

Rural Broadband Expansion

The collective future of Pennsylvania hinges on addressing the challenges to rural 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.

Many of these individuals are in rural parts of the state, where internet service providers have to build the infrastructure over long distances for few customers, which is often cost-prohibitive. Ongoing work in the 2019-2020 session continues to seek solutions, with legislation, studies and funding initiatives aimed at collecting data and assessing need within the commonwealth as well as gathering local solutions and best practices. Many counties are also leading the way in building local partnerships and developing innovative ideas.

But high speed and reliable internet access has become a necessity, and our rural 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 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 rural broadband expansion. 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 rural 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.



COUNTIES SUPPORT:

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

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



THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES