

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

National and local broadband adoption supports the country's conversion to a digital economy. Private subscribership rates at the national level continue to grow each year while connecting millions of more Americans to digital information networks. Ensuring every Georgian has reliable online access is a clear 21st century statement to maintain Georgia's global economic standing.

Targeted income assistance programs for low-income areas are a substantial priority. Some of these policies will be set at the federal level, including efforts already underway. A reformed Lifeline program and the newly-announced "**ConnectHome**" will both improve broadband availability and affordability for low-income households. Also, the need exists for enhanced cooperation and communication across all levels of government alongside private Internet service providers, some of whom have demonstrated a commitment to community investment already.

Expanding digital and technological education courses are equally important to all metro and rural areas. Digital literacy training classes and programs can help prepare young students for their digital future and offer opportunities for adults to improve their skills for today's working environment. Community assets like libraries are especially important by providing public Internet access and representing centers for training. The recently-expanded federal **E-rate** program will help communities build capacity at their schools and libraries.

Finally, continuing growth of the federal and local policy strategies will also involve continued research into broadband adoption. Public and private sector employers should also continue to incentivize telecommuting for broadband benefits. Many of the largest metro areas have the highest broadband adoption rates and telecommuting could help get more households online and better maximize the internet capacity being built. As demonstrated by the wide range in metropolitan adoption rates, it's especially important to understand the local and rural areas that drive high or low economic performance, and how other factors may impact neighborhood-scale adoption.

Solutions

- Codify definition of broadband to track the Federal Communications Commission definition
- Strengthen broadband project priority with OneGeorgia funding
- Consider the establishment of a dedicated broadband fund within the Department of Community Affairs
- Permit the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority to offer funding programs for broadband projects
- Develop "Gigabit Ready" community designation by providing a list of goals that could be attained at the local level to create a more attractive business environment for companies to deploy and enhance broadband access
- Encourage SPLOST funding initiatives to include broadband deployment
- Amend the purpose of the Georgia Technology Authority to include the responsibility of monitoring broadband deployment and adoption in tandem with other state partners, such as the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia; to provide information to the legislature and other government stakeholders regarding policy changes from the federal government and how it affects Georgia; and to serve as the state partner to the Federal Communications Commission

- Explore how the Georgia Department of Transportation and other state agencies can lease excess fiber to providers for better broadband services
- Catalogue available resources—*e.g.*, excess conduit, fiber optic routes, potential antenna sites—and market these assets at fair market price
- Require the Georgia Department of Transportation to open the right-of-way for conduits and fiber on rural roads
- Repurpose Georgia Universal Access Fund eligibility to include broadband expansion
- Expand Georgia Universal Access Fund fees from landlines to all telephone numbers
- Convene with experts within the Department of Education and Georgia Technology Authority, local boards of education, and stakeholders of the Georgia Public Web Service to determine whether and how the state could broadcast unused bandwidth (*e.g.*, after school hours) to citizens or anchor institutions within a local community in need of broadband
- Explore how public-private partnerships could be better facilitated between local government, real estate professionals, local development authorities, and others
- Encourage the Department of Community Affairs or Georgia Technology Authority, in concert with Regional Development Centers, to educate citizens on the benefits of broadband in local communities, field questions, and compile data on the costs of deploying broadband to areas without service or enhancing existing service
- Collect information from Regional Commissions, the Georgia Farm Bureau, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, and others, to assess what geographies seem to be underserved
- Hire a consulting firm to conduct a statewide feasibility study to understand current conditions and formulate a statewide broadband plan
- Amend existing law to provide Georgia's Electric Membership Corporations statutory clarity to provide telecommunication and broadband services
- Eliminate taxes or fees on telecommunications equipment that is purchased with the goal of deploying to or enhancing a rural area
- Provide tax credits for individuals or businesses that invest in broadband infrastructure in rural areas
- Create tax incentives for individuals or businesses deploying broadband in rural areas to recruit and hire local labor force
- Address local government issues that inhibit future broadband expansion
- Develop a uniform, streamlined permitting process at the local level
- Craft incentives to encourage partnerships between large and small telecommunications providers, thereby eliminating duplicative efforts and leveraging combined resources to assess and address broadband disparities
- Reaffirm the state's approval of competitive telecommunication markets by continuing to permit locally-owned and operated government broadband services
- Request information from state agencies on how adequate broadband service affects their regulated parties and how it fuels economic development