



Making a difference...together

REPORT TO ELECTORAL AREAS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, MARCH 10, 2021

SUBJECT **TELUS Request for Letter of Support to the Universal Broadband Fund**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To consider a letter of support for an application by TELUS to the Federal Universal Broadband Fund for increased cellular service in the Southern Gulf Islands and Salt Spring Island.

BACKGROUND

The Universal Broadband Fund (UBF) is a federal funding program with \$1.8B in allocated funding for projects with a funding split of 75/25 (75% Federal funding), and 90/10 for First Nations applications. The UBF program has an extended submission deadline date of March 15th, 2021 with a construction completion date of December 31, 2026.

TELUS is proposing to apply to the mobile stream of the UBF to improve existing cellular sites with wireless service. The TELUS request for support has been attached. Subsequent communication with TELUS has provided the following additional information:

- The Telus application will be submitted under the mobile internet stream of the UBF
- The focus will be on upgrading equipment on existing cell towers to a N78 band (3.5 GHz 5G band), or any other technology that will become available to enable to speeds of 50/10mbps or faster (which is the lowest threshold the Federal government would like to have for Canadians).
- Telus does not have additional spectrum under existing licences to implement service improvements; for this project to be implemented they will have to be successful at a future spectrum auction.
- TELUS does not have a confirmed timeline for these upgrades to be implemented, but notes the funding program extends until 2027.

Locations proposed for improvements:

- Saturna Island
- Pender Island
- Mayne Island
- Salt Spring Island (Mt. Bruce)
- North Salt Spring

Connectivity Planning in the Southern Gulf Islands

As previously reported, the CRD has been conducting connectivity planning for the Southern Gulf Islands. This work has been focused on broadband internet and not cellular or mobile service, although the lack of reliable cell service did come up as an economic and safety issue during the community engagement phase of the project. The report demonstrated how improved connectivity is a fundamental need for Southern Gulf Islands communities to attract and retain young families, support low carbon economic development, and to improve access to social, educational, government, and health services.

Alternative 1:

The Electoral Areas Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the Board approve a letter of support for the TELUS application to the Universal Broadband Fund to improve cellular service in the Southern Gulf Islands and Salt Spring Island Electoral Areas.

Alternative 2:

1. That the Electoral Areas Committee recommend CRD not provide a letter of support to TELUS for the Universal Broadband Fund at this time.

IMPLICATIONS

This project supports CRD Board priorities and the corporate plan priorities for Economic Development of Rural Areas (4b-2): “to advance economic development and plans through commissions;” and (4a-1): “support CRD Board on building an advocacy strategy to ensure all occupied properties have the opportunity to access high-speed internet services.”

On January 11, 2021, the Capital Regional District Board approved a letter of support for the Connected Coast project to apply to the same UBF program. If successful, Connected Coast would bring two additional landing sites for sub-sea fibre to Mayne and Galiano Island, as well as last mile fibre to the home for the SGI communities.

TELUS has provided limited information about its proposal, however, have indicated the focus is on wireless and mobile technology. Nevertheless, TELUS proponents have also clarified the application will also be for “any other technology that will become available to enable to speeds of 50/10mbps or faster,” and the sample letter they provide uses very broad language. The funders have said the CRD can support multiple applications, however past experience with other grant programs raises a concern that there is low likelihood more than one application would be approved for the same region. CRD’s grant application guidelines discourage supporting multiple competing applications by the CRD to the same funding program. A strategic approach may be to only support one application.

CONCLUSION

The *Connecting SGI* Report demonstrates that connectivity is a fundamental necessity to enable the Southern Gulf Islands’ communities to diversify the demographic profile of the islands and achieve economic, social, and environmental sustainability into the future.

TELUS is requesting a letter of support from the CRD to make an application to the Federal UBF. The focus will be on upgrading equipment on existing cell towers to a N78 band (3.5 GHz 5G band) or any other technology that will become available to enable to speeds of 50/10mbps or faster.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Electoral Areas Committee recommend to the Capital Regional District Board:

1. That the Board approve a letter of support for the TELUS application to the Universal Broadband Fund to improve cellular service in the Southern Gulf Island and Salt Spring Island Electoral Areas.

Submitted by:	Justine Starke, MCIP, RPP, Manager, SGI Service Delivery, Corporate Services
Concurrence:	Kristen Morley, J.D., General Manager, Corporate Services & Corporate Officer
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Appendix A: Letter from Brian Gregg, agent for TELUS