

General Views and Observations on Consultative Paper

Apart from the Kolkata Metropolitan presence, **Alliance Broadband** has an upcountry penetration in RoB Area (Bengal Circle) covering nearly 75% (260 blocks out of 341) and an interested partner for **Digital India** program starting with areas of West Bengal for which the company has adequate infrastructure.

As per the above Consultancy Paper; **Alliance Broadband** is interested to work on a PPP (Private Public Partnership) within the framework of existing Government Partnership Policy.

As stated earlier **Alliance Broadband** remains an enthused partner in providing universal and affordable access to broadband to every citizen within the periphery of its operation and become an active partner in the “**Digital India**” program. A partner in the context of expanding the footprint of broadband networks especially in view of ever-escalating global demand for services like e-governance, e-health, e-commerce, e-banking are taking. **Alliance Broadband** figures out to empower citizens and connect communities.

Alliance Broadband being a responsible corporate citizen believes in building a digital knowledge economy and thus participates in the Nation Building process. A partner in progress towards solving many of India’s social and economic challenges, to partner in the national aspiration that all citizen can access Broadband Service especially connecting the Gram Panchayats (GPs) and help in effective e-governance.

Alliance Broadband is ambitious in partnering to achieve the National Target of providing bandwidth of 100 Mbps as planned to be provided to each Gram Panchayat for the use in local administration, Panchayat, schools, colleges, hospitals, Primary Health Centres (PHCs), residents of the area etc.

Therefore, a well connected broadband highway is imperative, rather the need of the hour, therefore inter alia the Policy of implementation has to ensure that redundancy and reliability with regards to network planning must consider Ring Architecture for Districts (District Rings) in the first stage followed by Block rings and then Gram Panchayat (GP) rings at subsequent stages.

However, **Alliance Broadband** cautiously considers that the sizing of Optical Fibre i.e. 24/48/96 core needs to be finalized based on requirement and after carrying out proper cost-benefit analysis on the areas of service.

Further, in formulating its broadband plan, **Alliance Broadband** views and agrees that each unit (State) has to take into account overall national priorities, the socio-economic climate and geography, as well as levels of broadband awareness among key stakeholders (such as Government

agencies, business and community leaders and the public) and help in educating and dispelling doubts towards smooth implementation of the **Digital India** policies.

Alliance Broadband also considers and agrees that Special plans need to be envisaged and considered for 'special interest groups' such as schools, hospitals, universities, diverse languages and access by people with specific needs only and should not be misused by any interest groups whatsoever, strict compartmentalization is necessary on this front.

Alliance Broadband believes and stresses that based on an evaluation of the supply for and demand of challenges that exist must consider the following aspects:

- Setting concrete, measurable objectives for improving the supply of broadband
- Proper infrastructure build-up
- Boosting up demand for various services and applications (Apps).
- Setting specific plans or policies as a guiding tool.
- Encourage proper investment in the sector.
- Promote efficiency and equity among all operating factors.
- Actively support the social and economic goals of the country.

The Way Forward

Encourage and Attract Private Sector Investment: Since Government resources are limited, sufficient public money may not be available for broadband infrastructure spending. Therefore the models put forward and suggested were assessed and analyzed:

- a) Central Public Sector Undertaking CPSU-led
- b) State Government-led
- c) Private sector-led (EPC/Consortia)
- d) BharatNet- Build-Own-Operate-Transfer BOOT Model.

Alliance Broadband believes that the Build-Own-Operate-Transfer model (BOOT Model) being a **PPP Private Public Partnership** is most agreeable as of now. Since Design, Build, Own and Operate a specific piece of an infrastructure with the right to earn income from the facility for a pre-decided period of time and later transferring it back into public ownership seems to serve the National purpose very well.

The apparent advantages of the system, lies in its inherent quest for efficiency in the cost and time parameters as well as the reduction of burden on strained public resources. Therefore the BOOT model seems to be a viable model for building infrastructure for public use.

As we observe that in the BOOT model, the Government's indirect involvement in the day to day implementation issues of the projects is limited, leaving a lot of space and scope for private operators to manoeuvre.

However, the Government's **keenness to only provide the "Viability Gap Funding (VGF)"** to make it commercially viable to the operator is definitely encouraging.

It is appreciated that the advantages of this model lies in its relative simplicity, contractual arrangements, outcome oriented, the potential for relatively rapid deployment and the apparent capability of the system to often offset the risks to the grant recipient/operator.

Hence the BOOT model becoming a handy public financing initiative is well taken. The model's inherent nature enables both public and private sector to synergise their strengths in building/developing the infrastructure to the mutual advantage of both the various interest groups.

However all the Interest Groups should consider that the Advantages of BOOT should not find obstacles especially in Process Delay envisaged due to Hold Ups/ Right of Way (RoW) approvals:

However the suggestion that tripartite agreements be signed between the Department of Telecommunications, State Governments, **National** Highway Authority of India (NHAI), Indian Railways, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL) etc and Forest Dept etc is well taken. Nagging clearances problems are encountered in infrastructure processes has historically led to process delays needs serious considerations. The process therefore, must be looked in grave perspective as the cost overruns are direct fallout of such issues and pave way to growing discontent and disinterest amongst members of the interest groups leading up to a vicious cycle.

.