



THUNDER ENTERPRISES

Mr. Tom Wheeler
Chairman and Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: WC Docket No. 14-116 (Chattanooga), Removal of State Barriers to Municipal Broadband

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

My name is John Thornton and I am a residential developer with projects over the country from the Crescent H Ranch in Jackson Hole, WY to homes in Kukio on the Big Island of Hawaii. I was born and raised in east Tennessee, that is where my heart is and I have raised my five children in Chattanooga, TN. Currently, I'm developing a 9,000 acre mountaintop residential development called [Jasper Highlands](#) located in Marion County, TN. I've never been more excited about a project in my entire career as a developer. The project's proximity next to Interstate 24 is terrific being just 25 minutes away from the greatest mid-size city in America, Chattanooga. While the odometer might read 25 miles from our project to downtown Chattanooga, in terms of opportunity and growth these two areas are light years apart. Access to reliable and affordable hi speed internet is the primary reason why.

Admittedly, I initially began researching hi speed internet options for selfish reasons as I wanted to provide the property owners of Jasper Highlands the best internet speed available. The more I learned about the "broadband barriers" the more alarming the overall issue became. The first sign came when I reached out to AT&T and other well-known providers & received astronomical quotes being as high as \$1,300,000 in order to bring internet fiber to my mountaintop development. They admitted it's not worth their time and money to invest in our area.

I met with Joelle Phillips, President of AT&T, and their head lobbyist. They asked me to put 10% down (\$130,000) just for them to design the internet route up our mountain and be able to give us an exact quote for the work. Obviously, they were not interested in serving our area with their money but the problem surfaced when they didn't want anyone else to do it either. I learned this after contacting the Electric Power Board of Chattanooga about possibly getting them to be the provider in our Marion County development as I am a very satisfied customer of theirs at my Chattanooga home. More importantly, I have personally watched the mass influx of entrepreneurs that are taking EPB's hi speed internet infrastructure and starting new businesses while creating more jobs contributing to the continued economic growth of the city. Additionally, EPB's service has had an incredible impact on the Chattanooga area and the advantages it gives our local services, businesses, healthcare, and the asset it is to our educational system. After finding out that EPB cannot provide broadband internet service to retail customers outside its electrical footprint, I found myself in what I learned to be a common situation: *AT&T and other providers didn't want to help, but the preferred provider that could simply isn't allowed.* It is as if Marion County is a desert and Chattanooga has this massive reservoir of clear, clean water only 8 miles away. EPB is willing to share it but AT&T and the cable guys say no. The industry giants and their army of lobbyists make political contributions totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars; meanwhile, the consumers don't have nearly as organized or as powerful of a voice nor the budget.

On literally a daily basis, I have the unique position of getting to witness first-hand the phenomenal impact and opportunity that EPB's gigabit internet service provides the Chattanooga area, yet as I get in my car to head to our office in Marion County, I drive into a digital desert in less than half an hour. Even our office (where I have a \$2,000,000/year payroll) has horrible internet service. If I could move our mountain and office to a location that was within EPB's footprint, I would do it in a heartbeat, but we're held hostage due to the current legislation.



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Marion County is a rural area with very little growth & I have personally invested over \$15,000,000 in our Jasper Highlands project that will eventually have around 2,000+/- homesites. We've already made a tremendous impact on the local economy from tax revenue, commercial shopping, restaurants, and job growth. Our residential development attracts pre-retirees and retirees from all over the country and many times the first question these customers ask us when they get to our property has nothing to do with the price of a homesite, what it costs to build, amenities, etc. but rather, "What kind of internet will be available?" We have several property owners who are able to work from home and can live wherever they choose. They are anxious to sell their home in Florida and other parts of the country so they can build and live in Jasper Highlands/Marion County but they will not make the move until there's adequate internet speed on the mountain.

The issue and benefits of affordable hi speed internet is so much bigger than the potential success of our development. I have been introduced and am well aware of the enormous disadvantages these rural counties are put at due to lack of quality internet capability. It's like putting a high school junior varsity football team against the Denver Broncos and expecting them to compete; it's just not going to happen and never will if the playing field isn't leveled out. Today, in 2014, hi speed affordable internet is the same as rural electrification was for our state in the early 20th century. If Marion County had access to EPB's gigabit internet service it would be an absolute bonanza for this county. Many of the County Commissioners and the local leadership have already voiced their support and enthusiasm for expanding EPB's fiber internet throughout the rural county. Furthermore, the local utility provider Sequatchie Valley Electric Coop (SVEC) has shared in this support, as well.

There's no question that cities and counties should have the right to choose at the local level to make this available to their citizens. This will spur economic growth, enhance competition, and improve services and education. Lifting these broadband restrictions is simply a no brainer, and everyone knows it, even if the opposition refuses to admit it.

I'm a Republican. Traditionally, I don't like the federal government imposing mandates or telling states or local government what they can and can't do, however, the federal government has done some great things that bleed over from one state to another such as: 1.) Our interstate transportation system and 2.) The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) providing affordable energy, jobs, and flood control to multiple states. Hi speed internet is one of these critical components to living in the United States in 2014.

For the good of rural Americans everywhere I will conclude by quoting a great American, "Mr. Chairman, tear down this wall."

Sincerely,

John "Thunder" Thornton