. While on a going-forward basis this can be done at the time of installation of new facilities while technicians are onsite, taking this approach will still require additional technician time at each “location” to make sure the precise geocodes are recorded properly based upon the guidance provided by USAC.⁸ Alternatively, geocoding via web-based maps and imagery or automated address geocoding could be employed without the presence of a technician onsite, but each of these options (as USAC observes) are less accurate and therefore may necessitate additional time to “clean-up” and verify by an employee checking and rechecking each location’s coordinates from a desk.⁹ And, for those subsets of carriers that need to go back and record previously installed locations,¹⁰ there will be the additional time associated with dispatches to (or desktop “survey” of) locations that are not the subject of current installs. Given these options for reporting, the burden estimate is seemingly based on one of two flawed assumptions: (1) that a typical rate-of-return carrier can, in no more than 30 man hours per year, geocode hundreds or even thousands of individual

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*, pp. 4 and 7.

¹⁰ *See*, Public Notice, p. 9 (“By March 1, 2019, recipients of CAF A-CAM support must file all qualifying locations to which they made broadband service available prior to January 1, 2016, namely, pre-existing locations.”).

locations by either using (or re-sending in the case of prior installs) a technician to each location or using alternative methods that will likely need back-end verification *and then* also enter such data into the HUBB portal or (2) that such a process of geocoding each individual location is not part of the process or involves so little time as to not justify its inclusion into the burden estimate analysis.

In addition, the guidance in the Public Notice with respect to the locations that must be geocoded and entered into the HUBB portal has created additional problems that go to the PRA analysis here. Specifically, the impact of the three explicit categorical exclusions that were identified in the Public Notice and questioned by NTCA in a subsequent Application for Review¹¹ must be considered in assessing the full burden of this reporting requirement, as those three specific exclusions could affect the amount of efforts carriers must expend in culling and reporting on their location deployments.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹¹ *See, supra*, fn . 7.