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Via Electronic Filing

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Room TW-A325
Washington, D.C. 20554

Ex Parte Submission

Re: Accelerating Wireless Broadband Deployment by Removing Barriers to Infrastructure Investment, WT Docket No. 17-79

Dear Ms. Dortch:

With each day that passes, the record in this docket becomes more compelling that Federal Communications Commission (“Commission”) action is needed to modernize National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) and National Historic Preservation Act (“NHPA”) regulations in a way that avoids unnecessary delays and costs associated with wireless broadband deployment. In particular, small cell facilities are unlikely to impact the environment, yet incur significant costs. WiFi and small cell base stations—both wireless facilities deployed on poles, street furniture, and buildings—are similar, yet only one (small cells) requires NEPA and NHPA review. The below picture of a pole-side WiFi deployment in Atlanta, Georgia provides a good comparison with small cell deployment examples previously filed.



The record unambiguously demonstrates that NEPA/NHPA impose significant costs. In its recent *ex parte* filing, CTIA emphasizes the \$23 million in tribal fees incurred by Sprint in the last two years and Verizon's 2017 NEPA and NHPA compliance costs for small cells that average 26% of its total deployment costs.¹ AT&T predicts that in 2018 its NEPA and NHPA compliance costs will top \$45 million, of which \$29 million will be attributable to tribal fees alone.² Yet, these costs need not remain static. The Commission can and should reduce broadband expansion costs by finding that small cell deployments are neither "undertakings" under the NHPA nor "major federal actions" under NEPA. AT&T estimates that such findings would reduce small cell NEPA/NHPA compliance costs by up to 80%, which would fund over 1,000 additional small cell nodes annually, and reduce the small cell deployment timeline by 60-90 days. As CTIA explains, "[e]liminating unnecessary reviews for these facilities can produce tremendous time and cost savings that will help create jobs, as well as speed investment in the densification of networks and delivery of 5G services to consumers, without impacting the environment or historic properties."³

Pursuant to Section 1.1206 of the Commission's rules, an electronic copy of this letter is being filed for inclusion in this docket.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Colleen Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Colleen Thompson

CC:
Will Adams

¹ Letter from Scott K. Bergmann, Senior VP, Regulatory Affairs, CTIA, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, WT Docket 17-79, at 2 (filed Feb. 26, 2018) ("CTIA Letter").

² Letter from Henry G. Hultquist, VP-Federal Regulatory, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, WT Docket 17-79, at 2 (filed Feb. 23, 2018).

³ CTIA Letter at 1.