UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Washington, DC 20230

NTIA Requests Public Input on Issues related to the Proposed NANA Regional Broadband Network Project

AGENCIES:
Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)
Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Department of the Army, US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)
Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS)

SUMMARY:
NANA Regional Corporation, Inc. (NANA), a regional Alaska Native Corporation, has proposed to construct a Regional Broadband Network Project (project). The proposal would include installation of a fiber optic cable across federal, state, privately-owned lands, and waters in northwest Alaska.

NTIA, as the lead agency, in cooperation with the NOAA, USACE, BLM, FWS, and NPS, intends to prepare an Environmental Assessment for the project, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA).

NTIA and cooperating agencies request your input on the issues related to this proposed project, potential alternative suggestions, and identification of relevant information and studies.

DATES:
Submit comments by *August 19, 2025*.

ADDRESSES:
Submit comments for consideration to:

- *NEPAComments@ntia.gov*
- *US Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1401 Constitution Ave, NW, Room 4878, Washington, DC 20230*

SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to develop and install broadband infrastructure within the NANA region of northwest Alaska. The project proposes to provide reliable, high-speed internet service, to enable access to distance learning, telehealth, public safety communications, and provide opportunities for economic development. The newly proposed infrastructure would support connectivity to meet current and future needs of residents, businesses, and public institutions. Anticipated federal authorizations and/or permits that would be required to achieve the purpose and need, and that carry a NEPA obligation, include Right of Way authorizations from the BLM and USFWS, a USACE Section 404 permit, and a USFWS compatibility determination.

The proposed action is needed because communities within the NANA region currently lack access to true broadband service. Available internet options offer inadequate connectivity, low speeds, and prohibitively high costs, which contribute to low internet adoption rates.

Background

The NANA region is without true broadband. Current options have poor connectivity, slow access, and prices that are beyond the reach of most residents. Internet adoption rates are low, and residents lack access to resources such as distance learning, telehealth, or the ability to work from home while remaining in their communities. Installation of additional broadband infrastructure would allow scalable high-speed data transmission, providing reliable and fast internet access to residents, businesses, and public institutions that are currently unserved/underserved and would support real-time communication, future growth, and provide a stable, affordable, durable connection.

Proposed Project Location

Located at the extreme northwestern edge of the North American continent, mostly above the Arctic Circle, the NANA region encompasses 38,000 miles, is sparsely populated, and isolated. No roads connect NANA villages to each other or to greater Alaska. Household goods and food are barged or flown into the region, resulting in high prices for basic goods, including food, fuel, and building materials.

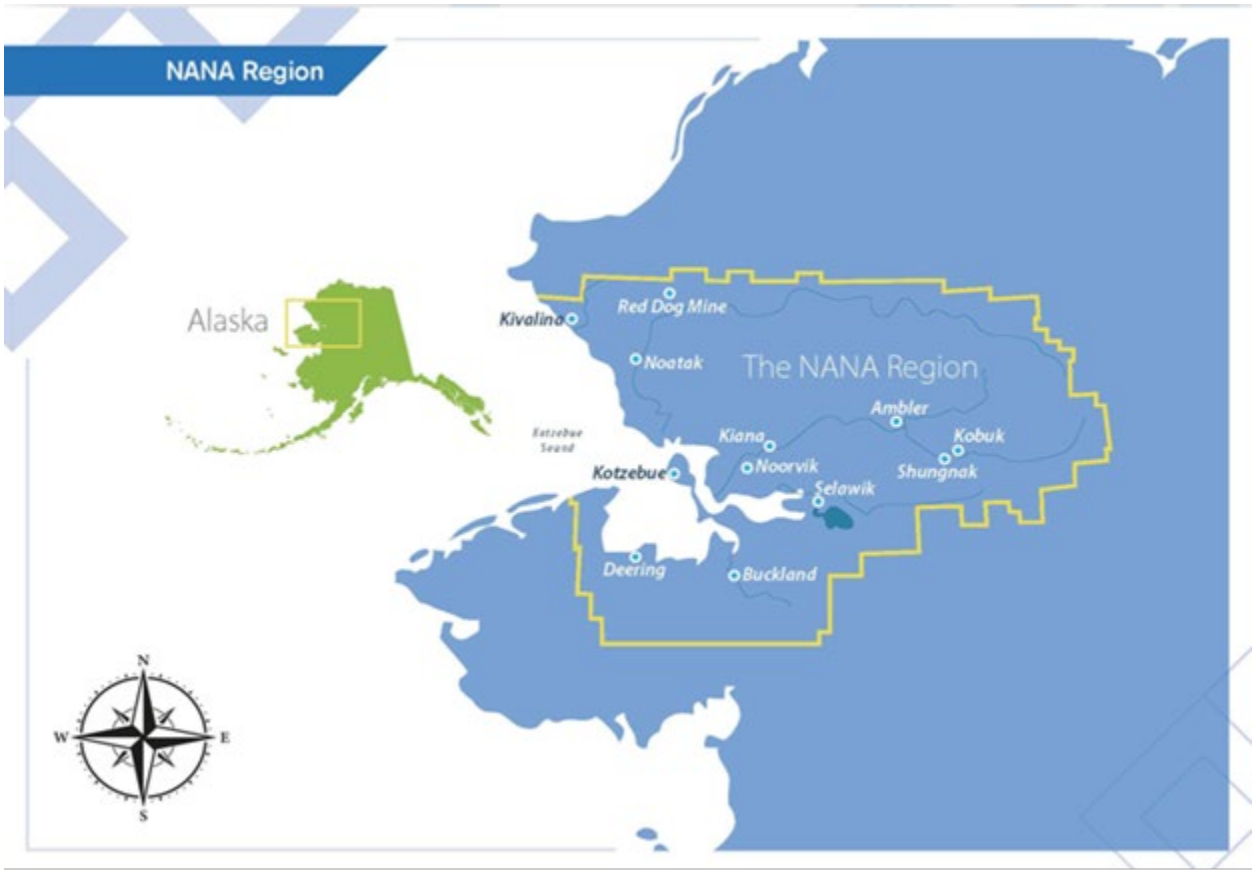
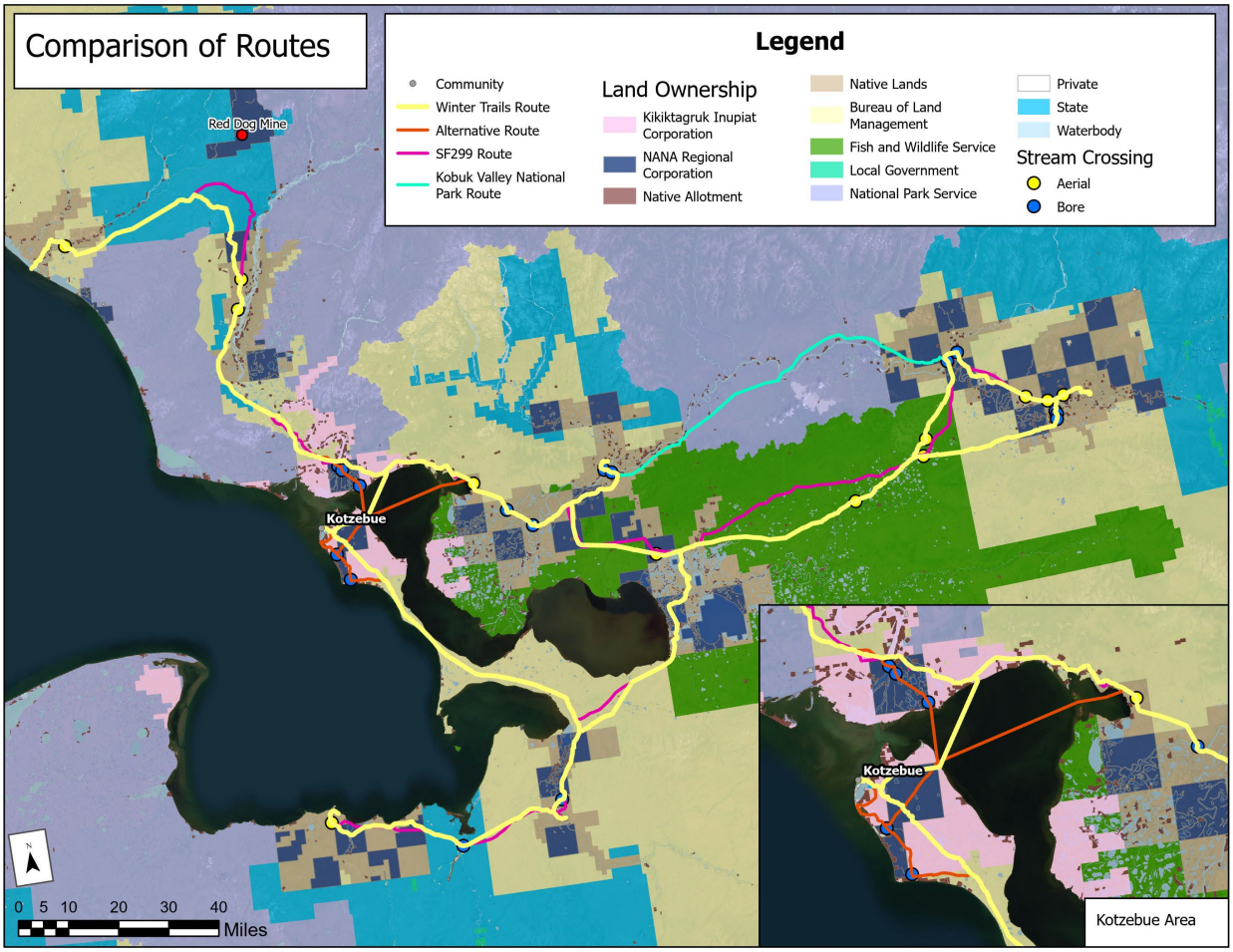


Figure 1. Map of NANA Region.

Proposed Action

The proposed project would establish fiber optic infrastructure through the deployment of long-haul fiber, connecting communities in northwest Arctic Alaska to regional and national telecommunications networks. The proposed fiber optic cable (FOC) route would incorporate a combination of terrestrial ground-laid, subsea, directional bored, trenched, and aerial cable placement methodologies. Figure 2 presents a map of the alternative routes proposed. The proposed route segments are also outlined in the table below.

Figure 2. Map of Routes.



* Ground-lay stream crossings are not depicted

Table 1. Analysis of Alternative Routes

Item	Winter Trails Route	Alternative Route	SF299 Route	Kobuk NP Route
Fiber Optic Cable (miles)	674	684	672	696
Subsea Fiber Crossings (miles)	10	27	10	10
Fiber Overland (miles)	639	611	651	678
Fiber Trench (miles)	1	20	0	0
Fiber Aerial (miles)	24	26	11	8
Stream/River Crossings	763	746	759	598
River Crossings (Aerial)	18	16	3	0
River Crossings (Bore/HDD)	17	18	0	0
River Crossings (Ground Lay)	728	712	756	598
Lake/Pond Crossings	59	57	53	N/A
ROW Width (feet)	30	30	30	30

*Lake/Pond Crossings were not annotated for Kobuk NP Route

Description of Construction Phases

WINTER PHASE CONSTRUCTION

The project proposes that the majority of the network would consist of ground-laid FOC installed during winter months across the terrestrial landscape, lakes/ponds, minor stream crossings, and river crossings. A deployment team will consist of approximately 14 people per crew (a total of 3 crews are anticipated for the project), along with tracked, low-ground-pressure cable deployment equipment, a mobile sleigh camp, vegetation clearing equipment, digging equipment, and snowmachines. Where vegetation clearing is necessary, a mulcher would cut vegetation to the level of the snow surface. Cable would be laid along the ground and anchored at no more than 6,000 foot intervals. FOC would be laid across the ice of lakes, ponds, and minor streams, and allowed to sink to the bottom after the ice thaws.

SUMMER PHASE CONSTRUCTION

Construction would occur during the summer for the subsea crossing and large river crossings. For subsea crossings, an excavator on floats, tugboat, barge, and static plow would be used. Trenching would occur from the low tide point to a water depth exceeding operating range of the excavator. Trenching would also occur in terrestrial areas of high pedestrian or ATV traffic, primarily around communities. At large river crossings the FOC would be horizontally directionally drilled (HDD) under the rivers, or installed aerially over the water. Aerial installation would involve one wooden pole placed vertically on each riverbank to support the aerial section of cable. The table below lists the proposed major river crossings.

Table 2. Major River Channel Crossings and Methods

River Name	Nearest Community	Crossing Method	
		Other routes*	SF299
Ambler River	Ambler	HDD	Aerial
Amaouk Creek	Noorvik	Aerial	Aerial
Buckland River	Buckland	HDD	Aerial
Cosmos Creek	Kobuk	Aerial	Aerial
Fish River	Selawik	Gravity Lay	Gravity Lay
Inmachuk River	Deering	Aerial	Aerial
Kiwalik River	Deering	HDD	Aerial
Kiyak Creek	Noatak	Aerial	Aerial
Kobuk River (6 crossings)	Kiana, Ambler, Shungak	HDD	Aerial
Kugaruk River (3 crossings)	Upper Kobuk Communities	Aerial	Aerial
Kugruk Estuary	Deering	Gravity Lay	Gravity Lay
Kungsugrug River	Selawik	Gravity Lay	Gravity Lay
Nazuruk and Melvin Channels of Kobuk River	Noorvik	HDD	Aerial
Noatak River	Noorvik	HDD	Aerial
Oblaron Creek	Selawik	Aerial	Aerial
Selawik River	Selawik	Existing 5th Avenue Bridge	Existing 5th Avenue Bridge
Shungnak River	Kobuk	Aerial	Aerial
Wesley Creek	Kobuk	Aerial	Aerial
Wulik River	Kivalina	Aerial	Aerial

Proposed Future Maintenance and Operations

Maintenance and operations activities are expected to be minimal and would include:

- One annual flight above the proposed route to identify any damage or areas of concern. Timing would be coordinated with landowners, land managing agencies, and consider potential sight and sound impacts to wildlife.
- Helicopter-supported preventative maintenance, if needed. Examples may include straightening poles and fiber markers, and/or tightening guy wires.
- Cable damage repairs. Summer damage repair would be supported by helicopter; winter damage repair would be supported by helicopter, snowmachine, or low ground pressure vehicle and could include splicing sections of new FOC into the existing line.

Proposed Future Decommissioning of Project

The expected useful life of the fiber optic network is 50 years. The fiber optic cable is expected to self-bury into the landscape over time. The fiber cable and ground anchors would be left in place to avoid unnecessary disturbance of the tundra/vegetation. Poles would be cut off at ground level, and supporting infrastructure would be removed. This activity is proposed to take place during the winter months, to avoid ground disturbance.

Past Community Engagement Efforts of the Proponent, NANA

- NANA has prioritized meaningful community engagement throughout the project planning process.

- Meetings were held with the City and Tribal governments in each of the communities along the proposed route to describe the project, discuss plans and timelines, and to answer any questions or address concerns.
- Initial public meetings in the village communities were held to introduce the project, show the proposed routes into/out of the communities, answer questions, and solicit feedback on the project and proposed routes, in order to make potential adjustments where needed.
    - In August 2024, meetings were held in: Ambler, Buckland, Kiana, Kivalina, Kobuk, Noatak, Noorvik, and Shungnak.
    - In November of 2024, meetings were held in Deering and Selawik.
    - Additional community engagement meetings are planned for the village communities in the region in the winter of 2025.
- Provided a project overview and update to the Northwest Arctic Energy Steering Committee Meeting May of 2025.