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Lancaster City Connect was launched in spring 2017 as a public-private partnership between Lancaster city and Reading-based MAW Communications Inc. to offer broadband service to residents and businesses. It is the second phase of an initiative aimed at enabling the city to run the Lancaster Community Safety Coalition's security cameras, traffic lights and automated water meter reading. LanCity Connect was touted by city officials as a game-changer that will boost educational and economic opportunities for city residents and schoolchildren. But, [as Tim Stuhldreher reported in Sunday's LNP](#), there are major headaches for the project, in which Lancaster has already invested more than \$5 million.

Having noble intentions is not sufficient. Proper vetting, planning and execution are needed to turn a noble intention into a success. The idea of Lancaster city partnering with a private utility to offer competitively priced broadband service to residents and businesses — [first proposed in February 2015](#) — was certainly a noble one.

But the substandard execution of that partnership has left consumers without a clear advocate and taxpayers with a potential liability. We're not yet prepared to call it a "train wreck," but we can certainly sympathize with the Lancaster resident who used that phrase after seeing his top-tier [LanCity Connect](#) service disconnected. He has a right to be angry. And he is not alone in being a victim of how this process has unfolded.

In early 2015, the city contracted with MAW, in a 20-year agreement, to build, operate and maintain a municipal broadband network. MAW was to be paid by Lancaster to install fiber-optic cable and transmitters throughout the city. The partnership would include a residential and business broadband service, which was to be more competitive and robust than plans offered by Comcast and Verizon. For Lancaster, having municipal broadband brings cost savings and efficiencies. The city anticipates eventually saving up to \$200,000 a year through the remote reading of water meters. Another \$110,000 will be saved annually by not having to pay for internet services for police and other city employees. An administrator for the School District of Lancaster said the network would help "close the digital divide between the haves and the have-nots" and make the district's students more competitive with better-funded school districts.

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These are all smart and admirable goals. On the surface, doing business with MAW made financial sense. The project was hailed as the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. MAW began building the city's fiber-optic network "backbone" in 2015, and much of that structure is now in place. Early sign-ups for residential service through LanCity Connect began in 2016. Phased rollouts of residential hookups were slated for spring 2017, with pre-registrations surpassing 3,000 customers.

In March 2017, Lancaster City Council approved financial arrangements undergirding the partnership. This included \$1.5 million from the general fund for a working-capital loan to MAW Communications. A second ordinance allocated another \$1.5 million to underwrite residential connections, which cost about \$1,000 each and would have made residential broadband sign-ups prohibitively expensive. In all, the city's investment in the network and LanCity Connect now tops \$5 million.

Today, fewer than 350 customers have service. Early obstacles emerged in summer 2017. LanCity Connect paused its residential rollout, telling customers that it had "presented an overly optimistic deployment timeline" and overestimated its ability to overcome various administrative, regulatory and logistical hurdles. Then, in December 2017, PPL Corp. sued MAW over its attachment of network equipment to PPL-owned utility poles in the city without permission, eventually identifying at least 1,000 attachments it claims were not pre-authorized.

PPL has recently begun, following a judge's order in its favor, removing MAW fixtures from its poles. And, with that, LanCity Connect's small base of subscribers has seen some customers lose service. In the wake of this step backward, one MAW email informed customers that "we do not know when your service will be restored." Lancaster city has joined the PPL-MAW court battle in order to protect its interest in the municipal-services side of the broadband network, as the removal of MAW installations from utility polls could affect municipal functions, such as traffic-light control and the safety coalition's surveillance cameras.

There does not appear to be a specific advocate for LanCity Connect subscribers in the ongoing legal fight, though MAW President Frank Wiczkowski has said: "Rest assured, my team is committed to ensuring every Lancaster city resident has access to a cost-effective, reliable, high-speed, local choice fiber-optic broadband connection." We're not convinced. Sadly, Lancaster consumers who require broadband may be forced to turn back to or stick with Verizon or Comcast.

The terms of Lancaster's loan to MAW would allow the city to take over the broadband network outright should MAW default on repayments. The city could then hire another firm to manage it, though it's unclear if it would be able to recoup all of the money that has already been invested or loaned. There remains legitimate national debate over the allowed usage of utility poles, and under what costs and conditions rival utilities can attach their equipment to those poles. But the time to clarify those issues locally was before Lancaster partnered with MAW.

The documented stumbles by MAW — which is now down to just 10 employees from about 25 in April 2017 — in implementing broadband

locally call into question how well it was vetted before this crucial local infrastructure project. Now, the ability to bring timely and reliable broadband service, and those game-changing benefits, to Lancaster residents and businesses seem threatened to such an extent that the project might never be realized in its envisaged form. Taxpayers should be wary of the city investing further funds in the scuffling partnership. That's a shame. Perhaps even a "train wreck." And one that might have been avoided had city officials, and their advisers, been more meticulous before signing on for this multimillion-dollar project. – *Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal* editorial

Comcast Corp. and 21st Century Fox Inc. will settle their takeover battle for Sky PLC in a weekend auction run by British regulators, setting up a dramatic climax to a 21-month sale process that has pitted some of the world's biggest media giants against each other. The U.K. Takeover Panel, which polices deal making in the country, laid out Thursday rules for the auction. It is a process the regulator hasn't run many times previously—and never before with such a large company as the prize. London-listed Sky has a market value of some \$35 billion.

Such auctions of big, publicly traded companies are extremely rare elsewhere, too. In 1988, private-equity giant KKR & Co. won a tumultuous auction for tobacco and food giant RJR Nabisco. It beat out a group led by the company's management in a \$25 billion deal, ending a takeover battle immortalized in the book and film "Barbarians at the Gate." The Sky auction pits Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox, which already owns 39% of Sky, against Comcast. Walt Disney Co. has separately agreed to buy a big chunk of Fox, including its Sky stake, for \$71 billion.

That puts Disney Chief Executive Bob Iger and Mr. Murdoch on the same team, bidding against Comcast CEO Brian Roberts. Because Fox already owns a big stake in Sky, the Disney-Fox team has an interest in driving up the bidding, even if it doesn't ultimately win. That would make the stake more valuable should it decide to sell it to Comcast. The three media titans have competed against each other—and made deals with each other—over years, as they each steered their respective companies and helped reshape the American media industry. Fox and Comcast declined to comment. Representatives from Disney weren't immediately available for comment.

Mr. Murdoch has long sought to consolidate his holding in London-based Sky. Disney and Comcast see Sky as a way to expand internationally. The broadcaster also sells wireless, TV and internet services throughout Europe, and it is a media company that produces its own news, entertainment and sports programming. Mr. Murdoch and his family are major shareholders in Fox and News Corp, which owns The Wall Street Journal.

Regulators resorted to an auction process after Fox, backed by Disney, and Comcast engaged in what was starting to look like an endless series of bids and counterbids for the broadcaster. The auction will run through the day Saturday, and consist of a maximum three rounds of bidding. The winner will be announced shortly after the auction ends Saturday evening. If there is a third and final round, it will be conducted with sealed bids—secret, final offers made to the regulator.

Fox first offered in December 2016 to buy the rest of Sky it didn't already own for £10.75 (\$14.22) a share. After Fox's merger proposal hit regulatory and political delays, Comcast made a surprise offer last February, for £12.50 a share. **Comcast made the most recent offer in July**, for £14.75 (\$19.49) a share, valuing Sky at \$34 billion. That is above Fox's current bid, also made in July, of £14 a share. Investors have long expected higher offers. Sky's shares were trading only modestly higher Thursday morning in London, at £15.82. The two sides could also increase their bids before the auction, or drop out before it starts, though there is little incentive to do so.

Under the auction rules, only Fox can bid in the first round. In the second round, Comcast can counterbid. If that doesn't determine a winner, each side can submit sealed-bid offers in the third and final round. The sides can also make a conditional bid. That is a bid that counts only if the other side also makes a bid. British regulators most recently held a takeover auction in 2008, when Wisconsin-based Manitowoc Co. beat Illinois Tool Works Inc. with a \$2.7 billion bid for British food-equipment manufacturer Enodis. In that case, the panel and companies agreed to disclose only the winning bid.

In 2007, India's Tata Steel Ltd. and Brazil's Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional agreed to as many as nine, rapid-fire bidding rounds, in their duel to acquire Anglo-Dutch steelmaker Corus Group PLC. After an auction that went late into the following morning, Tata won with a bid of £6.08 a share, or £6.2 billion. CSN bid £6.03 a share. Also called blind auctions, sealed-bid auctions are common for selling real estate, professional-athletes rights and cellular airwaves. In cellular-airwave auctions, wireless carriers hire game-theory experts to help them figure out the value of the airwaves they want and a strategy for winning the bidding, said Steve Blythe, whose job is to oversee such auctions for French wireless operator Orange SA.

Often, part of the calculus is trying to ensure that even if a bids fail, rivals spend as much as possible, said Mr. Blythe, who has participated in about a dozen auctions. In a sealed-bid auction with only two contestants, only the last round really matters, he said. Early-round bids could contain useful information—or be bluffs—but “it’s what happens in the last round that matters,” he said. — **Wall Street Journal; more in New York Times**

Emergency call operators will soon have an easier time pinpointing the whereabouts of Android phone users. Google has struck a deal with T-Mobile US Inc. to **pipe location data** from cellphones with Android operating systems in the U.S. to emergency call centers, said Fiona Lee, who works on global partnerships for Android emergency location services.

The move is a sign that smartphone operating system providers and carriers are taking steps to improve the quality of location data they send when customers call 911. Locating callers has become a growing problem for 911 operators as cellphone usage has proliferated. Wireless devices now make 80% or more of the 911 calls placed in some parts of the U.S., according to the trade group National Emergency Number Association. There are roughly 240 million calls made to 911 annually.

While landlines deliver an exact address, cellphones typically register only an estimated location provided by wireless carriers that can be as wide as a few hundred yards and imprecise indoors. That has meant that while many popular applications like [Uber can pinpoint users](#), 911 call takers can't always do so. Technology giants such as Google and Apple Inc. that run phone operating systems need a direct link to the technology used within emergency call centers to transmit precise location data. "The U.S. is probably behind the eight ball right now and trying very hard to catch up," Ms. Lee said.

Most T-Mobile customers with Android operating systems will now send location data from Google's emergency location services via their carrier. In markets where RapidSOS is integrated into emergency call centers, Android users will send the information through the upstart company, according to Ms. Lee. T-Mobile has worked with Google on the issue for about four years and will merge the technology giant's location data with its own before quickly sending it to 911 call centers, said Mark McDiarmid, senior vice president of technology at the carrier.

RapidSOS, which is backed by three former Federal Communications Commission leaders, created technology that sends location information from smartphones and other internet-connected devices directly to the software used within 911 call centers. Its technology is active in over 1,000 of the more than 5,700 911 centers nationwide, and is available to all of them at no charge.

Google tested the technology and its location services in emergency call centers earlier this year, and said it reduced the average radius of the area in which a caller may be located to 121 feet from 522 feet. A partnership in the Virgin Islands between Google and West Corp., which provides technology used in many 911 call centers in America and works with carriers on emergency location services, could lead to similar arrangements in the U.S., Ms. Lee said.

Google currently offers emergency location services in 14 countries around the world by partnering with carriers and companies that are part of local emergency communications infrastructure. Its location data is based on a combination of inputs from Wi-Fi to sensors, GPS and a mobile network information. Jim Lake, director at the Charleston County Consolidated 9-1-1 Center, participated in a pilot of Google's emergency location services and said it made it easier to find people who didn't know their location, particularly because the area draws tourists. "On a day-to-day basis, most people know where they are, but when they don't, usually those are the most horrifying calls and we need to know right away," Mr. Lake said. In June, Apple said it had [partnered with RapidSOS](#) to send iPhone users' location information to 911 call centers. – *Wall Street Journal*



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