

**CRTC Consultation CRTC 2014-190:
Phase 3 of Let's Talk TV: A Conversation with Canadians**

Oral testimony submitted on behalf of the First Mile Community Consortium

by

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1. Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission. My name is Rob McMahon. I represent the First Mile Connectivity Consortium, and also work as a postdoctoral research fellow with the First Nations Innovation project at the University of New Brunswick.¹
2. We thank the Commission for the opportunity to speak today. Our oral testimony focuses on several issues that the Commission sought comment on at this public hearing, namely:
 - Ways to foster local programming;
 - Ways to foster compelling Canadian programming; and
 - Other issues that involved parties consider appropriate.
3. The First Mile Connectivity Consortium is an independent not-for-profit national association. Our members are First Nation and Inuit broadband service providers, and our associate members are researchers and other interested parties. Our work focuses on developing digital infrastructure and services with and in Indigenous, rural and remote communities.²
4. Our common interest is in showcasing how digital infrastructures and services – including television content – can be leveraged to support economic and community development. Along with highlighting innovations at the First Mile, we also research barriers to such work. The First Mile approach confronts the telecommunications industry's references to 'last-mile' challenges to establish equitable, scalable, and affordable broadband connectivity in remote communities. It is about working directly with communities to secure the resources they require to be economically and socially contributing members of society.
5. During these hearings, the Commission raised questions regarding the production and distribution of local and Canadian content. Indigenous organizations can help address this issue. Many are already involved in producing and distributing locally, regionally, culturally and/or linguistically specific digital media. These organizations support a diversity of channels and programming. They provide residents with opportunities to be compensated for their creative work, and to work as administrators and technicians. Such activities also contribute to economic development efforts to circulate revenues inside communities. The First Mile website

¹ See: <http://www.fn-innovation-pn.com>

² See: <http://firstmileconnectivity.myknet.org/>

(<http://firstmile.ca>) highlights more than 80 of these projects across Canada. Today, we provide four examples:

6. In Atlantic Canada, the First Nations Help Desk and Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey launched *The Red Road Project* in 2012.³ The “Red Road” refers to being on the right path in life and in harmony with the Creator. The project invites First Nations youth to produce and share digital media on the dangers of substance abuse. These videos are then distributed over local and regional networks operated by Indigenous service providers. The Red Road project remains vibrant today, with new content contributed on a regular basis.⁴
7. In Quebec, the First Nations Education Council established Permanent Studios as a means for their 22 member communities to produce and distribute digital media.⁵ Along with creating short films, Permanent Studios provides training opportunities at studios in Wemotaci and Kitcisakik, and through mobile workshops. Permanent Studios has produced eleven films created by young filmmakers from the Atikamekw, Anicinabe (Algonquin), and Innu (Montagnais) nations. Teachers use these videos and resources in their classrooms too.
8. In Nunavut, the Cannes Film Festival award-winning IsumaTV production unit established the Digital Indigenous Democracy network. This project provides low-bandwidth communities with opportunities to access high-definition digital media housed on local servers and connected to community TV and radio channels.⁶ This system also supports interaction among viewers through social media. IsumaTV's network allows people facing limited and costly satellite bandwidth to access a library of 5,000 films and videos in more than 50 oral Indigenous languages at no added cost.
9. Finally, the Wawatay Native Communications Society – founded in Northwestern Ontario in 1974 – has since grown to incorporate a range of media production and distribution services, including for digital content. Wawatay's print, radio, television and digital content is presented in Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Cree, and English languages. It reaches more than 30,000 Aboriginal people in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Treaty 3 area of Ontario, over terrestrial and satellite networks – including systems developed and managed by Indigenous service providers including KO-KNET.
11. Despite their promise, these First Mile initiatives face substantial barriers. **The first is access to secure funding.** All four projects must cobble together funding from disparate sources, including private sector organizations, government departments and subscriptions from users. In the words of Wawatay's acting Executive Director: “We are one of the many small Aboriginal content producers that would not survive in a market-driven environment”. That is because small, dispersed and isolated communities are not attractive markets for private sector investment. Therefore public sector funding and other supports are required. We agree with the Canadian

³ See: <http://www.redroadproject.ca/>

⁴ Read a Tyee news story about the Red Road Project: <http://thetyee.ca/News/2014/03/19/Trading-Substances-for-Substance/>

⁵ See: <http://www.permanentstudios.com/>

⁶ See: <https://www.isuma.tv/fr/DID>

Association of Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS), which stresses the need to support local media production alongside the operations and maintenance of facilities and equipment.⁷ In the area of digital content, this might include access to funding distributed by the Commission, such as the National Contribution Fund for the provision of telecommunications in high-cost serving areas.

12. **The second barrier is technical.** Without affordable and accessible links to transport networks, these organizations cannot develop and deliver local content. As the Commission recognizes, Canadians are increasingly using platforms like Internet-based video and mobile services to access broadcast content. We are concerned that limited and expensive infrastructure and services restrict the ability of Indigenous peoples to produce and access broadcast programming. We have already pointed out the need for reliable and affordable bandwidth in CRTC 2012-669 (Northwestel Modernization Plan) and 2014-44 (Satellite Inquiry). We note that this access is also critical in this proceeding. This issue will only become more important as producers and distributors increasingly rely on emerging applications like streaming video, cloud computing, and support for mobile devices.
13. **The third barrier is the lack of participation in digital policy and regulation.** The First Mile Connectivity Consortium emphasizes that the process of digital regulation can and should engage affected communities. As the examples above demonstrate, community organizations are capable of local innovation, and can work with regional organizations to partner with public and private sector groups. However, they require voice in decisions regarding the funding programs that shape their activities. It is our opinion that Indigenous and northern communities are best positioned to articulate how public sector funding is used to support their development needs, and therefore should be provided substantial opportunities to do so.
14. We note that we received several expressions of support for our intervention, beyond the four organizations highlighted today. For example, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) told us that our proposal is very compelling for its constituent communities, and noted that it seeks to start filling a gap identified by Aboriginal Peoples, communities and APTN in the past.
15. In conclusion, as we have shown, residents of Indigenous, remote and rural communities are limited in their ability to produce and access digital broadcast programming. The production and distribution of digital media can be led by community-based organizations in partnership with the private and public sector – provided that the appropriate funding supports are in place. This process can contribute to a Canadian broadcasting system that reflects the special place of Aboriginal peoples in society. We thank the Commission for the opportunity to present today, and would be pleased to answer any questions.

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⁷ For more information, please visit: <http://cactus.independentmedia.ca/node/11>