



PUBLIC NOTICE

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WIRELINE COMPETITION BUREAU ANNOUNCES GUIDANCE REGARDING LOCATIONS AND BROADBAND COVERAGE FOR ENHANCED ALTERNATIVE CONNECT AMERICA MODEL MECHANISM WC Docket No. 10-90

In this Public Notice, the Wireline Competition Bureau (Bureau) provides guidance regarding the resolution of outstanding location and broadband coverage issues in the Enhanced Alternative Connect America Model (Enhanced A-CAM) mechanism. First, the Bureau provides guidance about which Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric (Fabric) location and Broadband Data Collection (BDC) availability data will be used to determine final deployment obligations and support amounts for Enhanced A-CAM recipients. Second, the Bureau addresses three outstanding issues related to the assignment of specific locations to Enhanced A-CAM recipients' study areas: the treatment of locations outside a carrier's study area that were included in calculations of Enhanced A-CAM offers; the treatment of locations that are within two Enhanced A-CAM study areas due to overlaps in the certified study area boundaries submitted to the Commission; and the identification of locations in Tribal lands. Finally, the Bureau announces the release of files documenting the effects of these issues on the status of specific locations in Enhanced A-CAM carrier service areas.

Background. The Commission adopted the Enhanced A-CAM mechanism on July 24, 2023, as a voluntary path for supporting widespread deployment of 100/20 Mbps or better broadband service throughout the rural areas served by carriers currently receiving A-CAM support and in areas served by legacy rate-of-return support recipients.¹ On August 30, 2023, the Bureau released a Public Notice announcing Enhanced A-CAM offers for eligible carriers, as well as the *Enhanced A-CAM Implementation Order*, which addressed matters that had been delegated to the Bureau by the Commission.² On September 21, 2023, the Bureau released a Public Notice revising Enhanced A-CAM offers for 82 companies, and offering preliminary guidance regarding the assignment to carriers, in the documentation of the Enhanced A-CAM offers, of locations outside their study area boundaries or in

¹ See *Connect America Fund; ETC Annual Reports and Certifications; Telecommunications Carriers Eligible to Receive Universal Service Support; Connect America Fund – Alaska Plan; Expanding Broadband Service Through the ACAM Program*, WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 14-58, 09-197, and 16-271; RM-1168, Report and Order, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and Notice of Inquiry, FCC 23-60, at 42, para. 98 (July 24, 2023) (*Enhanced A-CAM Order*).

² See *Wireline Competition Bureau Announces Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model Support Amounts Offered to Rate-of-Return Carriers to Expand Rural Broadband*, WC Docket No. 10-90, Public Notice, DA 23-779 (WCB Aug. 30, 2023) (*Enhanced A-CAM Offer PN*); *Connect America Fund; ETC Annual Reports and Certifications; Telecommunications Carriers Eligible to Receive Universal Service Support; Connect America Fund – Alaska Plan; Expanding Broadband Service Through the ACAM Program*, WC Docket Nos. 10-90, 14-58, 09-197, and 16-271; RM-1168, Order, DA 23-778 (WCB Aug. 30, 2023) (*Enhanced A-CAM Implementation Order*).

areas with overlapping study area boundaries.³ On October 30, 2023, the Bureau authorized 368 companies to receive Enhanced A-CAM support beginning January 1, 2024.⁴ On November 17, 2023, the Enhanced A-CAM commitments were uploaded to the Broadband Funding Map.⁵

Location and Broadband Availability Data for Final Deployment Obligations and Support Amounts. In the *Enhanced A-CAM Order*, the Commission directed the Bureau and the Office of Economics and Analytics (OEA) to adjust carriers' lists of required deployment locations as more complete data become available, which "specifically shall reflect locations and broadband deployment that existed at the time Enhanced A-CAM offers were made, but were not reflected in the Fabric or the National Broadband Map," as well for enforceable commitments not included in the Broadband Funding Map.⁶ The Commission provided further instruction regarding adjustments to support due to updated deployment obligations.⁷ Consistent with this direction from the Commission, the Bureau sets forth the following procedures for determining locations and broadband deployment applicable to Enhanced A-CAM.

To identify broadband serviceable locations (BSLs) to which deployment may be required (depending on the current availability of 100/20 Mbps or faster broadband service), the Bureau plans to use Version 4 (released December 27, 2023) of the Fabric, as modified by any successful challenges to location data submitted by March 8, 2024.⁸ Version 4 of the Fabric was generated between July and December 2023, and the Bureau and OEA have determined that dataset best represents the locations that existed at the time the offers were made.⁹ Version 4 of the Fabric incorporates bulk challenges to Version 3 data submitted by September 8, 2023, as well as data from additional data sources and other improvements by the Commission and CostQuest. Moreover, incorporating successful challenges submitted by March 8, 2024 offers the opportunity to address data issues with the locations in Enhanced A-CAM offers that interested parties identified after the September 8, 2023 deadline for incorporation of Fabric challenges in Version 4. Successful challenges that would be incorporated include bulk challenges to Version 3 filed between September 9, 2023 and the release of Version 4, individual challenges to Version 3 filed before March 8, 2024, and any bulk challenges to Version 4 filed by March 8, 2024. Including the results of these challenges will ensure that Enhanced A-CAM relies on the most accurate location data to determine obligations and calculate support.

³ *Wireline Competition Bureau Announces Corrected Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model Offers for 82 Companies*, WC Docket 10-90, Public Notice, DA 23-835 (WCB rel. Sept. 21, 2023) (*Enhanced A-CAM Corrected Offers PN*).

⁴ *Wireline Competition Bureau Authorizes 368 Companies in 44 States to Receive Enhanced Alternative Connect America Cost Model Support to Expand Rural Broadband*, WC Docket No. 10-90, Public Notice, DA 23-1025 (WCB rel. Oct. 30, 2023). The number of companies was determined by counting each holding company as a distinct company in each state for which it elected Enhanced A-CAM.

⁵ See FCC Broadband Funding Map, available at fundingmap.fcc.gov.

⁶ *Enhanced A-CAM Order* at para. 43.

⁷ *Id.* at paras. 77-78.

⁸ The Bureau establishes March 8, 2024 as the deadline for entities to submit bulk challenges to Version 4 of the Fabric in order to have them processed and considered for potential inclusion into Version 5 of the Fabric. See FCC, Broadband Data Collection, at www.fcc.gov/BroadbandData (noting key National Broadband Map dates in 2024).

⁹ Although the Commission noted in the *Enhanced A-CAM Order* that it "expected" the Bureau and OEA would "ultimately rely on Fabric v.3 and [associated National Broadband Map]" as a result of the Commission's guidance that any adjustments should reflect locations and broadband deployment at the time of the offers, *Enhanced A-CAM Order*, para. 43 & n. 146, for the reasons described here the Bureau and OEA have determined that Version 4 better meets the stated criteria.

To identify broadband availability at the relevant locations, the Bureau plans to use BDC availability data as of December 31, 2023 due March 1, 2024 (the filing window associated with the release of Fabric Version 4), as well as any challenges to broadband availability that have been resolved by May 15, 2025. Due to the potential length of time required to fully resolve broadband availability challenges, any challenge must be filed by August 1, 2024 order to guarantee resolution by the May 15, 2025, cutoff. Because of this potential time required to resolve a broadband availability challenge, it is not feasible to set a cutoff earlier than May 15, 2025, while also providing interested parties with an appropriate amount of time to submit challenges. Further, a cutoff later than May 15, 2025, may prevent the Bureau and OEA from finalizing Enhanced A-CAM obligations and support by December 31, 2025, as required by the *Enhanced A-CAM Order*.¹⁰

Challenges that would be incorporated, if resolved by May 15, 2025, would include challenges to availability data as of June 30, 2023 and December 31, 2024, based on Version 3 and Version 4 of the Fabric, respectively. While the Bureau and OEA recommend filing any broadband availability challenges by August 1, 2024, challenges filed after that date also will be applied if resolved prior to May 15, 2025. In the small number of cases where a location is added to Fabric Version 5 due to a timely successful challenge, the Bureau plans to use broadband availability data as of June 30, 2024 for those locations (the filing round associated with Fabric Version 5), as modified by any availability challenges to such data that are resolved by May 15, 2025. Using the broadband availability data as described here will provide the most comprehensive data set for the locations included in Version 4 of the Fabric, as modified by challenges.

The dates most relevant to this process are summarized below:

Action	Date
Fabric Version 4 Available to Licensees	December 27, 2023
Broadband Availability Data for Fabric Version 4 Due	March 1, 2024
Last Day to File Challenges to Location Data for Application to Enhanced A-CAM Obligations and Support	March 8, 2024
Last Day to File Challenges to Broadband Availability Data with Guaranteed Resolution in Time for Application to Enhanced A-CAM Obligations and Support	August 1, 2024
All Broadband Availability Challenges Resolved by this Date will be Applied to Enhanced A-CAM Obligations and Support	May 15, 2025

Offer Locations Outside Study Area Boundaries. As previously acknowledged by the Bureau in the *Enhanced A-CAM Corrected Offers PN*, some Enhanced A-CAM carriers were assigned locations outside their certified study areas in the “Potentially Eligible Locations” file, which was made available to document the calculation of Enhanced A-CAM offers.¹¹ This issue is caused by an algorithm in the Connect America Cost Model which assumes a location is served from the nearest point along a road and, if the road is in an adjacent study area, assigns the location to the adjacent study area, rather than based on the certified study area boundaries.¹² On November 17, 2023, Enhanced A-CAM commitments were

¹⁰ *Enhanced A-CAM Order* at para. 43.

¹¹ The “Potentially Eligible Locations” file was posted to the A-CAM page at [cacm.usac.org](https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-396476A1.pdf). For a discussion of this data source, see the *Enhanced A-CAM Calculations Methodology and Data Sources*, available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-396476A1.pdf>.

¹² *Enhanced A-CAM Corrected Offers PN*, at 2. The Bureau noted that electing carriers would be committing to serve all locations in their study areas that were without 100/20 Mbps service, and would therefore be required to

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uploaded to the Broadband Funding Map using the most recently updated and certified study area boundaries.¹³ As the Bureau noted in the *Enhanced A-CAM Corrected Offers PN*, carriers electing Enhanced A-CAM “should recognize that, by electing Enhanced A-CAM, they would be committing to serve all locations in their study areas that are currently without 100/20 Mbps and may therefore be required to serve locations that the Enhanced A-CAM offers assigned to adjacent study areas in error.”¹⁴ Further the Bureau noted that carriers electing Enhanced A-CAM “should recognize that they will not be required to serve, and may not ultimately receive support for, locations outside their study areas.”¹⁵ Using the certified study area boundaries with location data from the Fabric resolves the issue with locations outside study areas being assigned incorrectly to carriers. As detailed below, updated files will be provided to help carriers, states, and other interested parties assess the impact of using the certified study area boundaries.

Offer Locations In Overlapping Study Area Boundaries. In addition to the above, the Bureau and the Office of Economics and Analytics estimate that, according to Version 3 of the Fabric, approximately 1,036 locations are within the certified, overlapping study area boundaries of multiple Enhanced A-CAM electing carriers. In the Potentially Eligible Locations file, these locations were assigned to one carrier based on model algorithms. In the Broadband Funding Map, these locations are assigned to two Enhanced A-CAM carriers because the certified study area boundaries were the basis for all assignments. In order to avoid funding duplicative deployment, it is necessary to assign those locations to only one Enhanced A-CAM carrier.¹⁶

The Bureau determines that using the model-assigned carrier, as reflected originally in the Potentially Eligible Locations file, for the final assignment of an obligation to deploy 100/20 Mbps or faster service (or to at least maintain service, if 100/20 Mbps or faster service is already provided) is a reasonable outcome in cases where the model-assigned carrier already provides some level of service. Further, the Bureau concludes the obligation should lie with the model-assigned carrier in cases where neither of the carriers provides any level of service. Only in cases where the model-assigned carrier does not provide any service, while the other, overlapping carrier does, will we change the assignment for the final obligations. In the event that a location does not have a “model-assigned” carrier because the location was not in Version 2 of the Fabric used to develop the offers, the location will be assigned to the carrier reporting the highest level of broadband service (as determined by summing reported upload and download speeds) according to the Broadband Data Collection. There may ultimately be a small number of locations for which these guidelines do not resolve the assignment.¹⁷ In those cases, the Bureau will assign the location to the same carrier as the next nearest assigned location within one of the overlapping census blocks. If necessary, the Bureau will consult with the states and carriers to address any remaining assignment issues.

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serve locations in their study area assigned to adjacent study areas in error as part of the offer calculation. *Id.* The Bureau further recognized that carriers would not be required to serve locations outside their certified study areas that had been assigned to them in error. *Id.*

¹³ See FCC Broadband Funding Map, *available at* fundingmap.fcc.gov.

¹⁴ *Enhanced A-CAM Corrected Offers PN* at 2.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ The Bureau notes that there were also many locations in study areas overlapped by local exchange carriers that were not eligible for or did not elect Enhanced A-CAM. Enhanced A-CAM carriers will be required to serve them consistent with the Commission’s Enhanced A-CAM rules. In some cases, a location that was assigned by the model to a carrier that did not elect Enhanced A-CAM, as reflected in the Potentially Eligible Locations file, will be reflected in the Enhanced A-CAM carriers locations going forward.

¹⁷ The Bureau and OEA estimate that, of the 1,036 locations in Version 3 of the Fabric in overlapping study areas, 59 locations are not model-assigned, of which 43 may be assigned based on a carrier providing a higher level of broadband service but 16 locations may not be.

Tribal Locations. In posting the Enhanced A-CAM commitments to the Broadband Funding Map, the Bureau and OEA identified a discrepancy between Tribal locations shown in the Broadband Funding Map and Tribal locations shown in the Enhanced A-CAM offers. The Tribal locations in the Broadband Funding Map reflect updated information regarding Tribal boundaries but are consistent with the definition of Tribal lands used in prior A-CAM offers. The Enhanced A-CAM offers relied on information from the Connect America Model. As the Bureau finalizes deployment obligations and support amounts, it will rely on the current Tribal boundaries as reflected in the Broadband Funding Map.

Interim Eligible Locations File. For transparency purposes, the Bureau has posted two files documenting the guidance described in this Public Notice.¹⁸ First, an “Interim Eligible Locations” file shows all BSLs in Fabric Version 3 within the certified study area boundaries of Enhanced A-CAM-electing carriers. For each BSL, the file shows: the Location ID; the Census Block ID; the state; the Provider ID of the Enhanced A-CAM carrier; the study area code; the number of units at the BSL; the Tribal status of the location; the broadband availability status of the location;¹⁹ the applicability of any other programs with an enforceable commitment to deploy broadband;²⁰ and whether the location is a “required location,” to which the Enhanced A-CAM carrier is obligated to deploy 100/20 Mbps or faster service. Locations within overlapping study area boundaries are assigned to carriers and study areas as described above. This file will allow Enhanced A-CAM carriers and other interested parties to see, based on currently available data, what locations are “required” (to which the Enhanced A-CAM carrier must deploy 100/20 Mbps or faster service) or “carrier-served” (to which the Enhanced A-CAM carrier must at least maintain existing 100/20 Mbps or faster service). This file will be updated in the future to reflect locations and broadband availability are finalized, as discussed above. A second file, “Interim Carrier Location Assignments,” identifies whether BSLs have been added to or removed from a particular study area in the “Interim Eligible Locations” file as compared to the “Potentially Eligible Locations” file that was provided at the time of the Enhanced A-CAM offers. The Bureau will continue to consider any questions or concerns raised by parties, and provide additional guidance or updates as warranted.

For additional information on this proceeding, please contact Stephen Wang (Stephen.Wang@fcc.gov) of the Wireline Competition Bureau, Telecommunications Access Policy Division, (202) 418-7400.

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¹⁸ The files are available at <https://www.fcc.gov/files/enhanced-acam-interim-locations>.

¹⁹ The codes for this variable are as follows: (1) ILEC-only served; (2) ILEC and competitively served; (3) unserved; (4) served only by a competitor; (5) unserved, subject to an enforceable commitment to deploy reflected in the Broadband Funding Map (BFM); and (6) ILEC-only served, subject to a competitive commitment to deploy, reflected in the BFM. Locations coded as (5) and (6) were previously coded in the “Potentially Eligible Locations” file as (4) and (2), respectively.

²⁰ This variable is coded as follows: (0) not subject to an enforceable commitment in the BFM; (1) unserved, loan to ILEC; (2) unserved, grant to ILEC; (3) unserved, loan or grant to competitor; (4) ILEC-only served, loan to ILEC; (5) ILEC-only served, grant to ILEC; (6) ILEC-only served, loan or grant to competitor; (7) ILEC and competitive served, with a BFM commitment; (8) only competitive served, with a BFM commitment.