



October 23, 2020

Stephanie Tom
Deputy Director, Broadband and Digital Literacy
California Department of Technology

Sent Via Email: CABroadbandCouncil@state.ca.gov

**RE: Governor's Executive Order N-73-20
State Broadband Action Plan**

Dear Ms. Tom,

On behalf of CTIA¹, the trade association for the wireless communications industry, thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment as part of the Broadband Action Plan. CTIA applauds the Council's efforts and desire to accelerate broadband deployment in California.

Wireless is the way we communicate. Mobile devices provide users with internet access anytime, virtually anywhere. The wireless industry is already on the cutting edge of efforts to close the digital divide by effectively deploying quality, affordable and reliable broadband to all Californians. Mobile broadband has never played a more central role in how Californians - and all Americans - live and work.

With regard to deployment and affordability, 2019 alone saw the wireless industry build more than 46,000 new cell sites across the U.S.—more than in the preceding three years combined.² Nearly 10 percent of the GDP increase of the entire U.S. economy from 2011–19 was due to the growth of the U.S. wireless industry³—and U.S. 4G networks support 20 million jobs,⁴ drove nearly \$700 billion in economic

¹ CTIA[®] (www.ctia.org) represents the U.S. wireless communications industry and the companies throughout the mobile ecosystem that enable Americans to lead a 21st -century connected life. The association's members include wireless carriers, device manufacturers, suppliers as well as apps and content companies. CTIA vigorously advocates at all levels of government for policies that foster continued wireless innovation and investment. The association also coordinates the industry's voluntary best practices, hosts educational events that promote the wireless industry, and co-produces the industry's leading wireless tradeshow. CTIA was founded in 1984.

² *Order Instituting Rulemaking Regarding Broadband Infrastructure Deployment to Support Service Providers in the State of California*, R20-09-001, Order Instituting Rulemaking (issued Sept.18, 2020) (OIR).

³ RECON ANALYTICS, *The 4G Decade: Quantifying the Benefits*, at 5 (July 29, 2020) <http://reconanalytics.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-4G-Decade-1.pdf> (Recon Analytics 4G Study) (link triggers download).

⁴ *Id.* at 15.

contribution last year alone,⁵ and have saved consumers \$130 billion annually over an extended window.⁶ And last year's wireless industry investment, totaling \$29.1 billion, marked a four-year high.⁷ It is no coincidence, that American mobile wireless carriers have provided world-leading connectivity and speeds in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸

Nearly 96 percent of U.S. adults own a mobile phone of some kind, and the percentage of those consumers with a smartphone has nearly tripled over the past decade.⁹ Mobile broadband has never played a more central role in how Californians, and all Americans, live and work, as mobile data use last year exceeded 37.06 trillion MBs—representing 30 percent year-over-year growth, or 96 times more data used in 2019 than 2010.¹⁰

Broadband will be “crucial to California’s economic recovery from the impact of COVID”¹¹ and America’s wireless networks continue to rise and meet the challenge in large part due to the light-touch regulatory approach that applies to wireless at the national level. For instance, on a purely voluntary basis, in California alone here is a sample of what the wireless industry is doing:

- AT&T donated 11,000 wireless hotspots to the Santa Clara County Office of Education and San Jose Public Library System for students and households in San Jose who lack internet access as they prepared to start the school year virtually due to COVID.¹²
- Verizon collaborated with Governor Newsom and the First Partner in a cross-sector partnership to expand their LAUSD agreement by committing unlimited internet connectivity for up to 250,000 additional underserved students in school districts across the state at a discounted rate.¹⁴
- T-Mobile partnered with the Department of Education to donate up to tens of thousands of wireless devices, connecting up to 1 million students in need of wireless access as they began the school year from home.¹⁵

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.* at 14.

⁷ *Id.* at 3.

⁸ CTIA, *How Wireless Kept Americans Connected During COVID-19*, at 3–4 (June 23, 2020), <https://api.ctia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/How-Wireless-Kept-Americans-Connected-During-COVID-19-2.pdf> (COVID-19 Wireless Connectivity Study).

⁹ See PEW RESEARCH CTR., *Mobile Fact Sheet*, (June 12, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/>; CTIA, *2020 Annual Survey Highlights*, (Aug. 25, 2020), <https://api.ctia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-Annual-Survey-final.pdf> (2020 Annual Survey Highlights).

¹⁰ 2020 Annual Survey Highlights at 7.

¹¹ OIR at 6.

¹² KPIX CBS SF BAY AREA, *AT&T Partners with San Jose to Provide Free Wi-Fi to Needy Students*, YOUTUBE (Aug. 3, 2020), https://youtu.be/On6g-sG_RUk.

¹⁴ VERIZON, *Verizon Steps Up to Bridge the Digital Divide with Connectivity for 250,000 California Students*, (May 22, 2020) <https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-connectivity-california-students>.

¹⁵ CAL. DEPT OF EDUCATION, *State Superintendent Tony Thurmond Announces Major Collaboration with Apple and T-Mobile to Connect Students in Need*, (Aug. 5, 2020), <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr20/yr20rel65.asp>.

Wireless carrier networks were able to meet their customers' needs during the COVID-19 crisis, providing additional connectivity for remote education, work, health care, and more. Wireless carriers are constantly trying to upgrade their networks to meet increasing consumer demand.

A 2019 economic study determined that over the previous decade the wireless industry was a leading generator of new jobs, generating nearly 10 percent of the increase in the GDP of the entire US economy, and investing \$261 billion in expanding wireless networks. During that period download speeds increased more than 30 times as the wireless industry invested in spectrum, infrastructure, and new technologies to improve service and expand coverage to rural and underserved areas.

The industry is currently deploying 5G technology and investing hundreds of billions of dollars to deploying facilities that are needed to provide expanded and densified high-speed 5G networks. That investment is critical to increasing the availability of broadband to Californians.

To make 5G a reality, our networks need more capacity. Small cells, about the size of a pizza box or a backpack and often synonymous with 5G, are generally installed on utility poles, streetlights and the sides of buildings. They complement existing cell towers by densifying wireless networks and providing the capabilities needed for next-generation networks. While small cells can be installed in few hours, outdated rules designed for 200-foot tall cell towers and outright prohibitions can cost thousands of dollars in fees and take more than a year to get local government approval. These barriers slow down the rollout of 5G and threaten America's continued wireless leadership.

2019 alone saw the wireless industry build more than 46,000 new cell sites across the U.S.—more than in the preceding three years combined.¹⁶ This massive growth and investment is the result of the deregulatory paradigm that the US Congress presciently enacted more than two decades ago and the Federal Communications Commission continues to follow.

Today, wireless providers primarily expand wireless broadband service by collocating small cells on existing facilities. Simply put, the national policy to minimize regulatory barriers drove more intensive use of existing infrastructure, which in turn directly expanded and improved wireless service to the public. Accordingly, state efforts to promote broadband should focus on removing barriers to entry and streamlining processes rather than attempting to mandate deployment.

We want to work with all stakeholders in a positive effort to achieve that end. Unfortunately, we are largely reliant on local government for permitting and zoning on placement of facilities and sources of power, fiber and access to poles. In many, but not all cities, this has proven to sometimes take years, at exorbitant cost, sometimes resulting in de facto prohibitions.

We'd like to work with stakeholders on the following infrastructure reforms for small cell deployment to both accommodate demands on today's networks and prepare for next generation wireless services:

- Reasonable access to government-owned property, like utility poles and public rights-of-way
- Reasonable and non-discriminatory fees reflecting municipalities' direct management costs and next-gen network economics and architecture
- Modernized processes providing reasonable schedules, more uniform approaches, and objective standards

¹⁶ OIR at 8.

Over the past four years, 30 states and Puerto Rico have enacted legislation streamlining the deployment of small wireless facilities. Each bill is different, but the majority of them address the previously mentioned three core areas in various ways.

These infrastructure reforms are working. As indicated above, according to CTIA's Annual Survey, industry investment increased to \$29.1 billion – marking a 4-year high. By removing regulatory barriers and streamlining processes, states and communities are experiencing an influx of capital investments and fostering innovation and job growth. Wireless infrastructure is required to meet increasing demand for wireless services and to extend the benefits of wireless into as many communities – to as many consumers – as possible, particularly in light of the current global crisis.

We look forward to working collaboratively with members of the Council to identify and reduce barriers to the deployment of wireless infrastructure to promote the expansion of wireless broadband throughout California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerard Keegan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gerard Keegan
Vice President
State Legislative Affairs