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Brock Carlton  
Ottawa, ON

10, rue Rideau Street,  
Ottawa, Ontario

**Mailing address/  
adresse postale**

24, rue Clarence Street,  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 5P3

T. 613-241-5221  
F. 613-241-7440

[www.fcm.ca](http://www.fcm.ca)

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Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology  
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A6

**M-208, Rural Digital Infrastructure**

Dear Committee Members,

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) welcomes this opportunity to bring Canada's municipal voice to your study of Private Members' Motion 208, on rural digital infrastructure. Thank you to the Member of Parliament for Pontiac for this motion and his commitment to this key rural priority.

In today's Canada, fast and reliable broadband Internet access is an essential service that should be available to everyone, no matter where they live. Many rural, remote and northern communities struggle to maintain public services and attract and retain businesses and a skilled workforce. This directly impacts the next generation of rural, remote and northern residents.

FCM supports the intent of M-208 to deem reliable, accessible and affordable digital infrastructure an essential service. This would enable rural communities to seize new business opportunities, create jobs and connect with the global economy. It would also be key to public safety and emergency response. FCM supports federal initiatives to encourage further investments in rural digital infrastructure and believes that fostering connectivity is essential to prosperity and growth for communities across the country.

FCM has consistently advocated for the federal government to take a leadership role and develop an ambitious national broadband strategy with clear timelines and long-term, predictable funding. Budget 2019 made significant commitments to funding broadband infrastructure for rural, remote and northern communities—including \$1.7B for a new Broadband Fund over 13 years, and \$1B through the Canada Infrastructure Bank, which is expected to generate an additional \$2B from the private sector.

FCM welcomes these commitments, which are expected to build on the \$500 million *Connect to Innovate* program and the Canadian Radio and Television Corporation's (CRTC) \$750 million *Broadband Fund*, with the objective of bringing service to some of the hardest-to-reach areas. With funding committed, FCM will be working to see these commitments transformed into real outcomes.

Section (d)(ii) of M-208 recommends that, "the government examine the possibility of enabling further investments in rural digital infrastructure, including by reviewing the



terms and conditions of the federal infrastructure program *Investing in Canada*.” FCM welcomed the \$2B rural and northern stream of the *Investing in Canada* infrastructure program, and some communities have taken advantage of the eligibility of broadband projects through this fund. However, it is essential that the *Investing in Canada* infrastructure program supports local priorities.

FCM has supported municipalities as eligible recipients of federal funding for broadband through various funding programs, and in some cases municipalities have taken the initiative to build digital infrastructure or provide services. However, in many cases, it is not possible for municipalities to take on this role, and it is important that funding for broadband remain a priority supported by distinct federal funding programs, such as Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada’s *Connect to Innovate* program.

The *Investing in Canada* infrastructure plan should remain available for other equally important rural and northern municipal priorities, such as roads and bridges. To reiterate, the use of the rural and northern stream for broadband development should not preclude the rollout of other core local infrastructure needs and should be driven by local priorities.

As the federal government develops its Canadian Broadband Strategy in partnership with the provinces and territories, it is important for the needs of local governments to be considered, through consultation and engagement. Part of this strategy must include clear standards and timelines to achieve the CRTC’s speed targets for fixed broadband (50/10 Mbps download/upload), and a new target for rural mobile access. The federal government must re-evaluate targets for fixed and mobile broadband on a regular basis to ensure rural communities do not fall behind. Furthermore, municipalities must be engaged in the design of the new federal broadband fund in order to ensure that eligibility criteria and application processes meet the needs of rural, remote and northern communities.

As raised in M-208, wireless telecommunications infrastructure plays a critical role in securing the health and safety of Canadians, particularly during emergency events. FCM has called on the federal government to support Canada’s Public Safety Broadband Network (PSBN), a secure and dedicated high-speed wireless data communications network that provides enhanced, interoperable communications between jurisdictions and public safety agencies.

FCM encourages the federal government to ensure consistent security, coverage, and quality of service across different regions, in order to ensure that the PSBN can facilitate interoperable communications across multiple agencies and jurisdictions. This would make sure that the technology employed ensures redundancy to reduce the likelihood of service disruptions during critical incidents. For the public safety dimension of wireless services, as well as to encourage deployment of broadband services in rural areas, FCM encourages the federal government to make available necessary spectrum for rural and remote communities to access wireless broadband, and moving forward, 5G wireless technology.

In respect to the regulatory role of the CRTC, as the Minister of Rural Economic Development is mandated to increase high-speed broadband coverage and to foster a strong investment environment for telecommunications services in rural communities. FCM continues to support the federal government in leading the development of a

national strategy, policy setting and ongoing reporting on progress toward mandated standards. Policy and programs should enable a faster roll-out of mobile networks in rural areas. Given the CRTC's role as an administrative tribunal that regulates and supervises telecommunications in the public interest, FCM believes it should remain responsible for technical data and needs assessments. In addition, the CRTC should also develop a more robust annual communications monitoring report, including metrics beyond speed, as well as convening key user groups to discuss the needs and challenges of broadband expansion to rural, remote and northern areas.

### ***Conclusion***

Thank you for this opportunity to share the municipal perspective on M-208 and our recommendations for universal broadband with the Committee. FCM looks forward to working with you to close the broadband gap. If you have any questions or would like to discuss FCM's recommendations further, please contact Nicole Christy, Government Relations Advisor, at [nchristy@fcm.ca](mailto:nchristy@fcm.ca) or 613-907-6378.

Sincerely,

Bill Karsten  
Councillor, Halifax Regional Municipality  
FCM President

CC: The Hon. Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Rural Economic Development