

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Progress Check: RDOF Broadband Projects Taking Shape, Questions Remain

Broadband providers winning a portion of the \$9.2 billion doled out in Phase 1 of the FCC's Rural Digital Opportunities Fund (RDOF) auction have years to complete those projects, but work is already getting underway.

**Charter**, the auction's largest winner with \$1.2 billion in support, started outlining some of its plans this week. The projects include buildouts in Alabama's Greene and Hale counties, part of the state's Black Belt region and an area the University of Alabama Education Policy Center recently found to be "markedly behind the rest of the state when it comes to internet access." Today, less than 1% of Greene County's more than 8,000 residents have access to high-speed broadband, with Charter's investment estimated to bring internet to an additional 1,318 homes and small businesses. All told, Charter plans to invest more than \$226 million in Alabama, which includes \$175 million in private investment and more than \$51 million in RDOF funds.

Other projects on Charter's RDOF roadmap include serving portions of the Qualla Boundary in NC, home to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and connecting an additional 80,000 homes and small businesses across 28 underserved Appalachian counties. One of Charter's biggest investments is Texas, where it expects to spend at least \$400 million in private investment along with more than \$186 million in RDOF funds. A priority will be Deep East Texas, where nearly half of the region's residents have download speeds of 10Mbps or less, according to the Deep East Texas

Council of Governments.

**Charter** CEO *Tom Rutledge* recently met with FCC acting chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel via teleconference to push for adopting reforms to pole attachment rules to help bring broadband to unserved areas. Specifically, he is calling for the FCC to adopt a fair allocation of the costs of replacing utility poles to accommodate new attachments and to take steps to ensure prompt resolution of pole attachment disputes that could otherwise delay deployment.

**SpaceX** has faced heavy criticism over whether its nascent **Starlink** satellite broadband service will be able to deliver promised speeds to the 640,000 locations it was awarded along with nearly \$900 million in RDOF support. SpaceX swatted back this week at **DISH**'s opposition to Starlink's petition for designation as an Eligible Telecommunication Carrier (ETC), saying it ignores the FCC's clear decision to permit applicants in Phase 1 to rely on spectrum in the 12.2-12.7 GHz band to meet RDOF obligations. "This facially spurious filing is only the latest example of DISH's abuse of Commission resources in its misguided effort to expropriate the 12 GHz band. The Commission should reject DISH's opposition as a baseless attempt to obstruct the ETC and RDOF processes, the result of which would serve only to delay what matters most—connecting unserved Americans."

A provider must be deemed an ETC in order to receive funding support for RDOF, and we're seeing a few auction winners work on that process now. **Shentel** petitioned the FCC this week to declare it an ETC after West Virginia's Public Service Commission determined it lacked jurisdiction to do so because Shentel provides



## Who Deserves to Rank Among Cablefax's Annual Top Power Players?

The Cablefax 100 salutes the most influential executives whose leadership continues to take the industry to new heights. We will rank the top professionals in the media, cable & broadband industry and publish the list in the June edition of Cablefax: The Magazine.

**It's free to enter - but you must submit your entries by April 9!**



Enter at [www.Cablefax100.com](http://www.Cablefax100.com) | Questions: Mary-Lou French at [mfrench@accessintel.com](mailto:mfrench@accessintel.com)

VoIP service in the state.

Other such procedural requests are trickling into the Commission. For example, Texas-based **One Ring Networks**, which was awarded RDOF support for 75 census block groups in California, Georgia and Maryland, wants a waiver of the Feb 15 deadline for providing a commitment letter of credit. One Ring said the extreme snow and ice that hit Texas last month brought rolling power outages that closed its bank for days, delaying the letter.

Meanwhile, there continue to be calls from members of Congress and associations such as USTelecom to closely scrutinize RDOF Phase 1 winners' long-form applications to ensure that providers have the technical, financial and managerial skills to deliver the service they have pledged. [A new group seeking close FCC inspection](#) appeared on the scene last week, calling itself "**The Ensuring RDOF Integrity Coalition**." Details of who comprises the coalition are sparse, with the group saying it is made up of "rural broadband providers" that have a long history of service and are members of groups such as **NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association** and the **Competitive Carrier Association**. That promoted the Competitive Carrier Association to speak up and clarify that it is not a party to the coalition's request, doesn't endorse it and wasn't consulted prior to its name being used.

Auction watchers expect RDOF Phase 1 winners to be confirmed and funding released by the end of 2Q or in early 3Q. The FCC won't decide how to proceed with Phase 2 until it's finished this process.

#### SEC FILES COMPLAINT AGAINST AT&T

The **SEC** on Friday accused **AT&T** and three of its IR execs with selectively disclosing material nonpublic information to research analysts. AT&T disputes the allegations. According to the com-

plaint, AT&T learned in March 2016 that a steeper-than-expected decline in its 1Q smartphone sales would cause AT&T's revenue to fall short of analysts' estimates. The complaint alleges that to avoid falling short of the consensus revenue estimate for the third consecutive quarter, AT&T IR execs *Christopher Womack*, *Michael Black* and *Kent Evans* made private calls to analysts at approximately 20 separate firms, disclosing internal sales data that resulted in the analysts substantially reducing their revenue forecasts. "Tellingly, after spending four years investigating this matter, the SEC does not cite a single witness involved in any of these analyst calls who believes that material nonpublic info was conveyed to them," AT&T said.

#### BROADBAND LABELS LEGISLATION REVIVED

Rep *Angie Craig* (D-MN) introduced legislation Thursday that would provide consumers with transparent information on broadband services available in their area. The Broadband Consumer Transparency Act of 2021 would require sellers of those services to display information in a uniform and clear manner at the point of sale to allow consumers to easily compare plans and understand their purchase. The **FCC** and the **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau** rolled out a label in 2016 that standardized the information meaningful to consumers as they compared plans, but was not continued under the *Trump* administration. The concept also passed the House last year during consideration of a broader infrastructure package.

#### BACK ON THE IN-PERSON CONFERENCE CIRCUIT

The **Fiber Broadband Association** will hold its annual Fiber Connect Conference July 25-28 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center in Nashville. The event was previously scheduled

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## American Red Cross

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to be held in June in Dallas, but was moved to make it more accessible for attendees to adhere to modified corporate travel protocols during the pandemic. FBA pres/CEO Gary Bolton said the event will allow those in the fiber industry to discuss the impact of the FCC's RDOF auction and celebrate the association's 20th anniversary.

**DISTRIBUTION**

AVOD **Plex** added six **AMC Network** channels to its Live TV service. Viewers in the US can now enjoy AMC Presents, Absolute Reality by WE TV, All Weddings by WE TV, Rush by AMC, Slightly Off by IFC and IFC Films Picks.

**PROGRAMMING**

**FX's** "Pose" will premiere its third and final season on May 2 at 10pm with two back-to-back episodes to start its seven-episode run. The series finale will air June 6. – **HBO Max** will premiere the new animated special, "The Runaway Bunny," on March 25. The special will be based on the children's book of the same name by Margaret Wise Brown. – **Food Network** will premiere series "Chef Boot Camp" on April 8.

**RATINGS**

**YES's** Blue Jays-Yankees telecast Feb 28 marked its second-most-viewed spring training telecast ever at 200,000 viewers, according to **Nielsen**. It is surpassed only by its March 2018 Mets-Yankees telecast with 242,000 total viewers.

**PEOPLE**

**CSG** tapped Patricia Elias as chief people and places officer. She most recently served as chief legal & people officer for **ServiceSource International**. – **Scripps** appointed former **FilmStruck** chief Richard Steiner as head of digital for its national television networks business, effective immediately.

**CABLEFAX DASHBOARD**

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**Research**

- > Americans received just over 4.6 billion robocalls in February, a 15.1% increase over January.
- > The total for February 2021 is the highest monthly robocall volume since February 2020, right before the pandemic.
- > Scam and telemarketing calls accounted for roughly 60% of the month's total robocall volume, exceeding 2.8 billion total calls.
- > Robocalls are on pace to reach 51 billion for 2021.

(Source: [YouMail Robocall Index](#))

**Up Ahead**

**MARCH 8: STRONG WOMEN ALLIANCE "STRONG WOMEN LEAD" PANEL**

**MARCH 16-20: SXSW 2021 ONLINE**

**MARCH 19: THE FAXIES ENTRY DEADLINE**

**APRIL 9: CABLEFAX 100 NOMINATION DEADLINE**

**MAY 13: WICT ROCKY MOUNTAIN VIRTUAL WALK OF FAME**

**Quotable**

*"We've come out of the pandemic having proved the thesis around the business as we formed it a couple of years ago. One of the things we talked about was that we would achieve a billion dollars in retransmission revenue by 2022. We're absolutely on track to achieve that, even in light of a pandemic and subscriber declines at the rate they're declining. We are starting to see them ameliorate by the way... It was a good year not to own movie studios and theme parks and things. And we're coming out of the pandemic much stronger for it."*

– Lachlan Murdoch, CEO of Fox Corp, speaking at Morgan Stanley Technology, Media & Telecom Conference



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