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A Lancaster city official recommended Tuesday that City Council authorize lending \$1.5 million to the company building LanCity Connect, the city's broadband network, in order to help it roll out the service to city residents. Another \$1.5 million would underwrite residents' upfront cost of connecting, which the city would recoup over time through a surcharge.

The network will be a big boost to the city, director of administrative services Patrick Hopkins told council members at their Tuesday committee meeting. So far, the city has spent more than \$1.7 million on the network, which is being built by Reading-based MAW Communications.

The city plans to use it for remote water meter reading, to serve the Lancaster Safety Coalition's security cameras, and other uses, and it was worth building for those purposes alone, Hopkins said. Almost all the money came from the city's water fund, because of the planned meter-reading use.

Now comes the rollout to city residents. Installation costs are high — residential fiber-optic connections cost about \$1,000 each. Without city financing, MAW would have to demand much higher prices than it has, limiting its potential market and the number of city residents who can benefit. By acting as "patient capital," subsidizing the initial costs and being willing to wait longer than private lenders would be paid back, the city can benefit itself and its residents in the long run, Hopkins said. "Lancaster makes it possible, MAW makes it happen," he said.

Under Hopkins' recommendation, MAW would receive a \$1.5 million loan to use as operating capital. An additional \$1.5 million would fund about 1,500 residential connections, roughly the number of city residences who have pre-registered for the service. The working capital loan would come from the city's general fund and the residential connection subsidy from the water fund, respectively, Hopkins said.

The loan would most likely be a one-time infusion. MAW would pay it back at 7 percent interest, benefiting taxpayers, Hopkins said. The subsidies for connection costs are expected to be ongoing. The money would come from funds the water fund saved through refinancing.

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[Allentown Morning Call Trump talks infrastructure money but offers few details sought by Pa. legislators](#)

The city would recoup the money with a 13 percent surcharge on LanCity Connect's rates, which would still be less than current broadband providers charge, Hopkins said. All the money would flow through a newly created special revenue fund dedicated to LanCity Connect. That will make it clear what the

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inflows and outflows are, creating financial transparency, Hopkins said.

City Councilwoman Barbara Wilson asked if MAW shared in the risk the city would be taking on with a loan. The terms of the loan agreement will ensure that's the case, Hopkins said. "The risk really is borne by both sides," MAW President Frank Wiczowski assured the council. Council would need to enact ordinances authorizing the fund transfers and a resolution to make the capital loan. Tuesday's discussion was preliminary, and further debate is expected at next month's council meetings. –

[lancasteronline.com](#); [see a map of LanCity Connect's planned broadband deployment in the city](#)

The Federal Communications Commission voted on Wednesday to halt part of an Obama-era set of privacy rules that would require internet service providers to get explicit consent before they share consumers' browsing data and other personal information with advertisers.

Some background: Those rules were [approved this past October](#) under previous FCC chairman Tom Wheeler, who [stepped down](#) once President Trump took office, giving new chairman Ajit Pai and GOP commissioner Michael O'Rielly a 2-1 majority at the agency.

The most famous sect of the rules is set to take effect later this year, and would require wireline and mobile ISPs like Comcast and AT&T to ensure customers opt-in to any programs that share their web browsing and app usage histories, mobile location data, financial data, and other "sensitive" info with third parties for marketing purposes. The rules would also require ISPs to give "clear, conspicuous, and persistent" notifications of what data they collect and how it may be used.

But like many of Wheeler's proposals, the privacy rules have faced intense opposition from ISPs and Republican officials, and are now in doubt under Pai's control. ISPs and advertisers have argued that introducing barriers to targeted ads could make it harder to provide certain free content, for one. Pai and O'Rielly voted against the rules in October. In [his dissent](#), Pai's main complaint was with what he saw as a double standard: He said that the order unfairly stuck ISPs with stricter rules than internet companies like Google, which are able to harvest and monetize personal data more freely under looser guidelines from the Federal Trade Commission.

Pai says ISPs should be subject to similar guidelines. "All actors in the online space should be subject to the same rules, enforced by the same agency," Pai and acting FTC chairwoman Maureen Olhausen said in a [joint statement](#) on Wednesday. However, it's worth noting that recent court decisions have effectively forbidden the FTC from enforcing "common carriers" — a designation that was applied to all ISPs as part of the most recent [net-neutrality rules](#), which reclassified the internet as

a public utility and allowed the FCC to regulate it as such. Pai has **long opposed** the 2015 Open Internet Order that set those rules in place, and earlier this week deemed the regulation a "mistake." He's also called for a more hands-off approach to ISP regulation in general.

Wheeler and consumer advocacy groups have argued that any difference in privacy regulation is fair on the grounds that ISPs are able to see everything a customer does over their internet connection, and that it's harder to switch internet providers than use different apps and websites. Either way, the privacy rules were enacted on a limited basis in January, while a provision that would generally require ISPs to "engage in reasonable data security practices" was set to go into legal effect on March 2.

Now, it will not. Last week, Pai called for an emergency vote to stay — i.e., halt further progress — on the consumer data security provision before it could go into effect. Pai said FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau would issue the stay regardless if no vote could take place. On Wednesday, the agency voted 2-1 along party lines to halt the provision, with Democratic commission Mignon Clyburn **strongly dissenting**.

From here, a further dismantling of the privacy rules appears to loom. "The Commission's stay will provide time for the FCC to work with the FTC to create a comprehensive and consistent framework for protecting Americans' online privacy," the FCC said in a statement announcing the stay. The agency said it plans to keep the data security provision suspended until it is able to "able to act on pending petitions for reconsideration."

That last part is notable: The stay here comes after several telecom, cable, and ad industry groups filed **petitions** to the FCC to halt the broader set of privacy rules last month. No vote on those has been scheduled yet, but with Pai and O'Rielly in control, it could lead to a rollback of the whole order. "[W]ith the new FCC, the ends justify the means," Clyburn said in her dissenting statement. "This [data security] Order is but a proxy for gutting the Commission's duly adopted privacy rules — and it does so with very little finesse."

Beyond the FCC, Republicans in Congress **are looking** to undo the regulation entirely through the **Congressional Review Act**, a mid-90s law that allows Congress to eliminate select rules from government agencies like the FCC with a simple majority vote. However, that law only gives Congress 60 days to pass such legislation after a given rule goes into effect.

What Pai has halted here doesn't erase the broader privacy rules as a whole, and doesn't mean Pai will ignore privacy protections completely. (He's previously **expressed** concerns over static IP addresses and other things that could be used to persistently track users online, for instance.) But it is **another symbol** of his **desire to dismantle** the regulations set by his predecessor, another likely sign of greater reversals to come, and another win for ISPs. — *Reuters*

When it comes to President Donald Trump's plan for infrastructure spending, local government officials want to be sure he includes support for broadband. Mayors and other local leaders from 62 communities sent a **letter** to Trump, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) on the importance of including broadband in any infrastructure plan.

The letter supports three broadband priorities: access, affordability and local solutions for connectivity. The signatories, which are members of the Next Century Cities -- an organization committed to improving affordable broadband internet access -- called for increasing last-mile and middle-mile fiber networks and supporting communities that are facilitating right-of-way access through policies that govern wiring on poles and underground.

The letter supports broadband competition as a way to increase affordability and advocates for a variety of local solutions including city-designed networks, public-private partnerships and multi-provider, open-access delivery as well as nonprofit models from telephone and electric co-ops. "This letter, signed by cities large and small, serves as a reminder to state and federal lawmakers that there is widespread, bipartisan support for the deployment of high-speed, reliable internet access." said Deb Socia, executive director of Next Century Cities.

Trump **again promised to invest \$1 trillion** in infrastructure during his Feb. 28 address to Congress, but offered no indication that he would include broadband in that plan. "Crumbling infrastructure will be replaced with new roads, bridges, tunnels, airports and railways gleaming across our beautiful land," the president said. — *gsn.com*

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