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**Q2. Will this project be an extension of existing infrastructure?**

In 2017, the board of Tombigbee Electric Cooperative recognized a need in their community. They listened to their electric membership, community leaders, and existing businesses and heard a desperate need for reliable high-speed internet, much like the need for electric service in 1941. Through the dedication of the board to this community, Tombigbee Communications was formed to provide ultra-high-speed internet and HD voice services to every home and business in Marion and Lamar Counties as well as portions of Franklin, Winston, and Fayette Counties.

Tombigbee began building the freedomFIBER network in January 2017. At that time the Board of Directors elected to start with a phased approach. The first phase of the project was to construct fiber in the cities of Hamilton and Winfield, AL. This made up approximately 236 miles of fiber and would serve potentially 9,000 homes. In December 2017, Tombigbee began turning customers on and within one year, they were serving over 3500 homes with high speed internet.

In the summer of 2018, the board elected to move on to phase 2 which consisted of another 168 miles and another 4000 households. At the end of 2019, Tombigbee was serving high speed internet to 7200 homes. This was a 55% take rate when the organization was only hoping for a 30% take.

In 2019, the board elected to move forward with the remaining parts of the original plan and to apply for ReConnect funds that would take the project into Marion, Lamar, Fayette, Winston and Franklin Counties bringing the project estimate up to \$100 million. At the end of 2019, Tombigbee was awarded this grant and is currently working on the construction of the rest of the project. The current private investment is \$34.4 million. Today there is just over 1100 miles of fiber constructed with plans to have more than 2500 miles upon completion. At the end of 2020, Tombigbee was providing services to just over 8,800 households and this number grows by 400 per month.

With the Alabama Broadband Accessibility fund, the existing freedomFIBER network will extend throughout the unserved portions of the Southwest corner of Franklin County, bringing reliable and affordable high-speed internet services to an additional 770 households. Many of these residents currently have no access to broadband. It is through receiving grants such as this one that Tombigbee can extend their existing infrastructure into the most rural areas.