



STATE OF OREGON
Office of the Governor
KATE BROWN

SB 290 – Broadband Expansion for the State of Oregon

February 2021

Overview

Regardless of income level or zip code, the pandemic has demonstrated that every child must have access to broadband internet connections and digital learning devices for distance learning. Broadband is also a driver of economic opportunity at a time when remote work is becoming widely adopted. Equitable internet access is critical.

Oregon's information and communication technology infrastructure and the capacity of Oregon to utilize these technologies for economic and community development is an important component for the state's future economic growth and development. The internet has become the platform on which the world works and broadband connectivity is becoming the universal common denominator, important and essential for all sectors of the economy.

We are experiencing rapid advances in technology, network performance, capacity, and capabilities and changes in industry structure, markets and applications, resulting in a "Digital Divide." Oregon has made significant progress in the deployment of broadband infrastructure throughout the state in recent years, but it is not enough. Nationally, less than fifty percent of households with income in the bottom twenty percent use the Internet at home, compared to ninety-five percent of households with income in the top twenty percent. The Digital Divide continues to exist and may well be contributing to the economic divide that also exists between urban and rural areas of the state.

Summary

The Governor's budget includes a \$118 million investment in broadband expansion statewide, with \$10.1 million of that for schools, all with a focus on providing access to communities that have been disproportionately impacted during the pandemic, including rural, Black, Indigenous, Latino, Latina, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and Tribal communities. This will connect 50 additional communities statewide with broadband access, including investment in both rural and urban communities that currently lack access. This investment will be made using a three-pronged approach:

- Community Broadband Investments through Business Oregon will expand the Coronavirus Relief Fund investments that have been made, allowing for communities, local governments, and private providers to apply for funds to expand broadband infrastructure. Additional funding will staff Business Oregon's Broadband Office.

- Connecting Oregon's Schools Investments, through the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), will expand connectivity for about 60 percent of schools that need it, and expand broadband over the next two years to between 40 and 60 districts and communities that currently have limited or no broadband. Working through ODE's programs will allow Oregon to leverage and maximize the use of available federal funds.
- A new Urban Connectivity program through Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS) will create a subsidy for urban areas that have broadband access but face cost barriers.

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