



Asa Hutchinson  
GOVERNOR

Michael Preston  
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

September 8, 2021

Mr. Larry W. Walther  
Secretary, Department of Finance and Administration  
1509 W. 7<sup>TH</sup> St., Ste. 401  
Little Rock, AR 72201-3933

Dear Secretary Walther:

The American Rescue Plan of 2021 (ARP) was adopted by Congress earlier this year and provides significant federal funding to states through various programs. One of the priorities articulated by the Treasury is for projects that increase broadband connectivity within the states.

Presently, the Arkansas Department of Commerce Broadband Office oversees the Arkansas Rural Connect (ARC) program, including oversight of incoming federal grants to facilitate the deployment of high-speed broadband service to rural communities across Arkansas. In SFY 2021, 76 ARC grant awards were awarded totaling \$118,102,000. To date for SFY 2022, \$30,703,422 of ARP grant funding has been awarded and an additional \$147,200,000 will soon be provided for "shovel ready" projects. To provide ARC project management assistance, \$2,500,000 has been budgeted for professional consulting fees.

The executive and legislative branches agree that a comprehensive master plan for statewide broadband implementation would be worthwhile and help us achieve our mutual goal of increased connectivity within Arkansas. The Department of Commerce respectfully requests \$4,000,000 in ARP funding to hire a consultant for this plan. The scope of work is attached as reference. Upon committee approval, the department will seek the necessary review and approval by the Arkansas Legislative Council.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael Preston". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue circular background.

Michael Preston  
Secretary

## **Scope of Work for Comprehensive Master Plan for Statewide Broadband Implementation**

The Arkansas Department of Commerce, in collaboration with the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration (DFA), and the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism (ADPHT), has been tasked with obtaining a broadband consulting firm to formulate a comprehensive master plan for broadband implementation in the State of Arkansas.

- The statewide broadband master plan for the Arkansas Department of Commerce Broadband Office will provide short-term and long-term goals and strategies, including a proposed broadband implementation plan, with the result being increased connectivity across Arkansas, especially in underserved areas and in rural communities
- The planned comprehensive report will also compile all assessment findings and recommendations into a single written statewide broadband master plan
- Report specifics include:
  - Data collection and analysis of current broadband availability by technology type
  - Recommendations for the deployment of broadband throughout the State of Arkansas that includes analysis of current efforts in the public and private sectors, including current broadband programs, the Arkansas Rural Connect program, the Rural Broadband ID program, the Rural Opportunity Fund, USDA's ReConnect program, and others
  - Detailed technology, equipment type, staffing and program administration recommendations, and a proposed community outreach plan that could be utilized in the deployment of broadband
  - Recommendations to increase affordability of internet service for citizens and guidance on a reasonable timeline for deployment
  - Recommendations that can be implemented and funded with the use of federal funds from the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and any future federal funds dedicated to national infrastructure investment