Twitter Thread by Mike Romano



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The numbers on their face for the @FCC RDOF auction are exciting - lots of Gigabit winners. But it's important to remember the job is just starting. These rural areas don't magically get Gig today or tomorrow. 1/

The job is only done and the celebration can really only begin once we see that rural Americans are actually going to get the broadband they've been promised. 2/

And that's the rub here - at least from preliminary indications, there are LOTS of question marks clearly hanging out there once you look past the gloss and proclamations. And since we won't know for maybe 5 years if it worked, due diligence is essential now. 3/

A number of big winners have offered some service but never done Gig. This would be like giving hundreds of millions of $ to firms that have repaved residential streets to now design & build our interstate highway bridges. 4/

A number of big winners are using tech that has done Gig (maybe) only in tightly controlled applications that don't look anything like rural America. This would be like giving interstate highway $ to firms who've built lots of scale models but never actually built a bridge. 5/

Some winners have never offered commercial service &/or are using tech tested sparingly & selectively. This would be like awarding hundreds of millions of $ for interstate highway bridges to a firm that has developed a new concrete mix tested in a few driveways so far. 6/

Maybe some or all of these folks can do it, but there's no transparency into how it was determined that they can do so - and the effective "waivers" given to them to be able to bid at this level were awarded behind closed doors without any public process or transparency. 7/

And now, unfortunately, bouncing any of the applications would be tantamount to declaring the auction a failure in that area - so that seems unlikely to happen. And, yet again, the public will not be able to see if these applications show the capability to perform. 8/

So in short, we are staking the future of rural voice & broadband in these areas on behind the scenes review of untested technologies - and we will only find out if that “predictive judgment” worked/failed after years have passed and hundreds of millions of $ are spent. 9/

More specifically, it will take several years to build these networks & a year or two more before they have to test. Without better betting, we therefore might not find out where predictions & hopes fell down - where this auction failed - until 2025 or later. 10/

We are all hoping that every customer who has been promised broadband gets it. But a “trust us - this will work” set of promises reviewed only behind closed doors isn’t terribly reassuring. Many of these areas have already been burned once by overpromises and underdelivery. 11/

Transparency and accountability should be hallmarks of broadband funding policy. @NTCAconnect specifically urged before the auction for much more upfront from bidders of all kinds - incl. our members! - and to make the process for review more public. 12/

Neither happened, so the only hope now is that the FCC’s back-end review (also confidential) is truly stringent - because if it’s not, a lot of Americans may be left waiting for service and we won’t find out that once again the process failed them until it’s far too late. 13/

It’s not too late to get this right by vetting winners in a more transparent and accountable way before $ flow. But it’s way too important to not do that when billions of $ and millions of customers are in the balance. #AimHigherDoBetter 14/