



April 25, 2022

To: Metropolitan Policy Committee
From: Brenda Wilson, Paul Thompson
Subject: Item 6.c: Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriation Act (CRRSAA) Funding

Action Recommended: Approve distribution of CRRSSA funds

Issue Statement

At the February, 2022 MPC meeting MPC approved receiving CRRSAA funding as non-federal relief funding. In March 2022 LCOG received the \$2,018,930. This agenda item requests approval for distribution of the funds for the purpose of developing a regional broadband strategy and for direct payments to four metro area jurisdictions.

Discussion

The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act included in the omnibus package a total of \$45 billion for transportation. Of that amount, \$9.84 billion will be provided to State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and will be made available under the Surface Transportation Block Grant program (STBG) and be suballocated to areas over 200,000 in population (the large MPOs, or Transportation Management Areas (TMAs)). The purpose of the act is to address COVID-19 impacts.

Oregon will receive \$123,980,570 in CRRSAA funds. LCOG, as the Central Lane MPO, will receive \$2,018,930. One of the provisions within the act allows the MPO (LCOG) to receive the funding as relief funding and to use the funds however it sees fit. This is the provision that MPC supported in February 2022.

Almost from the moment availability of these unconstrained funds was known, the potential for using a portion of the funds to support development of a Lane County regional broadband strategy has been under discussion by the LCOG Executive Committee and regional MPO staff. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) passed in 2021 provides for unprecedented amount of federal broadband grant funding via multiple grant programs over the next several years. However, without a broadband strategy for our region it not possible to understand what funding, and for what purposes, the region should apply for, or to demonstrate this region's readiness for those funds to the federal grant programs.

A proposal is in place to devote \$838,000 of the \$2,018,930 CRRSSA funds to development of a regional broadband strategy, staffing for grant development and

management, and seed money as local match for federal grant funds. In summary, the proposed use of the funds is as follows;

Expense	Amount	Notes
Draft RFP and Go Through RFP Process	\$ 5,000.00	
Broadband strategy	\$ 250,000.00	Consultant
Broadband Coordinator	\$ 170,000.00	2 years
Staff Broadband Consortium	\$ 48,000.00	3 years
Interconnect Site Staff Time	\$ 55,000.00	3 years
Grant Writing	\$ 10,000.00	2 years
Federal Match	\$ 300,000.00	
Total	\$ 838,000.00	

The estimated \$250,000 cost for consultant development of a regional broadband strategy is based on a review of several similar efforts and costs undertaken by other regions around the country. The Table of Contents and Executive Summary from one of those is included as Attachment 1 to this memo. This provides an overview of the product expected for this region.

The investment in developing the Strategy will cover, and benefit, our entire Lane County region, addressing strategies for the metropolitan, small city, and rural areas. The strategy will determine where, how much, and for what benefits should our broadband investment focus. These dollars will not be spent specific to any geography, they will be spent to develop a strategy to address needs throughout Lane County. Benefits identified in the Strategy will also accrue throughout the County, both through specific capital improvements, and through indirect benefits such as economic development, job creation, and more, that strengthens the entire region.

In addition, Lane County is part of a 4-county (Benton, Lane, Lincoln and Linn) federal Economic Development District and is heavily involved in that effort. Being part of the district opens up additional federal funding for our region. We are required to develop a 5-year strategy and submit it to the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). Our Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) includes the buildout of broadband throughout the region, but we need to develop a strategy on how – that is the broadband strategy being proposed, and will allow us to leverage the unprecedented amount of federal broadband funding coming over the next several years. The Board for the district is made up of elected officials from all 4 counties and Commissioner Buch is the Chair of this Board.

While the state is developing a broadband investment and deployment strategy for Oregon, and should be focusing on unserved and underserved areas, they have also received a directive from the Governor's office to support and promote local and regional broadband planning. We need to have our regional broadband strategy in place in order to receive that support. Much of the federal funding will go to/through the states, and local and regional efforts will need to work with their state to access those funds to build out broadband in their own regions. We can't wait for the state to develop a strategy for our region. It is very likely that without both a Strategy and

matching funds in place ahead of the opportunity to access the state and federal broadband funds, we will have very limited success, if any, in obtaining those funds.

Currently, many efforts to expand broadband access are primarily focused on extending wired and fixed wireless infrastructure to the last mile: homes and small businesses. While some providers have delivered reliable high-speed internet to people in the urban and suburban areas of our region, Lane County is primarily rural and many rural areas remain underserved or lack a connection. The challenge of closing these last-mile gaps is compounded by geography, demographics, and the numbers and types of entities that provide service in Lane County. In order for our region to get where we need to be in the broadband race, we need to develop our own strategy and begin to build out our system – now. We are already behind. The federal dollars will start to be released this year (right now) and we have no strategy.

The *Broadband Coordinator*, *Staff Broadband Consortium*, *Interconnect Site Staff Time*, and *Grant Writing* expenses above are included to cover the 2-3 year cost of a regional broadband consortium to manage the consultant process, provide technical assistance, ensure grant writing capacity, and then manage and implement the anticipated grant funding. There is no other funding source to cover this staff time.

The \$300,000 of *Federal Match* funding provides local funds to be used as match commitments for federal grant funding.

The second component of the proposed use of the CRRSSA funds distributes the remaining \$1,180,930 to the four metropolitan general purpose governments as follows (in round figures):

Coburg	\$59,047	5%
Eugene	\$590,465	50%
Springfield	\$295,233	25%
Lane Co	\$236,186	20%

Those funds would be free of any local, state, or federal requirements, with the understanding that the funds would be used at the discretion of each jurisdiction for purposes with a transportation nexus.

Finally, any portion of the \$838,000 not ultimately used for the regional broadband effort would be distributed to the four jurisdictions in the proportions above.

MPC's advisory Transportation Planning Committee (TPC) reviewed the proposed distribution of the CRRSSA funding at their March 17, 2022 public meeting and unanimously recommend distribution of the funds as outlined above.

Action Recommended: Approve distribution of CRRSSA funds

Attachment

1. Eastgate Regional Council of Governments *Regional Broadband Feasibility Study* – Table of Contents and Executive Summary