

Rhode Island Wants to be the First State to Offer 5G; Releases RFI

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The state of Rhode Island plans to be the first state to test and launch next generation 5G networks, seeking to make 5G available to all of its communities. This past week, Governor Gina Raimondo announced a joint effort by the Public Utilities Commission, Division of Public Utilities and Carriers, and the Office of Innovation to pilot a large-scale 5G network deployment with real world testbeds to attract new high-tech businesses while lowering the cost of deployment and operation. Citing size, population density, and regulatory flexibility, the State sees Rhode Island as "an ideal place to rollout 5G wireless" and seeks informational proposals from qualified firms and vendors in response to a [Request for Information](#) (RFI) on implementing 5G and next generation broadband infrastructure statewide. While the state will not award funding to any respondents, the state does intend to use the information acquired in its collaboration with municipalities to develop the blueprints for three network imperatives: 5G wireless, Civic Internet of Things and an extensive fiber network.

What does Rhode Island anticipate from 5G? Advanced communication services (think two-way 4K video). Advanced security. Privacy controls. Autonomous Vehicle Technology. To achieve this, the RFI posits that 5G will be available from an array of small cells serving a smaller area and less customers, unlike today's wireless customers who receive data from a large tower serving a wider area and more customers. The RFI further suggests that providers offering 5G will need to deploy or lease wireline networks in much closer proximity to its customers than today's existing wireline networks relied on by wireless customers.

The RFI also highlights the state's challenge in broadening the reach of the state's existing fiber backbone to last mile customers, noting prohibitive costs to reach the communities of New Shoreham and Aquidneck Island. Given the cost barriers, the RFI asks whether 5G offers an alternative last mile solution for such communities.

Notably, the RFI specifically asks what government policies the state should adopt to "attract and foster a vibrant technology economy," including policies on construction, permitting, information, personnel and contracting. The state also asks what public assets and infrastructure respondents would propose to leverage in deploying 5G services, including fiber, rights of ways, tunnels, sewers, water mains, lights and utility poles, and real property.

The RFI further highlights Rhode Island's consistent ranking as one of the top places in the country for broadband services. While 5G policy and technology continues to receive significant attention at the federal level, residents and businesses alike should welcome a state level interest in trying to determine how best to support the deployment and development of 5G. This type of request could serve as an important first step for the private sector to help state entities understand the promise of 5G and ensure efficient implementation.

Any carriers, vendors or entities or other interested parties with recommendations on business-friendly policies, which will spur investment in next generation networks in Rhode Island, should share their experiences and respond to the RFI. Further, the RFI requests that where possible, respondents collaborate in offering ideas and recommendations. The RFI package includes an appendix of maps for respondent usage. Responses are due by 11 AM EST on December 27, 2016.

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