

REGIONAL BROADBAND WORKSHOP

Highlights

Presented by BizFed Institute
 In partnership with the Los Angeles/Orange County Regional Broadband Collaborative
 September 16, 2022

» WATCH: youtu.be/Bsbr8ltDOmA



I want to thank everyone who pitched in to make the 2022 installment of our **Regional Broadband Workshop** a resounding success. This virtual gathering of bright minds and dedicated difference-makers marked another important step forward in our mission to close the Digital Divide, especially in Southern California's most under-resourced communities. Our expert speakers delved into state-led middle-mile and last-mile efforts, the importance of expanding digital literacy with a multilingual approach, strategies to streamline permitting at all levels of government, intel-sharing initiatives that empower elected officials to secure more broadband funding, and what YOU can do right now to strengthen public-private partnerships.

At the end of the day, it's those partnerships that will move the needle in a big way on advancing broadband infrastructure, access, affordability, adoption, and literacy. I consider you a partner for simply opening this document and electing to read about the necessity of reliable internet in our increasingly digital society. The conversation around digital equity grew louder during the pandemic, when many of us shifted to remote work, e-learning, telemedicine, and virtual social services. Those dark days helped shine a bright light on issues that persist. Thank you for joining the conversation. Let's keep it going to spark meaningful change.

Kevin Harbour

Kevin Harbour
 BizFed Institute President

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REGIONAL BROADBAND WORKSHOP: KEYNOTE SPEAKER

— “ —
Internet access isn't a luxury. It's a basic utility. It's a civil right.
— ” —



HON. HOLLY MITCHELL
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors - 2nd District

Supervisor Holly Mitchell, Chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, broke some major, motivating news during her keynote remarks. She announced the creation of a county **"Director of Digital Equity"** position on September 13, just three days before our workshop, via board motion.

- The Director of Digital Equity will collaborate with the county Internal Services Department to establish the Intergovernmental Broadband Coordinating Committee (IBCC), which will serve as a coordinating entity to expand affordable and reliable internet access across jurisdictions.
- The director will support efforts to equitably allocate funding for broadband infrastructure projects.
- Nationwide recruitment efforts are underway to fill the new job.

The motion that created the position, co-authored by Mitchell and Supervisor Hilda Solis, will maximize the impact of unprecedented federal and state dollars available for broadband expansion. The board also approved **\$56 million** for the county to build out broadband infrastructure in high-need areas, as part of the county's recommended spending priorities for American Rescue Plan funds. Mitchell stressed the importance of using this pot of federal money to enhance regional collaboration across LA County's unincorporated municipalities. Government must be nimble in addressing such a large-scale and pressing issue, she said.

More than 428,000 households across LA County do not have home internet. These households are disproportionately concentrated in low-income communities of color. Leaving "hardly reached and hard-to-reach communities" cut off from what Mitchell described as the "emerging basic utility of our time" makes it even more difficult for residents to pursue education, work, aid, and other vital services.

Mitchell has proven herself an assertive and effective leader in our ongoing fight to expand broadband access. She authored a motion last year that accelerated efforts to close the Digital Divide, directing up to \$500,000 of American Rescue Plan funds toward expanding affordable and reliable internet service for communities that are disproportionately affected.

What's next in her playbook? Creating dedicated leadership positions. Issuing contracts faster to service providers. Upping accountability for achieving broadband goals.

There are projects that are "primed and ready to go," Mitchell told attendees.

Broadband Flash Poll Takeaways

PRODUCED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EMPLOYERS GROUP



38 professionals representing 11 industries (including professional services, nonprofit organizations, technology companies, and chambers of commerce) shared their perspectives on the current state of digital inequity in LA County and strategies for expanding internet access. Findings confirm and underscore our hypothesis that all Angelenos stand to gain from investments in broadband infrastructure and new public-private partnerships focused on digital equity.

When I think of the current status of the digital divide, the first thing that comes to mind is...

It is a serious problem, and we are not making sufficient progress solving it	37%
Its negative impact on equitable access to education, professional opportunities, healthcare and social interaction will be felt long into the future	34%
There are good plans in place to end it	13%
I don't think about it	8%
It is an over-stated problem	3%
Other	5%

More than two-thirds of Flash Poll respondents identified digital inequity as a "serious problem" that requires more attention and is negatively impacting access to education, work, health care, and opportunities for community and civic engagement. Only 13% of respondents said there are "good plans in place" to close the Digital Divide.

Overall, when I consider the current state and future prognosis for broadband for all throughout the state...

However, most respondents appear to be responding positively to ramped up efforts to connect more Angelenos with affordable internet. 45% of respondents said they are "more optimistic today" than they were a year ago about the state of digital equity in LA County. 11% of respondents reported feeling less optimistic than they did a year ago.



What is needed to successfully close the digital divide?

Make grant funding more accessible for broadband infrastructure deployment, adoption and internet access	61%
Leverage the affordable connectivity program and other government subsidies to create affordable internet	55%
Focus on underserved communities	55%
Establish and mobilize companies, business leaders and philanthropists through public-private partnerships across the state	47%
Implement digital literacy programs	45%
Streamline the permit process	39%
Overcome legislative gridlock	37%
Focus on small business access	16%
Other	13%

So what can we do about the problem? Nearly two-thirds of respondents support making grant funding more accessible for broadband infrastructure deployment, adoption, and internet access. More than half of respondents support focusing on underserved communities and leveraging government subsidies to expand access. Curiously, only 45% of respondents believe digital literacy programs are necessary to close the Digital Divide. Perhaps heightened awareness of how intel gaps dramatically slow adoption will change that number. BizFed Institute is committed to shining a light on the critical importance of digital literacy.

PANEL 1: Deleting the Digital Divide

Moderated by Kome Ajise – Southern California Association of Governments, Executive Director

Panelists:

Selwyn Hollins – LA County Internal Services Department, Director
 Rebecca Kauma – City of Long Beach, Digital Equity & Inclusion Officer



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted how people without internet access were left behind and essentially not participating in society.
- Internet access isn't the only thing hundreds of thousands of LA County households lack; approximately half of the 428,000+ homes without internet across the county also don't have a computer.
- Cost is king. The top concern among unconnected Southern Californians is affordability. \$20 a month for high-speed broadband simply isn't feasible for some low-income families. Poor connection quality is another top concern.
- It's difficult to usher in tangible and lasting change on the digital front without addressing systemic inequities that hold some community members back. Establishing trust with the community must be part of the solution.
- In addition to bringing together cross-sector partners, broadband leaders must also actively seeking input from members of impacted communities. We cannot properly serve them without understanding their everyday broadband needs.
- LA County is leveraging the thousands of contracts it has with major service providers to provide more comprehensive access, more reliable coverage, and affordable rates.
- LA County's existing agreement with the city of LA allows the two government entities to share basic assets including light poles, radio towers, and other above-ground infrastructure. The county is currently in talks with two other cities to establish similar MOUs.
- Rather than competing across jurisdictions, teaming up to achieve regional goals will better serve constituents who move across different cities daily for work and recreation.
- The Digital Inclusion Road Map crafted by the city of Long Beach can serve as a model for other governments seeking to uplift historically disenfranchised residents.
- The city of Long Beach is also leaning in to advance digital literacy with a multilingual approach. Workshops and pop-up events convened by the city include a Canva training session in Spanish so residents know how to use the free web service to create basic marketing flyers for small businesses.
- Partnership success stories in LA County include private sector donations for technology initiatives, including IT professional certificates that make budding professionals more marketable for broadband-dependent jobs.
- "This problem has existed for decades, but here in LA, we have the elected support and the resources to create a sustainable solution," said LA County Internal Services Director Selwyn Hollins.

PANEL 2: Regional Leadership

Moderated by Steve PonTell – National Community Renaissance, President & CEO

Panelists:

Supervisor Curt Hagman – San Bernardino County, District 4

Hasan Ikhata – San Diego Association of Governments, CEO

Amy Cortina – UNITE-LA, Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships

Chris Schmidt – Caltrans, Deputy District Director / San Diego Association of Governments, Digital Equity Manager



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- State funding unlocked by the passage of **SB 156**, which allows Caltrans to deliver on its middle-mile initiative, is being strategically funneled into closing broadband gaps in all under-resourced communities. We cannot overlook the needs of tribal and rural communities as we mobilize resources to connect low-income urban communities.
- A 2020 "gap analysis" study conducted by SANDAG identified the greatest broadband deficiencies in low-income communities of color, mirroring broadband gaps in other parts of the state.
- Building infrastructure that delivers broadband to unconnected communities is only one part of the challenge; making sure internet access is affordable is key to lasting change.
- San Bernardino County is deploying different technologies to connect remote areas where geographical features are not compatible with fiber. Each region faces unique challenges posed by Mother Nature that must be considered.
- There are seven Southern California counties that must work together to address digital inequity.
- SANDAG is tackling broadband permitting issues with the private sector, as well as Caltrans leaders, to accelerate infrastructure expansion. Recent SANDAG achievements include a first-in-state project to transform an 18-mile stretch of pavement into 18 miles of broadband infrastructure.
- UNITE-LA, a nonprofit that dedicated to advancing education innovation through collaboration, partnered with the LA Digital Equity Action League during the pandemic to successfully apply for a CPUC broadband grant as a designated "Regional Broadband Consortium" for LA County.
- Caltrans is rolling out digital permitting options that will ultimately make the application process simpler to navigate, but the agency acknowledges a "learning curve" as applicants adjust to the new technology, underscoring that digital literacy must be addressed in all spaces.

PANEL 3: Middle-Mile & Last-Mile Efforts

Moderated by Kevin Harbour – BizFed Institute

Panelists:

Tony Tavares – Caltrans, Director

Ron Hutchins – CENIC/GoldenStateNet, Senior Advisor

Robert Osborn – California Public Utilities Commission, Communications Director



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- California's state-led "middle-mile" and "last-mile" broadband initiatives are similar to our system of roads. State highways that feed into major metropolitan hubs connect with smaller, county roads so people who live farther from cities can still reach highways. Our middle-mile infrastructure functions like the state highway system, while last-mile infrastructure serves harder-to-reach Californians like county roads.
- The open-access middle-mile network consists of fiber infrastructure that carries large amounts of data at high speeds over long distances. Middle-mile deployment is critical to last-mile deployment.
- SB 156 was signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom in July 2021, unlocking a historic \$6 billion for digital equity efforts and expansion of broadband infrastructure.
 - \$2 billion from this pot of money was allocated for building last-mile infrastructure
 - \$750 million was allocated for a Broadband Loan Loss Reserve Fund that supports local broadband infrastructure development
 - \$50 million was allocated for a Local Agency & Tribal Technical Assistance grant program.
- While Caltrans is widely known for its highways and bridges, the agency also manages construction of middle-mile infrastructure. It's currently aiming to upgrade more than 10,000 miles of middle-mile fiber.
- 17% of communities in California do not have broadband access. 51% of rural communities do not have high-speed broadband access. More than 25% of tribal communities do not have high-speed broadband access.
- CPUC has been funding broadband efforts through the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) since the fund's inception in 2007.
- CPUC leaders are working to accelerate the funding approval process for qualifying projects.
- CASF money is allocated to support five accounts addressing broadband adoption, infrastructure, connected public housing, rural and urban regional broadband consortia grants, and a line extension pilot program.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: "Get Connected"

Marissa Canche – California Emerging Technology Fund, Adoption Manager



- "Get Connected!" is a statewide public awareness program that encourages all Californians to make their lives easier by maximizing the benefits of high-speed internet.
- Key goals include raising awareness of the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and providing hands-on guidance to ensure eligible Californians have the tools they need to complete and submit applications.
- BizFed Institute will help get the word out with a messaging blitz and ACP sign-up event in November.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: "Access & Adoption"

Erin Carr-Jordan – Arizona State University, Executive Director of Digital Equity & Social Impact



- Connectivity must be fast, reliable, and affordable. Remote, rural, urban, and tribal communities must be equitable reached.
- While connection itself is vital, people must also be empowered to use their broadband connection to engage in services that improve their lives.
- Digital literacy and workforce education are critical to advancing broadband adoption. The adoption gap is 3x larger than the availability gap.

PROGRESS REPORTS: BizFed Institute & LA/OCRBC's Public-Private Projects

Moderated by Mitchell Vieyra - BizFed Institute

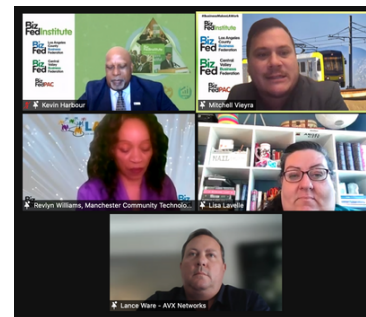


South Los Angeles Community Wireless Network

Keith Alexis, CEO of ICC Networking, said the high-tech hardware and software manufacturer is ready to deploy its emerging technology solutions to ensure under-resourced parts of South LA are connected. The company's use of innovative "digital navigators" will spur job creation in the technical and customer support spheres, while building community trust. New hires for these roles will come from local neighborhoods. BizFed Institute is leading this effort as the lead consortium member of the LA/Orange County Regional Broadband Collaborative (LA/OCRBC).

Catalina Island Project

Avalon City Councilmember Lisa Lavelle spoke at length about Santa Catalina Island's need for enhanced internet access to serve both seasonal visitors and the island's approximately 4,000 year-round residents. (Summer and weekend population can exceed 10,000.) Lance Ware, CEO of AVX Networks, called for public-private partnerships to accelerate the deployment of middle-mile infrastructure via new technologies such as oceanic cable to serve the island. LA/OCRBC leader Dr. Revlyn Williams, who also serves as Executive Director of Manchester Community Technologies, is credited with initially connecting Catalina Project leaders with BizFed Institute. She was instrumental in executing project launch efforts.

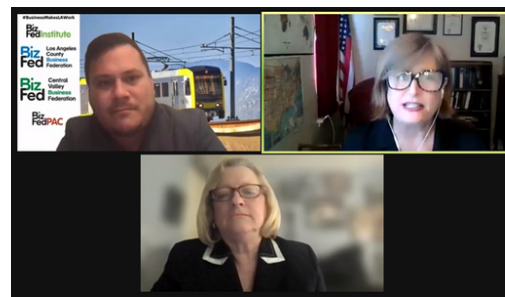


Antelope Valley Project

Marilyn Adjanba, CEO of One World Link, discussed the company's microwave technology solution and how it delivers the most efficient and cost-effective technology to connect unincorporated, hard-to-reach areas of the Antelope Valley. She framed this as a sustainable long-term solution. Tyler Gentry, Senior Site Development Manager at T-Mobile, offered up a near-term solution in the form of hotspots for residents with poor local connection. Sufficient funding is needed immediately for both solutions. A combination of the two efforts will maximize coverage.

San Gabriel Valley Project

LA/OCRBC leader Brenda Trainer, who also serves as President of MADIA Tech Launch, kicked off the final progress report showcasing how small contract cities and nonprofits can effectively partner with private entities. This team has been methodically assessing the impact of the pandemic on connectivity at schools, businesses, and other local institutions. Donna Choi, Executive Director at the Downtown Arcadia Improvement Association, said a significant number of local property owners and businesses have reached out for help addressing poor connectivity. Her association is now working with Arcadia city leaders to usher in immediate solutions. "All business owners need better broadband," she said.



LEARN MORE: laocrbc.org

CLOSING REMARKS: Rex Knowles - Verizon, Director of External Affairs
Rex serves on the BizFed Institute Board of Directors



We thank Rex Knowles for the succinct and energizing recap of key takeaways from our Regional Broadband Workshop. The "clear theme" across all panels and presentations was the importance of collaboration and communication, he told attendees. We can only permanently delete the Digital Divide if we work together to implement a coordinated roster of all-of-the-above solutions. These strategies should have distinct goals to collectively meet all communities and residents' needs, while creating equitable access to competitive rates.

We want to echo Rex's note of gratitude to keynote speaker Supervisor Holly Mitchell for opening the workshop with the "perfect framework" of discussion points and next steps. The creation of an intergovernmental coordinating committee will certainly be a catalyst for progress as more broadband funding becomes available at the federal, state, and local levels. We're proud to host a workshop bookended by such action-spurring speakers.

**THANK YOU FOR STEPPING UP
TO BRIDGE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

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