



MEMORANDUM

TO: ADVISORY PLANNING COMMISSION
FROM: JAMES VAN HEMERT, CONSULTING TOWN PLANNER
SUBJECT: DRAFT CONNECTIVITY COMMUNITY PLAN UPDATE
DATE: 2/14/2023

I participated in a video conference call hosted by the CVRD regarding their draft Community Plan for Cowichan Lake area. This plan is a component of a federal grant application to fund infrastructure that satisfies the objectives of:

- extending at least 50 Mbps down/10 Mbps up broadband service to all underserved areas, and
- to extend cellular coverage along roadways and to premises within those underserved areas.

Selected components of the draft plan:

Current Status of Broadband

The Town of Lake Cowichan and surrounding area has approximately 104 underserved premises and 14km of underserved road segments as shown in Figure 2 below.

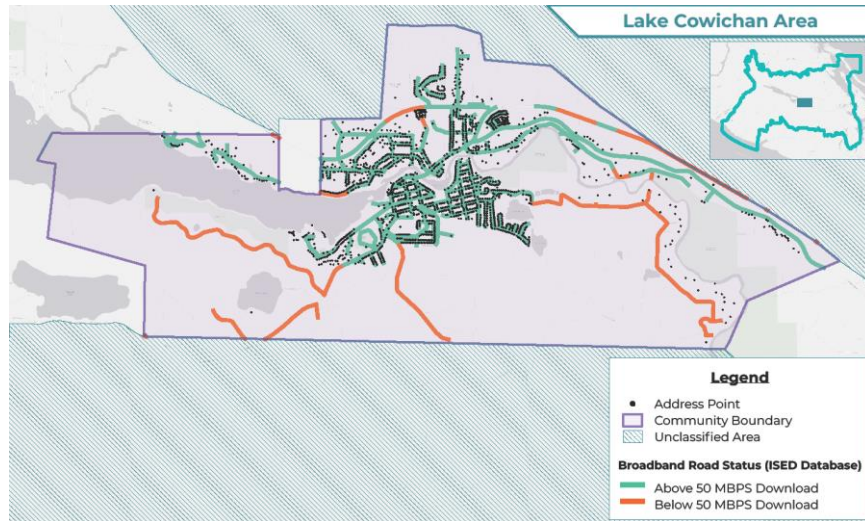


Figure 1: Cowichan Lake Area Current State Broadband Coverage

My observations on coverage:

- the majority of the underserved premises lie **outside** the Town boundaries
- the Town owned Cowichan Lake Education Centre would benefit from improved service.

What we Heard

In September 2022, a community meeting was held to gather input from Cowichan Lake Area residents on their priorities and concerns. The meeting revealed that residents enjoy the lake and river environment, and embrace continued development, as long as the integrity of the environment is maintained. They view that improved broadband will help to:

- Connect the community, providing for messaging boards and community portals,
- Enable work from home and online businesses, and
- Attract new residents to the community.

In addition to improved broadband, a need for more towers and improved cellular coverage was expressed to:

- Support more reliable emergency service,
- Improve safety along roadways, especially along Highway 18 and the Pacific Marine Circle Route, and
- Improve the safety of visitors to the many surrounding trails and parks.

The expressed development priorities for the area included new housing, seniors' residences, a new town hall, a year-round hotel, and a seasonal water park, while the main concerns or barriers to connectivity included:

- Lack of ISP competition and choice,
- Mountains that impede coverage, and
- Winter weather.

Proposed Phases

- Select a building site for a tower near underserved areas,(Youbou, Honeymoon bay)
- Engage an independent wireless infrastructure company to construct a tower,
- Extend fibre backbone to the tower
- Make excess fibres available to ISPs to be used to extend backbone/high-capacity transport

Recommendations

To best meet the stated needs of the community to enable work from home and attract new residents it is recommended to work with existing service providers to extend broadband service to underserved areas, and encourage a tower service provider to build two new towers in Youbou and Honeymoon Bay to improving the safety of residents and visitors by improving cellular coverage. It is recommended that the next steps include:

- Review with the community and agreement to proceed,
- Advocacy with tower service providers, and ISPs to assess interest, confirm funding requirements, and proceed to detailed design,
- Advocacy with various grant programs and establish local area service or other community funding mechanism as required to assist with funding,
- Advocacy with existing ISPs to extend sustainable broadband services in and around the Town of Lake Cowichan.

Construction Cost Estimates:

Total: \$5.2 million

Grant: \$3.3 million (70%)

Providers: \$1.2 million

Community (as in local government) \$700k

Answers to Questions I Posed:

1. What is ISED?
 - a. Innovation Science and Economic Development (a Federal department)
2. Please explain the standard of 50 mbs and below for download,
 - a. For premises, funding only for less than 50 mbs download

My observation: folks with, say, any mbs above 50 download or with no fibre won't be helped with this proposal

3. How much fiber serving Lake Cowichan residents now?
 - a. None available, as far as we know. Ian Morrison thinks the providers may be waiting until some investment of \$\$ from local, regional or federal government. Shaw and Telus have fiber.
4. What is the current backbone? And where does it end?
 - a. Town, there is a building.
5. Will this result in a separate community run provider?
 - a. No. Approach will be to approach individual providers.