Next Century Cities applauds the release of the Consumer Broadband Nutrition Label rules but urges the FCC to go farther.

Washington, D.C. (November 17, 2022) – Today, the Federal Communications Commission released a Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking outlining how the Consumer Broadband Nutrition Labels will be displayed and formatted in addition to what information they must contain.

Congress directed the FCC to develop the Consumer Broadband Nutrition Label as a part of the Infrastructure, Investment and Jobs Act. The primary goal is to give consumers a clear picture of the costs associated with an Internet service plan. The Order requires Internet service providers to display the label “prominently,” meaning that the label must be visible while a consumer is viewing a potential service plan. Prominent display prevents the label from being buried behind links or icons.

Machine readability and display of promotional pricing terms are also required by the FCC. Making the label machine-readable is a crucial accessibility tool that will allow devices such as screen readers and electronic braille machines to read information from the label.

The Commission also included a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to ask critical clarifying questions on accessibility and languages, pricing and network performance information, network management practices, and formatting issues.

Ryan Johnston, Senior Policy Counsel, at Next Century Cities, offered the following remarks on the importance of the label:

“NCC applauds the critical step the Commission has taken to give consumers clear information about current and potential broadband subscriptions. Including promotional pricing, machine readability, contract terms, and granular information about fees and discounts. These are essential components that inform consumers about the true cost of broadband.

While this is a good first step, there is more work to be done. Without including the label on a consumer’s bill, the broadband nutrition label falls short of its goal. Consumers may
not be comprehensively informed in the event that something changes. Instead, consumers will have to continually check their bills against online labels, something they may not have the presence of mind to do on a monthly basis.

“As Commissioner Starks noted in his statement, ‘this is just the first step, and we shouldn’t rest on our laurels.’ I agree, this label is a step in the right direction, but there is still a long way to go to make the Consumer Broadband Nutrition Label the key transparency tool that Congress envisioned.”

###