

## **Santee Cooper Can Help Expand Broadband to Unserved Areas**

Three Key Takeaways:

- Santee Cooper offers the State the ability to leverage our resources in unique ways, including economic development, provision of safe drinking water – and now, broadband.
- Santee Cooper does not intend to be a broadband provider, but rather a backbone to help providers to expand critically important broadband to unserved areas.
- We have an electric infrastructure (our 5,000-mile transmission system) that may be used to expand broadband access more quickly and cost-effectively.

As a public entity, Santee Cooper offers South Carolina the ability to leverage the utility as a state asset in unique ways to help the State's citizens, including those who live in areas that are economically disadvantaged. In addition to serving low-cost, reliable electricity in South Carolina, Santee Cooper is bringing clean water to areas in need and supporting the economic development efforts of electric cooperatives and other state partners who recruit jobs to rural South Carolina. Now, Santee Cooper recognizes a clear opportunity to assist the State in its mission to make broadband more affordable and accessible.

The lack of broadband in unserved areas affects the availability of education, healthcare and employment and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the impact worse. As such, South Carolina leaders have established a goal for the State to make broadband service available to every citizen to include addressing economic barriers for those in need.

In 2020, many efforts addressed improving the accessibility and affordability of broadband in South Carolina. Congress provided broadband funding in the CARES Act, the South Carolina General Assembly adopted the Broadband Accessibility Act, private providers added investment in South Carolina, federal agencies administered existing programs to support broadband, and work began on new federal broadband programs. The Office of Regulatory Staff also organized as a state coordinating agency responsible for overseeing certain broadband funds and projects, developing a new specialized map of unserved areas in South Carolina, and developing programs for technology training in order for citizens to be in a position to use the technology necessary to access broadband.

In 2020, the electric cooperatives and Santee Cooper also looked for ways to make an impact with broadband. After all, electric cooperatives and Santee Cooper played a critical role almost 100 years ago in bringing light to darkness in areas of South Carolina that were deprived of electric service because it was not economical to serve these areas.

Last year, Santee Cooper determined that it has critical infrastructure that may be leveraged by the State to make broadband available in unserved areas more quickly and less expensively. Santee Cooper is not interested in becoming a retail provider or making a profit but, rather, Santee Cooper determined it could allow providers to lease its excess fiber capacity and to access its electric infrastructure.

To that end, Santee Cooper has inventoried its available excess fiber and attachment capability across more than 5,000 miles of transmission lines crisscrossing the state. Since the transmission

lines already exist, this infrastructure may be used to create new middle-mile broadband infrastructure quickly and at a reduced cost.

This is a high priority for Santee Cooper and over the next couple of months Santee Cooper's management expects to finalize its broadband program components with terms and conditions and a pricing methodology. To govern its involvement, Santee Cooper has adopted principles to ensure its program is fair for all and does not disrupt existing markets.

## **SANTEE COOPER BROADBAND PRINCIPLES**

**Enable Expansion of Broadband Services** - Provide access, consistent with the Broadband Accessibility Act, to certain Authority resources, including poles, conduit, rights of way, and excess fiber capacity, to communications service providers in order to facilitate their delivery of more widespread broadband services within the State, with an emphasis on unserved and underserved areas.

**Access** – Offer access to these Authority resources to communications service providers on a non-discriminatory basis, subject to safety and operational considerations including capacity, engineering, and the operational integrity of the Authority's water and electric systems.

**Reliability** – The reliable delivery of power is paramount to all other uses of the Authority's transmission and distribution infrastructure. All non-electric uses must not jeopardize reliability to the power system and must adhere to the Authority's safety, engineering and operational standards.

**Pricing** – Offer communications service providers access to the Authority's excess fiber capacity at market rates and on terms and conditions that are not harmful to competition, while rates for pole attachments will be cost-based.

**No Cost Shift** – Avoid shifting to the Authority's electric and water customers those costs associated with offering access to the Authority's facilities to communications service providers.

**Engagement** – Engage federal and state officials responsible for full broadband access, communications service providers who are working to provide broadband in unserved and underserved areas, counties and municipal entities as appropriate, and other electric utilities who may have broadband resources that could be jointly leveraged along with the Authority.

**Transparency** – The Authority will publish and report on the use of its resources to enable broadband in a public forum.