
INTERNET FOR ALL

Finding of No Significant Impact

*Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania
(42-08-I2213)*



U.S. Department of Commerce
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

Finding of No Significant Impact

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

Broadband Infrastructure Program

Rural Broadband Infrastructure Expansion in the Alleghenies:
Shade Gap Tower Collocation and Shade Mountain Tower (Section 2)

Overview

Per the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA; 42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.) and its implementing regulations (40 C.F.R. §§ 1500-1508), this document serves as the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the following proposed project awarded by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). NTIA has completed the sufficiency review of the recipient's Environmental Assessment (EA) and has determined that the proposed project will not have a significant impact on the environment. The FONSI contains information related to the review.

Recipient Name:	Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania
Grant Project Name:	Rural Broadband Infrastructure Expansion in the Alleghenies (Section 2)
Grant Award No.	42-08-I2213
Program Location:	Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania

The NTIA awarded a grant to Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, through the Broadband Infrastructure Program (BIP), as authorized by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Division N, Title IX, Section 905(d), Public Law 116-260, 134 Stat. 1182 (Dec. 27, 2020) (Act). BIP provides new federal funding for the Assistant Secretary to make grants on a competitive basis for the deployment of broadband infrastructure. The Act authorizes grants to covered partnerships for covered broadband projects, defined as competitively and technologically neutral projects for the deployment of fixed broadband service that provides qualifying broadband service in an eligible service area. Section 2 of the Rural Broadband Infrastructure Expansion in the Alleghenies and proposed activities are scheduled to occur in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania completed an EA for this proposed project in November 2023. NTIA reviewed the EA, determined it was sufficient, and adopted it as part of the development of this FONSI. Based on a review of the analysis in the EA, NTIA has determined that the proposed project, implemented in accordance with the preferred alternative, and incorporating best management practices (BMPs) and protective measures identified in the EA, will not result in any significant environmental impacts. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. The basis for this determination is described in this FONSI.

Additional information and copies of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public through the NTIA website (<https://broadbandusa.ntia.gov/reporting/EA-shade-gap-shade-mountain>) and the following contact:

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Purpose and Need

The purpose of the project is to deploy Internet to underserved populations of Huntingdon County and the action is needed due to insufficient access to broadband. On November 15, 2021, President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act into law, which included a significant investment of \$65 billion to help close the digital divide and ensure that all Americans have access to reliable, high speed, and affordable broadband. According to NTIA, the purpose of the Act is to lay critical groundwork for widespread access and affordability of broadband, creating new jobs and economic opportunities, providing increased access to healthcare services, enriching educational experiences of students, and improving overall quality of life for all Americans. According to the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA), broadband connectivity:

- Fosters economic growth and innovation;
- Provides the critical infrastructure for the future;
- Grow workforce development and educational achievement opportunities;
- Provides adequate, reliable emergency services; and
- Enhances community health, well-being, access to health care services, and quality of life.

Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the BIP program's purpose is to use grant funding to expand broadband access to unserved/underserved areas of the Country. Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania has been identified as having a significant deficiency of broadband coverage. This installation will improve wireless communications and connectivity coverage in the immediate vicinity of Shade Mountain tower as well as improve the coverage to areas of the county that currently do not have access. By providing this coverage, Huntingdon County, its businesses, citizens, and students will receive the high level of access consistent with larger urban areas. The project will provide much-needed wireless communications and connectivity coverage to public institutions and create opportunities for broadband connections to both businesses and households in this underserved region of Pennsylvania. By providing wireless communications and connectivity coverage, the project is expected to facilitate rural economic development, job creation, education, and improve access to health care and emergency services.

The larger overall proposed broadband grant will deploy fixed wireless broadband service across 31 communications towers providing highspeed broadband Internet to the proposed service area comprised of 977 census blocks in the Pennsylvania counties of Huntingdon, Fulton, Bedford, Franklin, Perry, and Mifflin. This proposed action addresses the second component of the total project and comprises two communication tower locations: the Shade Gap tower collocation and the proposed Shade Mountain tower, both located in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania. The proposed communication facilities will improve cellular connectivity and the overall project will provide much-needed high-speed Internet connectivity to public institutions and create opportunities for broadband connections to both businesses and households in these rural areas



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of Huntingdon County. By providing high-speed connectivity, the project is expected to facilitate rural economic development, job creation, education, and improve access to health care and emergency services.

Project Description & Analysis of Alternatives

The EA includes an analysis of the alternatives for implementing the proposed project to meet the purpose and need. NTIA conducted a review of the recipient’s analysis of alternatives for implementing the proposed project to meet the purpose and need, including a review of the “no action” alternative, where applicable. Each alternative was evaluated for impacts against the no action alternative and impacts from other alternatives, as a component of selecting the preferred alternative. The following summarizes the alternatives analyzed in the EA.

- **Proposed Action Alternative:** The collocation/modification of Shade Gap Tower and the construction of Shade Mountain Tower and associated compound/equipment.
- **Fiber to the Premise - Underground Cable:** The consideration of using buried fiber-optic cable as a viable technology for project implementation presented significant readily apparent barriers that eliminated the technology from further discussion.
- **Fiber to the Premise - Aerial Cable:** The covered partnership would enter into a joint pole agreement with existing utility providers in order to acquire necessary access to attach fiber optic cabling to existing utility pole infrastructures.
- **No Action Alternative:** No collocation/modification of Shade Gap Tower and no construction of Shade Mountain Tower; broadband coverage in certain areas of Huntingdon County would remain underserved.

While all four alternatives were considered, the Proposed Action Alternative is being proposed for comprehensive analysis and final design because it would have fewer infrastructure constraints, less environmental impact, lower cost, and fulfill the requirements of the grant.

Findings and Conclusions

The EA analyzed existing conditions and environmental consequences of the preferred alternative and the no action alternative for potential impacts in the major resource areas of Noise, Air Quality (including greenhouse gases [GHGs]), Geology and Soils, Water Resources, Biological Resources, Historic and Cultural Resources, Aesthetic and Visual Resources, Land Use, Infrastructure, Socioeconomic Resources (including environmental justice [EJ]), and Human Health and Safety. The results of the analysis are summarized in the table below:

Resource Area	Preferred Alternative	No Action Alternative
Noise	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Air Quality (including GHGs)	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Geology and Soils	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Water Resources	No Impact with BMPs and Protective Measures Incorporated	No Impact
Biological Resources	Less than Significant Impacts with BMPs and Protective Measures Incorporated	No Impact

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Historic and Cultural Resources	No Impact	No Impact
Aesthetic and Visual Resources	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Land Use	Less than Significant Impact	No Impact
Infrastructure	Beneficial Impact	Less than Significant Impact
Socioeconomic Resources (including EJ)	Beneficial Impact	Significant Impact
Human Health and Safety	Beneficial Impact	Less than Significant Impact

The sections that follow provide a brief narrative for those resource areas or aspects of those resource areas where there has been a potential impact indicated in the table above, provide a summary of the results of required consultation with appropriate agency or agencies, or other considerations of note. The sections below are not meant to provide a complete summary of the analysis performed for an entire resource area but instead a discussion of specific points of interest/consideration.

Biological Resources

Preferred Alternative: A Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) environmental review was completed for the project. The environmental review tool is utilized to coordinate concurrent project reviews with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Review of the Shade Gap tower collocation indicated no environmental concerns with any agencies and no further consultation was required for the proposed collocation. As a mitigation measure, it should be confirmed that there are no active nests on the tower prior to collocation activities, to ensure the protection of migratory birds during project implementation.

The PFBC requested a survey for the Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*, Species of Special Concern) for the Shade Mountain tower site. The surveys confirmed the presence of dens in the vicinity of the tower site and a snake was observed crossing the project’s limits of disturbance and access road. To avoid impacts to the rattlesnake, the PFBC requested that the grantee construct a temporary fence around the construction site to reduce the access of snakes prior to October 15th. After October 15, the area will be assumed to be free of snakes and ground disturbing activities may proceed without a monitor. The PFBC included additional recommendations and BMPs, which are further outlined in Sections 5.5 and 6.0 of the EA. Additionally, preconstruction nesting surveys should be completed for any construction occurring during a migratory bird nesting window. Less than significant impacts to biological resources are anticipated as long as required mitigation measures are followed during project implementation.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would not deploy the proposed project, and the biological resources present within the proposed project area would not be impacted. It is assumed that the overall benefits afforded under the Preferred Alternative by adding high-speed broadband service would not be realized.

Infrastructure

Preferred Alternative: Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania residences, businesses, and government buildings are currently operating without adequate bandwidth for everyday

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necessities in the 21st century. It is important that these citizens be able to communicate and interact effectively for purposes of economic development, government services, education, health, and for the general welfare of its people. The proposed project is anticipated to provide citizens in rural Huntingdon County, who are currently underserved, with access to high-speed broadband. The proposed project would provide a beneficial infrastructure impact to Huntingdon County.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would not deploy the proposed project, and the proposed area served by the project would continue to rely on the existing broadband options for its underserved communities. Although some portions of the area have broadband services available, it is assumed that the benefits afforded under the Preferred Alternative by adding high-speed broadband service would not be realized.

Socioeconomic Resources

Preferred Alternative: Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania is a predominantly rural community of Pennsylvania. Providing high-speed broadband service will boost economic development, improve government services, facilitate educational opportunities, and provide higher quality health care options throughout the community. The proposed project is anticipated to have a beneficial impact on the occupants of this rural area, who have previously lacked access to high-speed broadband that is available in more urban areas.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would not deploy the proposed project, and the proposed area served by the project would continue to rely on the existing broadband options for its underserved communities. Without the improved broadband infrastructure of the proposed project, it is assumed that the broadband infrastructure and service would continue as it currently exists, and the benefits afforded under the Preferred Alternative would not be realized. The No Action Alternative would provide a significant, long-term socioeconomic impact to the area if it would continue to be underserved for high-speed broadband service.

Health and Human Safety

Preferred Alternative: One of the purposes of the grant program is to provide new federal funding for grants that promote the use of broadband to access telehealth resources. Providing gigabit broadband service will provide higher quality health care options throughout the community. The Preferred Alternative would provide a beneficial health and human safety impact to the proposed area served by the project.

No Action Alternative: The No Action Alternative would not deploy the proposed project, and the proposed area served by the project would continue to rely on the existing broadband options for its underserved communities. Although some portions of the area have healthcare services available, it is assumed that the benefits afforded under the Preferred Alternative by adding high-speed broadband service would not be realized.

Cumulative Impacts

As in other places across the country, the design of infrastructure, residential developments, and settlement patterns all contribute to the relative health and wellness of the proposed area served by the project. The Huntingdon County Commissioners adopted the Huntingdon County

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Comprehensive Plan Update that has been published as part of the plan titled "Alleghenies Ahead: Shared Strategies for a Stronger Region" on July 3, 2018. Alleghenies Ahead is a "collaborative effort to develop and implement strategies that will increase the region's chances to create jobs, increase the region's capacity to compete for households who have choices, and become a region of stronger and more vital communities." Based on a review of these plans, the proposed action fits within the broader goals of the community through providing gaps of broadband and Internet coverage that will allow for economic development, job creation, and education opportunities. Additionally, the work will be performed in compliance with Huntingdon County's planning and zoning requirements. Additionally, the construction impacts associated with the proposed project would be minimal and localized in scale and would not interfere with larger ways of life or construction projects. In the cases where other construction projects exist in the same area, the minor construction impacts resulting from the proposed project installation would not increase the overall construction impacts into a level of significance. The causal impacts of the tower installation would be improved broadband coverage to the underserved populations of this area. Long-term beneficial impacts of the coverage include improved access to education, health care, and emergency services. Improved access will also facilitate economic growth and provide more opportunities for the citizens of the area.

Public Comment

NTIA conducted a public comment period for the EA. Public notice was placed in The Daily News, a newspaper of general circulation in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, on December 16, 2023. The notice of the proposal and EA was also posted on NTIA's website for national exposure. The notice described the proposed project and comment process and provided guidance on where to view the document and federal points of contact. The comment period started on December 13, 2023, and ended on January 12, 2024. No comments were received by NTIA.

Other Local, State, Tribal, or Federal Permits/Approvals

The grantee and its contractor(s) shall comply with all applicable environmental and historic preservation laws and regulations addressed as part of the NEPA review as well as those outside of it (collectively, "Environmental Requirements"). Environmental Requirements include, without limitation, any statute, law, act, ordinance, rule, regulation, order, decree, permit, or ruling of any federal, State, local, and/or tribal government, or administrative regulatory body, agency, board, or commission or a judicial body, regulating and/or restricting impacts to and/or protection of human health, the environment, and/or historic preservation. The grantee or its contractor(s) shall be the party of record for all permits and/or approvals related to deploying, operating, and maintaining the proposed project and shall be solely responsible for obtaining any new or revised permits and/or approvals needed to deploy, operate, and maintain the proposed project.

Decision

NTIA concludes that constructing and operating the proposed project, as defined by the Preferred Alternative, identified BMPs, and protective measures, will not require additional mitigation. A separate mitigation plan is not required for the proposed project. The analyses indicate that the proposed project is a major federal action that will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. NTIA has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.



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This NEPA Determination was made based on the proposed project information provided by the grantee and its contractor(s). Material misrepresentation of fact upon which NTIA relies when making this determination could affect the execution of an award and/or the pursuance of other remedies. If any information was excluded or misrepresented, or the proposed project changes materially, NTIA and all other permitting/approval agencies should be notified immediately.

Issued on January 30, 2024, by:

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