TAG Infrastructure Talks: S02 Ep01, The Business and Legal Case for EMCs and Broadband
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Alan Poole:

Welcome to another episode of *TAG Infrastructure Talks*. I'm your host, Alan Poole. I'm a partner at Troutman Pepper, and I'm the Vice Chair of the Infrastructure Society of the Technology Association of Georgia. I'm excited to have with me my guest, Kevin Curtin. He's the Senior Vice President of government relations at Georgia EMC (Electric Membership Corporation). Kevin, welcome.

Kevin Curtin:

Thank you, Alan.

Alan Poole:

Yeah, thanks for being with us.

Kevin Curtin:

Absolutely.

Alan Poole:

Well, we're going to talk today a lot about Georgia EMCs generally, and specifically those companies getting it into broadband. But before we get to all that, would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself and your background?

Kevin Curtin:

Sure. I'm glad to do that. I've been a government relations professional for about 30 years now. I've spent most of my time in infrastructure or organizations. I spent 22, 23 years with AT&T, and then been with Georgia EMC now for about a year and a half. Before that, I spent about a decade in the insurance industry doing political and regulatory work for insurers around the state and around the southeast. So had a foot in a few different camps over the years, but very interesting. New areas are being developed by EMCs, so I took the opportunity to come represent them about a year and a half ago.

Alan Poole:

And let's talk about Georgia EMC. That's not actually an EMC, but it's a group representing all of them to some extent.

Kevin Curtin:

That's right. Most people would consider us a trade association. We represent the 41 EMCs in the state of Georgia, plus affiliated organizations like Transmission Generation that are owned by our members. So we represent the whole ecosystem of electric cooperatives in the state of Georgia.

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Alan Poole:

Let's talk a little bit more about EMCs in particular. I think there are some attributes of those types of companies that are relevant to this discussion about rural broadband.

Kevin Curtin:

Yeah. I mean, it really goes back to the origin of what EMC or electric co-op. In Georgia, we call them EMCs. Other states, they just call them electric cooperatives. I mean, they really formed around the time of the New Deal back in the 1930s with the idea of serving folks who didn't have access to electric service. If you go back to the 1930s, only really the cities had electric service. And driven primarily by agriculture interests, farmers, folks who lived in smaller towns around the United States and then state of Georgia, there was obviously a desire to have electric service at their homes and businesses, but they didn't have access to that through investor-owned utilities. So the federal government and state governments created electric cooperatives, which are essentially just non-profit cooperatives that provide electrical service to large swaths of the state of Georgia.

Our members in composite provide electric service to over 70% of the land mass of the state of Georgia, and over 40% of the population of the state. And Georgia EMCs are probably the largest set of EMCs or co-ops around the country, closely followed by Texas. So because our state is largely rural, if you get outside of the metro area, that's why EMCs represent such a large piece of the overall pie in Georgia.

Alan Poole:

And in terms of the governance of these entities, you mentioned IIs, or investor-owned utilities, those are more traditional public companies owned by investors, but co-ops are governed a little differently.

Kevin Curtin:

They are, and they're actually owned by their own members. It's like a credit union versus a bank. You are a member and you're an owner of your co-op, and it's a very democratic process. The members actually nominate and vote for the board members and elect board members to represent their interests, and the board members make all the high-level decisions of that co-op. So it's a very democratic model. It's been in place for 80 or so years now, 90 years in some cases, and it's worked quite well considering that essentially everybody now has electric service.

Alan Poole:

I think I've heard it's more community-based too. You'll find the general manager talking to everybody in the community at the local diner or something.

Kevin Curtin:

Exactly, and it really keeps them close to the needs of the local community. So they know, not only what's going on with electric service, but they hear about everything else that's transpiring in the members' lives and some of the challenges they face. So they are very ingrained in their local communities. That's one of the reasons we have 41 of them around the state, not three, is because they can be locally-based and are very in tune with their local communities because,

not only do the general managers live in those communities or CEOs live in those communities, so do all their employees. So it's like serving your neighbor, essentially.

Alan Poole:

So would this history, I think... We'll get into why some of this makes sense for providing broadband as an EMC, but until, I think, 2019, Georgia EMCs were not authorized by law to provide that service. Can you tell us anything about the impetus towards that change?

Kevin Curtin:

Sure. Up until 2019, the relevant statutes were really silent on the issue. It didn't say you could, it didn't say you couldn't. When those relevant statutes were created, there wasn't a such thing as broadband or internet service. So the law was actually silent on the issue. We actually had two EMCs in Georgia who had decided to provide broadband service, even though it wasn't clear in the statute, they had the authority to do that. They were up in north Georgia, up in the mountains of North Georgia where there was a real need for internet service. In 2019, the general assembly, and actually had been debated for two or three sessions before that, but in 2019, senate bill two passed, which gave clear explicit authority for EMCs to provide broadband service throughout the state of Georgia. Subsequent to the passage of that bill, we now have 25 EMCs statewide that are in some form or fashion in the broadband business. Not all of them directly, a lot of them with partners or other arrangements, but the number of EMCs who are in this market have increased dramatically since the law was clarified in 2019.

Alan Poole:

25 out of 42?

Kevin Curtin:

Out of 41.

Alan Poole:

Out of 41, so over the 50% mark.

Kevin Curtin:

Exactly. We just went over 50% probably in the last three or four months.

Alan Poole:

Oh, wow. Okay. I mean the timing certainly seems to be right for more EMCs to get into this business.

Kevin Curtin:

Yeah, absolutely. It's really fortuitous timing from an authority and then closely followed by the ability to get grants from mostly the federal government in order to make some economic sense of providing that service in hard-to-reach areas which are primarily where our members serve.

Alan Poole:

So that leads nicely into my next topic, which is, what are the reasons EMC's, now that the legal landscape is clear, what are the reasons they make good sense to provide service in their areas? You just mentioned they, as a result of their history already being rural entities, serving rural areas, they're situated in the areas that need it most.

Kevin Curtin:

Absolutely. They're very attuned to the needs of their local community. Broadband had been a need for over a decade, probably most communities around the state. It is a public policy question and problem that it was really hard to solve because anytime you try to get a service deployed in a partially populated area, you simply don't have the population density to spread costs effectively so that an investor-owned approach wouldn't make sense in of these areas because there just was no ROI or return on investment in a scholarly populated area, not as many potential customers. So EMCs being community focused and also serving those exact populations for electrical service provided a great model to be able to piggyback on the electric model to provide what many people considered the electricity of our era, which is broadband.

Alan Poole:

Some of the other things that come to mind for me that help the case for EMCs is built in customer-base and community involvement.

Kevin Curtin:

Absolutely.

Alan Poole:

There's extra trust there for the reasons that we've discussed.

Kevin Curtin:

There is, and much like the 1930s where investor-owned utilities simply saw no return, but that's never been the goal of a co-op. A co-op has always been focused on providing the service and spreading those costs amongst all the members, but there's never been a profit motive, and that takes some of the calculation off the table. It makes it a little bit easier to make the numbers make sense. Also, deploying fiber deep in a power network makes a lot of sense from a power perspective. So the fact that our members could provide a service to the public, which is much needed, and also use that fiber for their own purposes in a smart grid applications, gave that a great dual purpose and made the whole deployment make economic sense.

Alan Poole:

The economics of that are really interesting to me. I mean, you have this sunk cost when you go in a linear direction, but adding to fibers within the sheath is, I mean, almost nothing. So you go from having a $50 million red budget item that you needed, and you can take some of that off or maybe even make it black by going into another line of business.

Kevin Curtin:

Exactly. And that's why a lot of our members have partnered with internet service providers where they're simply wholesaling fiber network to that internet service provider, which then does the rest of the work: the customer service, the install, the dropped to the house or business, and dealing with the router and the Wi-Fi and all the things you have to deal with internet service, which are not traditionally things our members have dealt with over the years. That's why most of our members have partnered with another provider in order to provide the actual retail service to the consumer. We do have seven EMCs around the state that have formed their own affiliate to directly provide that service as well. So there's a bunch of different kinds of models out there, and we're in the stage where everyone's feeling their way through this and we'll be interesting to see 10 or 15 years down the road which model makes the most sense. But in my opinion, there could be different models for different parts of the state, which makes sense. And this is not a one size fit all solution.

Alan Poole:

So that covers the choices between how many feet you dip into the business, are you just providing infrastructure, you providing service, which comes with can get you more retail revenue, but also more headaches.

Kevin Curtin:

Right. And if you think about it, I had one local EMC CEO say to me shortly after I started that they never had a desire to have any of their technicians ever go into the house. And I thought about it and I realized the linemen never go into the actual home. Their service ends at the power meter, traditionally, on the outside of your home or business. And entering the home is a whole new paradigm. So some have been comfortable creating their own workforce that does that kind of work inside the home. Some have not felt comfortable with that and feel more comfortable having somebody else who has experience in that area doing it. That's why you see the different models.

Also, I think, over time, those may morph over time, depending on their comfort level, et cetera. But the nice thing is that being close to the community and understanding the needs of the community, our members knew there was a real opportunity to provide a service which was much in demand. You couldn't go to church or the local hardware store or the local grocery store without hearing from your neighbors, essentially, that there was a huge need for quality broadband service. And when I say quality, 99.9% of the broadband being deployed by our members is fiber to the home or fiber to the business. So that's about as high-quality broadband as you can provide.

It also allows you to, over time, scale on that existing fiber to increase speeds over time. You've seen a lot of the fiber to the home providers start off with a maximum speed of one gigabit, which is amazing. When I first started doing this business in the late '90s, we were going one and a half megabits and thinking it was really fast. Of course, that was compared to dial up, but now you can do a gigabit on fiber, and now a lot of members are providing up to five gigabits service. So that will scale over time. The question is, how much demand is therefore those really high bandwidth intensive services, and can you tell the difference between one gigabit and five gigabits? That's an open question.

Alan Poole:

That's been a big question in the market about 5G, do we even really need it or people using it? And the scalability comes from the fact that one fiber can have vastly different bandwidth due to what's your equipment at the end can do. Correct?

Kevin Curtin:

Exactly. Essentially, I call it... I hate this term, but I use it anyway, is it future-proofs your network. You swap out the equipment on the ends with DWDM and things like that with being able to put more and more bandwidth across a single fiber. That seems to be almost unlimited capacity over time. So you put in a fiber sheath with let's say 20 fibers in it, and you can grow into that over time. But with technology continuing to evolve on the equipment, there really is no end in sight as far as the ability to provide higher and higher bandwidth intensive products and services.

Alan Poole:

It seems, maybe not now, but soon could end up in a pretty funny result where you have rural areas that have better technology, at least, than some of the suburbs, which, by and large, are being dominated by cable.

Kevin Curtin:

Yeah, that is an interesting paradigm, considering there will be leapfrog effect because of the subsidies that are available through the federal government in the forms of grants and things like that, loans. And those are typically available to areas that have no internet service or no broadband service. You will see that scenario occur from time to time, where you will see parts of rural Georgia maybe get fiber to the home, where if you're sitting in the suburbs of Atlanta, you may be working off of either a coax hybrid cable system or some a DSL (Digital subscriber line) platform, which you cannot get those kinds of speeds on a consistent basis on those types of copper-based networks that have some copper in the loop. Whereas, if you're in a rural area, you may have fiber end-to-end and essentially hassle-free broadband experiences.

Alan Poole:

The other point on business models I wanted to hit involves area of service. As I understand it, there are a couple different philosophies that EMCs are taking it in terms of where they actually want to provide broadband service.

Kevin Curtin:

There are, and some of our members have taken the approach that their goal is to serve every electric customer that they serve. So every member of their co-op, they want to provide broadband service to.

Alan Poole:

That's probably what I would think of initially.

Kevin Curtin:

Right. It's sort of the universal model, which they're used to providing. Let's piggyback the broadband on top of what we provide, which is the electric service to all these homes and businesses in our service territory. Electric service territories, if you're familiar with them, are not like telecommunications service territories. They're much more Swiss cheese. They're a bunch of corridor rights. They're a bunch of things in the electric world. Because if you think about it, when co-ops were formed and service territories were defined back in the '30s and all the way up to the 1970s when they were actually put into the statute in the Territorial Act in Georgia up until 1973, it was a mishmash of you put your lines wherever you wanted to put them. In '73, the general assembly passed an act to try to get rid of redundancies and overlapping networks for electric service and create those efficiencies of having a sole provider in a geographic area. Although, when you spend 40 years building networks where they could overlap, you can see that it's sort of a Swiss cheese scenario.

So providing service to all of your members is not as simple as it seems. Also, trying to distinguish and leave out other investor-owned utility electric customers who want broadband service is sometimes challenging. So we have a scenario, everything from, some of our members want to provide services simply a subset of their members, and those are the ones that don't have any choices or any broadband choices available to them today, to the middle is provide service to all my members, all my electric members. And then you also are starting to see a few of our members think about how to provide service to members of investor-owned utilities on the electric side who don't have broadband access but are right next door to their service territory. So this model moves over time. I think some of them that started off with a subset have moved to the full and now some in the full category have moved to the, how do we get side outside of our own electric footprint and provide service to customers of investor own electric utilities?

Alan Poole:

And I don't really see IOUs providing broadband service anytime soon, although they get into the Middle Mile (segment of a network between local and destination access).

Kevin Curtin:

Yeah, exactly, kind of long-haul stuff. But we haven't seen many traditional IU power companies get into the broadband business. I think they have a very similar problems that are experienced by the large telecom and cable providers. Return on investment when you're accountable to shareholders and outside investors, it creates a different pressure on you than it does if you're a cooperative.

Alan Poole:

Sure. Well, co-ops are a big topic in federal funding, both currently and forthcoming. So let's turn to that topic. Recently, Governor Kemp's office has announced a number of awards for, I think, Capital Project ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) COVID funds that have gone to co-ops. That funding is starting to end. Now we're looking towards the infrastructure bill, specifically the bead funding. And I note that the NTIA's (National Telecommunications and Information Administration) notice of funding opportunity is incentivizing states to make sure that the co-ops are included. Are you seeing co-ops as excited about this money, concerned, anything else?

Kevin Curtin:

Primarily excited because a few years ago, they were looking at a landscape with no additional help from the outside to try to make a broadband network work financially, which is challenging, and especially in less dense areas. So any opportunity they have to have federal government and or state government, primarily federal government at this point, a lot of times work through a state plan created by our state, they see that as a great opportunity to defer the costs that would otherwise be borne by the membership. So the more money they can get from a subsidized source like a federal government, the lower they'll have to worry about debt and paying that debt back and that debt being on the backs of the folks they provide service to. So it's all good news story.

Obviously, working through all different funding programs create certain challenges because in the infinite wisdom of the federal government, we don't have one subsidy program. We have multiple subsidy programs, and that creates some challenges because everyone has their own rules, their own qualifications, and the federal government's been taking a very active approach to make sure they don't overlap with one another.

Alan Poole:

Sure.

Kevin Curtin:

So those create some challenges, but those are things that our folks are glad to work through to try to get to the end result of providing more broadband, more parts of the state.

Alan Poole:

Some of the federal funding goes straight to broadband, but it seems to me there's smart grid and other energy-related infrastructure that might figure in as well. Have you seen any of your members pursue it from that angle?

Kevin Curtin:

Not to date, but there are a lot of opportunities in the federal infrastructure bill, on the energy side and also in the Inflation Reduction Act, the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, which a lot of people put air quotes around that. But there's a lot of energy opportunities there to bolster grids, to do projects like Middle Mile projects, things like that, through one of those two federal bills.

As an example, Georgia Transmission Corporation, which was is one of our members that is the transmission entity for the 38 of the 41 EMCs in Georgia, owns its own fiber network, has built that over the last 15 years using it initially for electrical purposes, but now can use that network for dual purpose, both for their own purposes, also, they can use it as back haul from a local EMC, back to a head in here in Atlanta to get on the internet at Marietta Street downtown. So you'll see that folks like Georgia Transmission apply for Middle Mile funding through the federal government through NTIA to try to fill some gaps in their own network they've built over the last 15 years. So there's some real synergies between the electric smart grid applications and needs, as well as the residual benefit of providing service to a large swath of Georgians who never had access to quality broadband service in the past.

Alan Poole:

Let's talk about some of the other issues you look at. I know it's not just broadband and I know there's some pretty exciting and important stuff on the horizon.

Kevin Curtin:

There is. It's a very interesting time to work in the electric sector. It seems like everything is trying to be electrified at this point, especially most people think traditionally about the electric vehicle movement and Georgia's prominent role in that. Governor Kemp and the Department of Economic Development have done a fantastic job over the last few years attracting investment to our state in that growing sector. You see the Rivian (Automotive) announcement, the Hyundai announcement in southeast Georgia, a lot of the battery plants, SK Electric and others that have been announced over the last two years, and you can see that Georgia is really in a great position to take advantage of the electrification of the whole vehicle infrastructure and transportation sector. I think, in fact, Governor Kemp said in his state of the state, or his inauguration, one of the two, that he wants to be seen as the electric mobility capital of the United States by the end of his second term.

Alan Poole:

I just saw that.

Kevin Curtin:

Which is a fantastic goal for our state. It's a great opportunity for us to get into a sector that wasn't heavily represented in our economy. We had the one Kia plan over in West Point, which was a great opportunity that Governor Perdue brought to the state a number of years ago, but we weren't a huge automotive state. So if we're going to be a huge electric mobility state, that gives our citizens the opportunity for great paying jobs. And they're not just in the metro areas. Look at the two big plants that have been announced. They're not in the metro area. One of them is in outside Savannah, one's outside of Atlanta. So I think the state has done a great job, to date, attracting those types of investments, and we look forward as a power industry to helping develop the right policies and procedures to really move that forward and help the overall goal and help the economy of our state.

Alan Poole:

With the state legislative session ongoing, what are some of the biggest legislative issues facing the development of the EV (electric vehicle) and EV charging industries?

Kevin Curtin:

Yeah, that's been really at the forefront of public policy at the state capital now for the last year or so. Right after the Rivian announcement in December of '21, this issue really hopped up on the radar screen. There's multiple questions, multiple things the state has to deal with when it comes to transitioning from a petroleum-based vehicle situation to electric vehicles. One of them is: where are you going to charge your car? One of them is, how are you going to replace the gas tax revenue that is embedded in your petroleum costs when you fill up at the filling station? Part of that goes to fund the roads. If you don't have to fill your car up at the gas station, how are we going to fund our roads?

There are multitudes of different things involved with that transition. How fast will that transition happen? You will get multiple different estimates based on how many people you ask. Some will say it's going to be very quick. Some say it's not going to ever get to 100% electric. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle there. We don't know exactly how quickly they will be adopted. If you look worldwide, the world is starting to move toward electric vehicles. And the number one country in the world moving toward electric vehicles quickly is China, and that's kind of interesting. And then probably right behind that is Europe. And North America and the United States is behind that. So how quickly will we be willing to move in that direction? Is it something that consumers really want or is it something driven by policy? Those are all open questions at this point.

Our goal as an electric utility section is to be able to support our members if that's the direction they choose to go. We don't want to influence them to go one direction or the other, but if they choose to go in the electric vehicle direction, we want to be able to make sure that charging's available to them, both at home and on the road because, I mean, most people don't really think about this, but today, 70% to 80% of charging for electric vehicles is done in your garage or at your home. So if you're going to spend most of your time charging while you're sleeping, which is a great use of those few hours while you sleep, that requires us to think about how to meet those demands in the residential environment.

What most of the policy that has been debated at the capital has really been focused on the second sector, the commercial charging, how I'm on the road and I might run low in my battery in my car, how do I find a place to recharge that battery? And not only, how do I recharge it, but how do I do it in a timeframe that makes sense? I'm not going to plug my car in at a level one or a level two charger on the road for hours to wait for it to recharge. Really, when you're talking commercial charging, you're talking a level three charger, quick charger, which can pretty much get you to a full charge within 20 to 40 minutes. Still 20 to 40 minutes is a lot longer than people are used to spending at a filling station. So how do we make sure that that's available to the people in the right places at the right time?

We also have an issue where how do we make sure that's available, not just in the corridors, the major interstates and things like that, but how do you make sure it's also available in rural Georgia? Those are really challenging scenarios. It's got a lot of similarities to the broadband issue we just discussed.

Alan Poole:

Customers per mile density.

Kevin Curtin:

Customers, density, it's a simple density issue. And rural Georgians, by most estimations, will probably be the last ones to adopt electric technology. Most people think that. Although, I will tell you, if you get an opportunity to drive a Ford Lightning F-150, that may change pretty quickly because the fact that the car manufacturers are developing pickups in the electric vehicle space, I think will get us there much faster than most people think.

But how do we make sure that everyone has access to charging when they need it? Because it's critical, and if your car runs out of power and there's nowhere to charge it, that's a problem.

Alan Poole:

You're in trouble.

Kevin Curtin:

And much like gas stations. Gas stations have been set up, the bigger gas stations are along the major corridors, but every small town in Georgia has a gas station, so there's somewhere to fill up. It may not be as prevalent and needed in some places because home charging will be... the vast majority of charging will be done at home, but there'll still be a need to be able to replenish your car if you're not sticking around home, if you're on the road. So those are all really interesting challenges, market structure challenges, and they've turned into a lot of debate at the state capital, including a joint study committee between the House and Senate on this entire issue, which met starting in August, all the way through December of this past year, and they came up with 75 pages of recommendations. And it'll be interesting to see what they do with those recommendations in the '23 session.

Alan Poole:

One of the big issues with the electric industry is, how do you charge and bill for this energy? How's that being done now and how could that change? Let's start with the home and then talk about the commercial gas stations or what have you.

Kevin Curtin:

Sure. At home, it's really a fortuitous that most charging is done overnight because, really, that is the perfect time to charge from electric perspective. When the demand on the electric grid is lower, typically, members, and not only our members, but also investor-owned utilities can offer lower rates overnight because of the lack of demand overnight. So you're filling up your car or your battery at the exact right time from an electric grid perspective. And so, that's why you see a lot of folks offer overnight charging rates, very low overnight rates to recharge batteries at home, things like that.

When it comes to commercial charging, that's a whole different ball of wax. Most commercial charging is going to be done during the business day, and that's when you run into your challenges with other energy consumption methodologies, which drain the ability to do that kind of a charging during peak times. In the winter, first thing in the morning, in summer, kind of late afternoon, 5:30, 6 o'clock at night, your peak times for energy demand.

So how do you make sure that as we try to charge our cars during peak times, there's enough electricity available, the infrastructure can handle it, create a whole set of new issues that have really never had to be dealt with before? I know the industry is spending a lot of time and effort looking at those emerging demands and emerging trends to figure out how to make sure the electric system is ready for those. I think they will be ready. I feel very confident they will, but a lot of it has to do with, how fast are we going to get from point A to point B? How fast are we going to get to 15%, 20% market share for electric vehicles? And nobody really knows the answer to that.

Alan Poole:

To close, I always like to ask my guests something along the lines of, what do you see as the biggest challenge in 5 years, or what do you hope to accomplish? We've kind of been talking about that a little bit, so maybe I'll just ask in an open-ended way. Any great hopes or predictions or issues spotted, let's say five years from now?

Kevin Curtin:

Well, hopefully, we'll have a third national championship at the University of Georgia next year. That's one.

Alan Poole:

Absolutely.

Kevin Curtin:

A “three-peat.” I'm a Georgia graduate, so I have to say that by contract. But from a professional point of view, I would really think that there's an opportunity with all the money that's coming from the federal government right now via the B program and other programs, I really think we have the opportunities as a state to get to essentially the full ability for every Georgian to get broadband at their home in business within five years. I think that opportunity does exist, so I'm really excited about that. If you think about it, getting to universal broadband service statewide has been a goal for at least a decade. And to see the opportunity for the state to advance to that end would be an incredible accomplishment, both for our public policy leaders, the governor and the general assembly, but also the federal government who has supplied a lot of the funding. So that's really exciting.

I mean, if you could do universal broadband, think about all the things that we can do. Think about how that frees people up to live where they want to live. I know a lot of people who live where they live because of their broadband service. So if you take that factor out, will they then decide to move to different part of the state?

Alan Poole:

I think your optimism towards that speaks really well of the state and how ready it is for to execute on this broadband funding because, on the one hand, everybody knows it's explicit. The goal of this funding is to connect everyone in America. On the other hand, with few exceptions, nobody in the industry thinks it's actually going to do that. But in Georgia, we actually had Jessica Simmons at the Georgia Technology Authority on recently, and we talked a lot about how we're very well-positioned to execute on this, and I think the future's bright as a result.

Kevin Curtin:

We really are. We have to give our policymakers a lot of credit going back to the last several years. Their decisions have put us at the forefront nationally from a preparedness perspective on broadband. What I mean by that is, in 2018, they passed legislation to create a broadband map, a Georgia-specific broadband map. That was built out of a frustration of the federal broadband information that was available at the time through the FCC was insufficient.

Alan Poole:

And that was all at the census block. It was almost meaningless.

Kevin Curtin:

It was very hard to discern that, and you could have one customer served in census block and the entire census block would be considered served. Obviously, that's not the level of

granularity we needed. So Georgia stepped up to the plate and did something hard. It was not easy because not a lot of states had done that at the time. But because of the fact that the General Assembly and the governor stepped up and did that in 2018, it's put us in a great position. We have one of the better broadband maps in the country, and if you look at how the federal government is now creating their broadband maps, they're doing a lot of the same things that Georgia did a few years ago.

So because Georgia was forward-thinking and did a lot of planning and really prepared us for success, I think now in the next few years, we can really just spend on executing that plan to get to 100% broadband availability. So think about what a huge accomplishment that is to check off the list of, everyone's got... 80 years ago, 70 years ago, we got to Universal Electric Service. And for years we had universal phone service. Now we can get to Universal Broadband. That's a huge feather in our cap as a state.

Alan Poole:

Well, future looks bright. I think this has been a great episode, and I really appreciate your time. I'm excited to release this, and thank you for everything you're doing, and thanks for coming in.

Kevin Curtin:

Yeah, thanks for having me. I really enjoyed it.

Alan Poole:

We hope you enjoyed today's episode. Please make sure you're subscribed to this podcast mailing list and following TAG and Troutman Pepper on LinkedIn to stay up to date. Thanks.