

March 27, 2025

The Honorable Jennifer McEwen, Chair
Senate Labor Committee

The Honorable Gene Dornink, Minority Lead
Senate Labor Committee

Chair McEwen and Members of the Senate Labor Committee:

The City Engineers Association of Minnesota (CEAM) and the Minnesota Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA-MN) urge you to oppose changes to broadband safety laws proposed in HF 47 and SF 908. Our opposition extends to any legislation that is counter-productive to the effectiveness of organized, consistent and safe installation regulations for broadband facilities.

CEAM and APWA-MN represent more than 1,000 engineers and other public works professionals across Minnesota. Our members are responsible for permitting and monitoring construction activities on public rights-of-way, and for building and maintaining public infrastructure.

CEAM and APWA-MN are increasingly concerned by the threat that substandard and unsafe telecommunications installation poses to public safety and to the operation of energy and civil infrastructure. Our members have experienced a dramatic increase in broadband installations, driven by the growing demand for competitive fiber optic networks. Unfortunately, our cities, counties (along with their residents and businesses) deal with damage and hazards from directional drilling installing broadband on a weekly or even daily basis. Experiences with improper broadband installation have repeatedly demonstrated a negative effect on public spaces, communities, residents, and businesses.

1. Damage to Roadways and Public Infrastructure

- a. **Roadways.** Improper broadband installation creates pavement heaving and damages pavement structural integrity. This results in costly roadway patch repairs and shortened pavement life. In one instance, a drilling contractor lost a drill head beneath a major intersection (15,000 vehicles per day). Recovery efforts required extensive traffic control coordination and road closures. Public impacts included increased travel times, increased fuel costs, increased emissions, and logistics delays.
- b. **Water Systems.** Improper broadband installation damages critical water infrastructure. This results in loss of service and creates “weak” joints in the system. In one instance, a drilling contractor struck fire hydrants and water shut-off valves. Repairs required emergency water shutdowns. Public impacts included service disruptions.
- c. **Municipal Operations.** Improper broadband installation damages internet infrastructure. This results in costly repairs and loss of critical communications for emergency services, water and sewer system management, hospitals, and schools. In one instance, a drilling contractor struck a fiber artery, resulting in the loss of internet connections to a municipal liquor store. Public impacts included lost productivity (~\$12,000 in lost revenue).

2. Increased Costs to Taxpayers

- a. Local roadway improvements are primarily funded through local revenues, including property taxes and special assessments. Damage to roadways caused by improper broadband installation is unfair to taxpayers and prevents communities from economically maintaining streets as prioritized and programmed.

3. Liability Issues

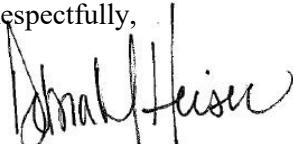
- a. Inadequate training and oversight can create safety violations and risks for both broadband installers and the public if basic safety protocols such as adequate traffic control and proper personal protective equipment (PPE) are not adhered to.

4. Lack of Right-of-Way
 - a. Public right-of-way is a valued resource that provides area for multimodal transportation, snow storage, traffic control signage, traffic signal connectivity, and essential utilities.
5. Interruption of Essential Underground Existing Facilities
 - a. Existing facilities such as gas, electricity, internet (i.e. traffic signal communications) and telephone are at risk and can be damaged, causing significant service delays, safety risks and costly repairs.

Our members support a qualification-based process in which installers are screened, evaluated and trained. We desire that quality installers perform quality work that produces quality services. Before last year's passage of the Broadband Safety Law, which establishes safety training requirements for underground telecommunications installers, our members lacked the necessary tools to prevent damage caused by fly-by-night contractors and inexperienced workers. Delaying or weakening these requirements risks further harm to our communities and organizations, and the current language of HF 47 and SF 908 would do both.

Access to internet service is essential in today's world, but broadband deployment must not take place at the expense of public safety and disruption to essential services. We ask that you reject HF 47 and SF 908 and any other legislation that would put our communities at risk by undermining critical new protections.

Respectfully,



Debra M. Heiser, PE
President, City Engineers Association of Minnesota
Engineering Director, City of St. Louis Park



Jupe Hale, PE
Past President, American Public Works Association – Minnesota Chapter
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