

A Proposal to Move BEAD Forward

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Recommendations from Rural Broadband Expert Jonathan Chambers, Conexon co-CEO

In this proposal, Mr. Chambers analyzes the potential impact of the Trump Administration's BEAD changes and outlines his four recommendations to move BEAD forward again for the benefit of rural America.

BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2021, Congress passed BEAD, which included \$42.45 billion for investment in broadband infrastructure to unserved and underserved rural Americans.

The Commerce Department allocated funds to the states, the FCC produced location-specific maps, and every state engaged in labyrinthian processes to deliver broadband to every unserved and underserved location in their state.

- **To date, 42 states** have begun or completed their assignment of funds to companies to build broadband infrastructure.
- **To date, zero dollars** have been released to connect rural households to broadband.

On January 21, 2025, the administration turned over. The new Commerce Department told states that it needed time to review and revise all the state applications, including ones that were already approved.



As weeks became months, Governors, Senators, and Congress members began expressing concern that the new Administration's review will upend each state's work over the past three years.

Rather than follow the lead of states and local communities, the Biden Commerce Department imposed a one-size-fits-all set of policies and preferences on our topographically and geographically diverse states.

Commerce Secretary Lutnick now appears poised to do the same.

Another Administration taking more time and adding new requirements means more of the same – ***no rural households connected to critical infrastructure in any state.***

What to Do: Use Budget Reconciliation to Reconstitute BEAD

In a politically divided world, there remains a path that serves everyone's interests.

In this year's budget reconciliation, I recommend:

1. **Congress should reaffirm and adopt new** BEAD legislation, replacing the current BEAD program at 90 percent of the amount appropriated in 2021, generating an immediate savings of \$4 billion.
2. **Congress should require** that the Treasury Department within 30 days send 60 percent of the previously allocated BEAD funding directly to states and 30 percent of the previously allocated BEAD funding directly to counties – with no stops along the way at the Commerce Department, NIST, or NTIA.
3. **Congress should not get caught up** in defining broadband by speed or technology. Instead, it should maintain spending to the previously established BEAD-eligible locations and limit reimbursement to broadband infrastructure with a lifespan of 30 or more years. For once, let's invest for the long term in rural America.
4. **Congress should require** all states and counties to assign the funding to sub-grantees by the end of 2025 and require that all work be completed by the end of 2028. They can embrace and use the three years of work already done by state broadband offices and rural communities.

Why this approach? And why skip the Commerce Department (and NTIA specifically) and go directly to the states and counties?

It's been more than 3.5 years since Congress appropriated funding for BEAD. **Rural America shouldn't have to wait any longer.**

My message to Congress: Use the big, beautiful bill to legislate what your rural constituents want and need. Release the funds without new bureaucratic conditions.

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