

2021 County Government Priorities

Broadband Expansion

The collective future of Pennsylvania hinges on addressing the challenges to broadband expansion that are preventing access to opportunities and information to many of our residents.

Although the need for internet access continues to increase across the nation—as the backbone of business, and as a tool for education, health care, emergency services and other key parts of our everyday lives—the Federal Communications Commission estimates about 800,000 Pennsylvanians still do not have reliable internet service.

Broadband continues to be echoed at all levels of government as one of the biggest hurdles of the 21st century. COVID-19 has further exposed the lack of availability and the need of Pennsylvanians for high speed and reliable internet access for key parts of our everyday lives, especially as schools and businesses must constantly adapt to changing pandemic conditions and we begin to shift into the “new normal.” Even in places with access to broadband, we are using the technology more than before, creating capacity issues even in urban areas. Counties have been at the forefront of broadband expansion in the commonwealth and are continuing to develop partnerships and creative solutions that work to provide internet connectivity for their residents, especially in rural areas and better bandwidth capacity statewide.

But high speed and reliable internet access has become a necessity, and our communities cannot continue to wait for infrastructure that is critical to our economic vitality and our personal quality of life. Even agricultural work has become increasingly dependent on connectivity as technology is added to traditional farm equipment and new tools such as drones help improve productivity. Without broadband, a significant number of Pennsylvanians are missing access to opportunities, while rural areas in particular find it harder and harder to attract and retain residents and encourage business development.

The commonwealth must develop partnerships among federal, state and local government, as well as the private sector, that can help to deploy the resources and data needed to make meaningful progress on broadband expansion to all areas of the commonwealth, rural and urban. Counties can also learn from the best practices and innovative ideas, such as regional cooperative models, that have seen success in Pennsylvania and throughout the country, to be leaders in this area going forward.

The health and future viability of our communities has an impact on the strength of our entire commonwealth. Broadband expansion will be a critical tool to move all of Pennsylvania forward together, particularly in the changing post-COVID world.



COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Working together with federal, state, local and private stakeholders to develop strategies for successful broadband expansion.
- Identifying successful approaches and sharing best practices that can be replicated with other comparable communities.
- Partnering with higher education and research entities to leverage data and other resources.
- Identifying funding resources and opportunities to aid in development and deployment of infrastructure.

For more information on **broadband expansion**, contact **Melissa Gates** at (717) 736-4718 or mgates@pacounties.org.



THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES