

No.: IT. 51/2020/21

Dated: Dispur the 27th October, 2020

**Minutes of the first meeting of the State Broadband Committee of Assam held on
29/09/2020 under the National Broadband Mission (NBM)**

The first meeting of the State Broadband Committee (SBC) of Assam was held on 29/09/2020 under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary to Assam Govt. at his office at Janata Bhawan, Assam Secretariat, Dispur, Guwahati. The meeting was attended by the following participants:

| SN | SBC members | |
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| 1 | Shri Kumar Sanjay Krishna, Chief Secretary, Assam Govt. | Chairman |
| 2 | Shri J B Prasad, Sr. DDG, DOT Assam | Member-convener |
| 3 | Shri Syedain Abbasi, Addl. Chief Secretary (IT), Assam Govt. | Member |
| 4 | Shri Niraj Verma, Pr. Secretary, Urban Development Department (UDD), Assam Govt. | Member |
| 5 | Shri Pankaj Das, State Head & Sr. GM, BBNL Assam | Special Invitee |
| 6 | Shri G Adam, GM (CFA), BSNL Assam (on behalf of the CGM) | Special Invitee |
| 7 | Shri T R Dua & Shri Avinash Vyas, TAIPA (through VC) | Special Invitee |
| 8 | Shri J Jena, COAI (through VC) | Special Invitee |
| Other participants | | |
| 9 | Shri P C Sutar, DDG (Rural-II), DOT Assam | |
| 10 | Shri K K Nath, Secretary (IT), Assam Govt. | |
| 11 | Shri Pradeep Kumar, Director (Rural-I), DOT Assam | |
| 12 | Shri Mukesh Kumar, Director (Rural-II), DOT Assam | |
| 13 | Shri Amit Kumar, ADET (Rural), DOT Assam | |
| 14 | Smt. Indrani Laskar Joint Secretary (IT), Assam Govt. | |
| 15 | Shri Adarsh Maheshwari, CAO, BSNL Assam | |

Background: The NBM was launched on 17th December 2019, with a vision of “affordable & universal access of broadband for all”. In line with the provisions in section 10 (implementation structure) of the Mission, the SBC was constituted vide Assam Govt.’s notification no. IT.62/2016/Pt.III/469 dated 07/08/2020 (enclosed at Annexure-1). As per the Mission, the committee has to meet every quarter. The Mission entrusts the SBC with the following broad functions:

- To advice, either suo-moto or on a request from the Governing Council or Steering Committee on the matters relating to the Mission concerning the State
- To facilitate the implementation of the guidelines issued by the Governing Council or Steering Committee
- To address all matters regarding Broadband Readiness Index (BRI)
- Monitoring and evaluation of the work of Mission pertaining to the State

The SBC is to be assisted by the district-level broadband monitoring committees in discharging its monitoring function as defined in the Mission document (section 13 (monitoring & evaluation) of the Mission document). These district-level broadband monitor committees would monitor the progress of the Mission within the respective districts on monthly basis and will submit a report to the SBC.

Meeting’s proceedings: Firstly, the Sr. DDG, DOT Assam & member-convener welcomed the chairman and the members of the SBC to the meeting. During his welcome address, he stated that there is a direct correlation between the growth of telecommunications and overall socio-economic development as well as the GDP. Particularly in the 21st century, telecommunication is playing a pivotal role in the growth of all sectors of the economy, e-governance, and delivery of public services. For effective and faster growth of telecom infrastructure, the role of state govt. is also of paramount importance, and it can play the role of pro-active facilitator within the state. Following the welcome address, the committee was taken through a presentation (by the DOT Assam) as per the agenda of the meeting (enclosed at Annexure-II). A very effective and constructive discussion took place amongst participants, a brief of which is provided below:

| S N | Agenda item | Discussion/deliberation and decisions | Action by |
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| 1 | NBM: Introduction , targets & timelines | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The committee was briefed about the Mission, its objectives, targets, timelines, its functions, etc. 2. The committee was informed that it has to decide the state & district level targets, to be aligned with the overall national target as envision in the Mission document. 3. The committee was further apprised about the need to set-up the district-level broadband monitoring committees as per section 13 of the Mission document. It was further informed that these committees would form the eyes & ears of the SBC and will enable SBC to discharge its monitoring function. While discussing the setting-up of the district-level committee, Pr. Secretary (UDD) suggested that the constitution of these committees can be decided by the SBC centrally and can be communicated to all districts. Addl. CS (IT) also expressed similar views and added that composition may be in line with the existing district telecom committee (DTC) except the member from the state’s Health Department may be replaced by the representatives from TSPs, at the district level. In principle, the above composition was agreed upon and soon it will be notified by the state govt. | State’s IT Department |

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| 2 | Pursuance of NBM's objectives in Assam | 1. State's NBM targets: The proposed state-level targets & timeline against NBM deliverables were discussed and agreed upon by the committee (enclosed at Annexure-III). | |
| | | 2. District-level targets: Regarding district-level targets, SBC decided that these targets can also be calculated in a manner similar to that of the state-level targets and can be circulated after the constitution of the district level monitoring committee. | DOT Assam & state's IT Department |
| | | 3. While discussing state-level targets, Addl. CS (IT) expressed that while the targets are being fixed by the SBC, they are to be achieved primarily through the telecom industry. However, SBC members were mostly unaware about the means and methods through which the state-level targets (set by the SBC) will be achieved, particularly, when 90% of the total funding of the Mission is envisioned from the industry. | |
| | | 4. Funding/ Waiving of RoW charges: Addl. CS (IT) informed the SBC that as far as state funding is concerned, he does not see any feasibility for funding from Assam Govt., however, waiving of RoW charges in backward/tribal/remote areas may be explored though as per his opinion it is going to be a very meagre amount. However, such a gesture by the state will send a positive signal to the telecom industry and may bring more investment. | State's IT Department |
| | | 5. Govt. land and buildings: Addl. CS (IT) stated that the state's RoW guidelines 2018 already allows for making available the govt. land and buildings for the installation of telecom infrastructure. He requested DOT Assam to make available a list of all such land & buildings where TSPs/IPs are willing/planning to erect towers. IT Department Assam Govt. will take up the case with concerned authority for granting the permission wherever feasible. | DOT Assam, TAIPA, COAI |

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| | | <p>6. EMF radiation concern: Chairman SBC expressed his concerns about the apprehensions prevailing in general public regarding the possible adverse effect of mobile radiation on human health and desired that DOT may create awareness on the issue amongst the general public. To this, Sr. DDG, DOT Assam informed the members that the radiation norms adopted by the Govt. of India are more stringent than the international norms and considered safest in the world. Additionally, the TSPs are required to submit a self-certificate (for every mobile antenna) regarding the compliance of radiation norms before making the antennas live. DOT regularly conducts random checks of the installed antenna against these norms. In case any non-compliance is observed hefty amount of penalty to the tune of Rs 10 Lakh per case is imposed on the erring TSPs. Further, DOT has also taken various steps to address the apprehensions of the general public like the creation of a knowledge-sharing portal 'Sanchar Tarang', an EMF portal to view the towers around any location with their compliance status, a facility for the public to get tested the desired location for EMF compliance (on paid basis), etc. DOT also organizes awareness workshops from time to time. Presently, this activity is on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> | |
| 3 | <p>Implementat ion issues of state's RoW guidelines 2018</p> | <p>1. State's online RoW portal: It was intimated to the committee that the soft/beta launch of the RoW online portal was done on 28th September 2020. The portal is under validation by all stakeholders.</p> | , |
| | | <p>2. Provision of deemed approval under state's RoW guideline: The section 9(2)(b) of the state's RoW guideline has the provision for deemed approval, provided the authority concern neither grant the permission nor reject the application within a stipulated time of 60 days. The chairman SBC, referring to this provision, pointed that there should not be an issue of the permission if application remained pending for 60 days. However, it was suggested that, in all such cases, the online RoW portal should auto generate a deemed approval certificate on 61st day from the date of application subject to the fulfillment of the deemed approval conditions given in the section 9(2)(b) of the state's RoW guideline.</p> | State's IT Department |
| | | <p>3. Forest clearance: As the state Forest Department has</p> | COAI/TAI |

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| | | <p>a separate portal for forest clearances, the RoW online portal would not form a single-window system in a true sense. To this, Addl. CS (IT) intimated the members that the IT department has already taken up the issue with the state Forest Department, however, the Forest Department does have some reservations on this. He inquired about the procedure being adopted in other states to resolve the issue and desired if some good examples can be made available to him, he may again take up the case with the Forest department. An example of Uttarakhand was cited from the industry side where a nodal officer has been nominated by the State Forest Department who works as a link between state govt. and the State Forest Department for RoW clearances. The committee felt the requirement of a similar arrangement in Assam to fast track RoW permissions.</p> | <p>PA to get a copy of the relevant order/policy of the concerned state govt. & share with DOT Assam</p> |
| | | <p>4. Shri J. Jena (COAI) intimated the committee that there is a provision in the Forest Act that if the permission for laying of road has been granted by the Forest Department to state PWD, then for laying of OFC along that road PWD is empowered to grant permission and permission of the Forest department may not be necessary. However, in the case of mobile towers on the land under the control of the Forest department, permission for the same needs to be obtained from the Forest department. Addl. CS (IT) enquired about the states which are following these provisions to which Sh. Jena cited examples of Odisha and Rajasthan.</p> | <p>COAI/TAI PA to get a copy of the relevant order/policy of the concerned state govt. & share with DOT Assam</p> |
| | | <p>5. Delay in USOF tower sites: As a consequence of the delay in forest clearances, it was also informed to the committee that 134 USOF sites (for covering uncovered villages) are now being proposed to be dropped by the implementing agency, M/s Bharti Airtel Ltd.</p> | |
| 4 | <p>Issues with tower erection (RoW and power-</p> | <p>1. District-wise pendency of RoW permission for tower erection was discussed in numbers. Around 6957 applications were shown pending for more than a year (complete district-wise and TSPs/IPs wise pending list is enclosed at Annexure-IV).</p> | <p>State's IT Department</p> |

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| | related issues) | <p>2. District-wise pendency of power connections to towers was also discussed in numbers. Around 1154 towers have electricity connections applied for (more than 6 months back) but connections yet to be provided (complete district-wise and TSPs/IPs wise pending list is enclosed at Annexure-V).</p> | State's Power Department |
| | | <p>3. Regarding pending power connections to mobile towers, Sh. Niraj Verma, Pr. Secretary (UDD), who is also in charge of the state's Power Department, assured to extend full cooperation from his department and intimated that he will issue suitable directions to all the field offices to clear all pendency & to provide power connections on priority to telecom infrastructure. He also desired that a monthly report of the pending cases should be made available to his office by DOT Assam for effective monitoring of the progress. This was agreed by Sr. DDG DOT Assam.</p> | State's Power Department, DOT Assam, TAIPA, COAI |
| 5 | BharatNet utilization & issues (under phase-I) | <p>1. FTTH & public Wi-Fi at GP-level: It was informed to the committee that to accelerate the utilization of BharatNet bandwidth the GoI has decided to provide FTTH to five govt. institutions at GP-level and one public Wi-Fi at GP-level (copy of the DO dated 14/02/2020 of Administrator USOF to CS Assam – enclosed at Annexure-VI).</p> <p>2. In this regard, CSC-SPV has identified govt. institutions at about 129 GPs in consultation with the local GP's office-bearers.</p> | |
| | | <p>3. It was informed to the committee that identification of the govt. institutions at GP-level is a critical & important step towards the FTTH provisioning at the premise of these institutions, and therefore, the process of identification should be formalized at the central-level and be done (as per the state govt.'s requirement) through the mutual agreement between the state govt. (IT Department Assam Govt.) and the CSC-SPV (for technical feasibility). The identified and agreed list of institutions at GPs may be shared by the state in the next SBC meeting.</p> | State's IT Department and BBNL/CSC-SPV |

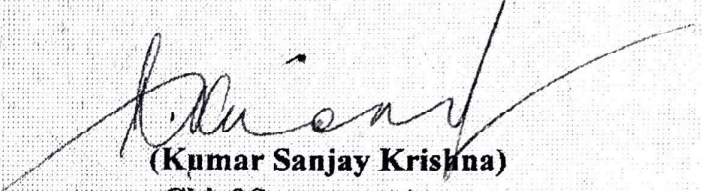
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| | | <p>4. It was further highlighted that there were around 64 GPs with no or damaged building and about 139 GPs where no power is available. Pr. Secretary (UDD) assured to look into the power issues in these GPs and requested for sharing the list of such GPs. BBNL Assam to share the list of such GPs and the state's Power Department may share the progress status to DOT Assam on monthly basis.</p> | State's IT & Power Department and BBNL/CSC-SPV |
| | | <p>5. State Head, BBNL Assam informed the committee that since CSC-SPV has been involved in providing last-mile connectivity under BharatNet, a representative from CSC-SPV may also be called in the next meeting to have a more fruitful discussion on the issues/ challenges being faced in BharatNet.</p> <p>6. The representative from BSNL intimated the committee that they have provided 986 FTTH connections to the GPs which were later on disconnected due to non-payment issues. The issue has now been resolved, however, restoration of these connections is pending for want of permission from the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development (PNRD) Assam Govt.</p> | |
| 6 | Assam's BRI | The finalized broadband readiness index of Assam (for the period ending December 2019) was discussed and committee members agreed that there are scopes to improve the index against every parameter and SBC will play a crucial role in this. | |
| 7 | Village master database | <p>1. The committee was shown the format of the village master database. It was informed to the committee that lat./long. data of villages are still pending from the state govt.</p> <p>2. Addl. CS (IT) informed the committee that they do not have lat./long. data of villages readily available and to carry out the exercise of collecting lat./long. data in a professional & scientific manner, his department may need funds.</p> | |
| | | 3. Sr. DDG DOT Assam shared his experience about the Jharkhand govt., where the state govt. has built such a database for villages and provided the same to the DOT office at very short notice. To this, Addl. CS (IT) assured the committee to take up this issue with the PNRD Department. | State's IT Department |

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| 8 | Specific issues raised by COAI & TAIPA | <p>1. Common duct: Sr. DDG, DOT Assam urged the state govt. to explore the possibility of having a common duct wherever feasible. He also suggested that instead of laying the duct on the side of the road it may be more appropriate to lay the duct in the dividers and can be done at least in cases where dividers are under construction.</p> | |
| | | <p>2. National Building Code (NBC): He further opined that the state govt. should make it mandatory to lay in-building OFC for the new buildings in line with NBC and such laying can be linked to the completion certificate to enforce it. To this, Pr. Secretary (UDD) immediately agreed to notify such changes in the state building code.</p> | State's Urban Dev. Department |
| | | <p>3. Annual charges for pvt. land/buildings: State's RoW guidelines 2018 levied the Annual charges for installation of telecom Towers on private land & buildings also which was agreed to be removed by State Government while formulating the policy in 2018. This clause needs to be removed from the policy at the earliest since it is getting replicated in all neighbouring Northeast States adopting the Assam policy as a model document.</p> | State's IT Department |
| | | <p>4. GMC notices: Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) issued notices (107 notices) to the landlords/building owners for getting the permissions of towers installed at/in their premises as per Guwahati Building Bye-laws and failing which necessary actions will be initiated by the authorities. These notices were requested to be withdrawn and the state's RoW guidelines 2018 be adopted by GMC and other authorities across the state.</p> | State's IT Department |
| | | <p>5. Sensitization programs for municipal/district authorities: IT Department may organize such programs to make relevant authorities aware of the criticality of telecom infra. and about the relevant provisions of the state's RoW guidelines 2018, periodically.</p> | State's IT Department |
| | | <p>6. Annual rental charges for the usage of LT poles: Requested the state govt. to reduce (from existing charge of Rs.1500 to Rs.50 per pole per year) the annual rental charges for usage of LT poles for overhead OFC (as mentioned in the state's RoW guidelines 2018) in the last mile network. Such reduction may motivate the TSPs to penetrate the fibre</p> | State's IT Department |

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| | to the home into the areas/houses not connected with fibre. In principle Addl. CS (IT) agreed to reconsider. | |
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- The timeline for actions by various departments of the state, DOT Assam, BBNL/CSC-SPV will be before the next SBC meeting so that the same may be reviewed in the next SBC meeting.
- The meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the chair, the members and other participants.

Enclosures: As mentioned-above (Annexure-I to V)


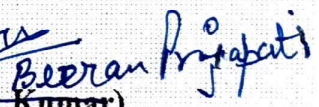

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Memo No. IT. 51/2020/21-A

Dated Dispur the 27th October, 2020

Copy for kind information to:

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