

Investing in America's Broadband Infrastructure:
Exploring Ways to Reduce Barriers to Deployment

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation

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May 3, 2017

Today, you can look down any crowded street in America and, at a glance, see multiple people, young and old, looking at their smartphones or tablets – following online maps, checking Instagram, Snapchat or Facebook, watching YouTube or Netflix, videochatting on Skype or FaceTime, or accessing one or more of countless apps. My mother lives in a retirement community. She used to have a wired internet connection with a desktop computer. Last year she got rid of it and now sits on her chair in the living room and accesses Facebook and email through her smart phone. Hearing this, it's not hard to understand that mobile data usage is skyrocketing. According to Cisco, in 2016 alone, US mobile data traffic grew 44%, and is expected to grow 5-fold from 2016 to 2021.

Big events cause people to use their mobile devices even more. At the Phoenix Open golf tournament in February, for just one carrier, mobile data use was equivalent to 26 million selfies! That same carrier had a 60% increase in data usage at the tournament in 2017 compared to 2016.

All that is the fun stuff, but mobile devices are critical to more serious matters. According to the Pew Research Center, 40% of cell phone owners said they found themselves in an emergency situation in which having their phone with them helped, and the FCC reports that 70% of 911 calls are from wireless phones. My father lives in Tucson and only has a wireless phone. In the last year he has had to call 911 two times in an emergency. For his sake and the sake of all Americans it is critical that these devices work when we need them most.

While these phones, tablets and apps seem magical, they don't run on magic, they run on hardware and software connected to antennas and ultimately fiber-optic cables, and all of this is installed on towers and poles and in underground conduits. In other words, they require infrastructure, and more and more of that infrastructure will be in the form of small cells, which are placed on utility poles, street lights, signs, bus shelters and traffic signals and are designed to blend into the existing environment.

FCC Chairman Pai recently said that "The future of wireless will evolve from large, macro-cell towers to include thousands of densely-deployed small cells, operating at lower power." These small cells are necessary to meet today's customer needs, but they are even more important for the next generation of wireless networks – 5G.

We're meeting today's needs and preparing for that future in Arizona, where we just passed a landmark bill that promotes needed investment in small cells while ensuring the appropriate level of local control. Arizonans will know that when they want to use their mobile devices, the infrastructure will be there to support them.

You may have heard that sometimes there are conflicts between wireless carriers and cities and towns over how and where these small cells will be built. But in Arizona, we had support for the bill from the industry players and also from the municipal association, the Arizona League of Cities and Towns.

How did we get there? Simple, we had many productive discussions about how to address the concerns of the cities and towns and others while ensuring the right policy framework for investment. The bill ensures that there is a uniform statewide policy for wireless carriers to get the necessary permits and agreements from Arizona cities and towns, and those cities and towns are able to ensure that small cells meet their local codes for public safety, design standards, and concealment requirements. If the wireless carrier wants to attach to municipal poles, like street lights, the bill ensures that carriers will pay appropriate fees for that attachment.

In summary, I am very proud that Arizona's new bill is a great example of how the state, cities, towns, and industry can all work together to meet a shared goal of ensuring that the needs and demands of citizens for broadband networks will be met.