

June 25, 2020

FCC Announces Process to Expedite Key Infrastructure Projects

The FCC today announced a process to expedite the approval of critical infrastructure projects during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The process, which was developed in coordination with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, will allow “wireless licensees to request expedited review for essential and immediate projects that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as emergency authorization for infrastructure projects critical for responding to the pandemic,” according to a Commission news release.

“Internet connectivity is more important than ever,” said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. “Americans rely on broadband to telework, take classes online, consult with doctors remotely, and stay in touch with loved ones they can’t see in person. Wireless infrastructure has connected consumers and delivered a lot of value during this pandemic, and the processes announced today will ensure that urgently needed projects can move forward.”

“I am incredibly proud of the work FCC staff have been doing to ensure that critical communications infrastructure projects proceed during this COVID-19 pandemic,” said Commissioner Brendan Carr, who is the point person at the agency on wireless infrastructure issues. “I want to commend the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as well for working with us to develop these processes that will ensure that even more Americans can realize the benefits that a high-speed Internet connection can deliver.”

The news release noted that ACHP in April “notified federal agencies that historic preservation deadlines are tolled when a state or Tribal review office has closed and is unable to respond in a timely fashion due to the COVID-19 emergency. Since then, Commission staff has been in regular communication with affected Tribal partners to offer support and with industry to facilitate communications deployments during the pandemic. Many historic preservation review offices have resumed operations, but some urgently needed proposed deployments remain indefinitely delayed.”

The news release observed that a public notice released by the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau today detailed “two processes for licensees in the midst of urgently needed infrastructure projects, some of which otherwise would be indefinitely delayed by historic preservation review office closures. First, FCC licensees may request expedited historic preservation review of projects that are essential and immediate and that respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, FCC licensees may request emergency authorization if a project addresses public safety or critical infrastructure initiatives prioritized by government or public safety authorities, brings coverage to meet the needs of unserved and underserved areas due to COVID-19 effects, or relieves network congestion due to COVID-19 effects.”

The news release said the Commission has “conducted outreach to all Tribes whose review offices remain closed about the need to move forward with emergency authorizations for urgently needed infrastructure projects.”- Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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