



Key Points

CONNECTICUT ACADEMY OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

Guidelines for the Development of a Strategic Plan for Accessibility to and Adoption of Broadband Services in Connecticut

Study Purpose

The State of Connecticut received federal stimulus funding to create a Strategic Plan for Accessibility to and Adoption of Broadband Services in Connecticut. CASE conducted a study on behalf of the Office of Consumer Counsel and the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection for the purposes of providing guidance for the state to use in its formulation of the strategic plan. The Connecticut Economic Resource Center was engaged by CASE to conduct the research for the study.

Definition of Broadband

The term broadband commonly refers to high-speed Internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access.

Methodology

A variety of study methods were used to gather data and information including:

- input from broadband experts at committee meetings;
- research on leading state and country broadband programs and initiatives;
- surveys of consumers and businesses;
- focus groups that were conducted throughout the state; and
- integration of the state mapping project findings into the final report.

Why Broadband Is Important

Broadband can be described as the electricity of the 21st century; it is a major driver of the global economy. Broadband has enabled innovations across all aspects of the economy, throughout many sectors and industries. It has improved communication and the flow of information and social interaction, facilitated job creation, reduced miles driven and fossil fuels consumed, and expanded consumer choice, and improved competition for goods and services.

Brief Statement of Primary Conclusion

The CASE Study Committee found that even though the state has benefited from broadband infrastructure investments by the private and public sectors, Connecticut lacks coordination among broadband policy makers and does not have clearly defined broadband goals. In researching other states and nations, one common thread that was evident among broadband leaders was a need for a clearly defined goal and actionable steps to achieve that goal. The state needs a broadband strategic plan that establishes goals and objectives, continues the initiatives already underway in the state, and leverages public and private investments.

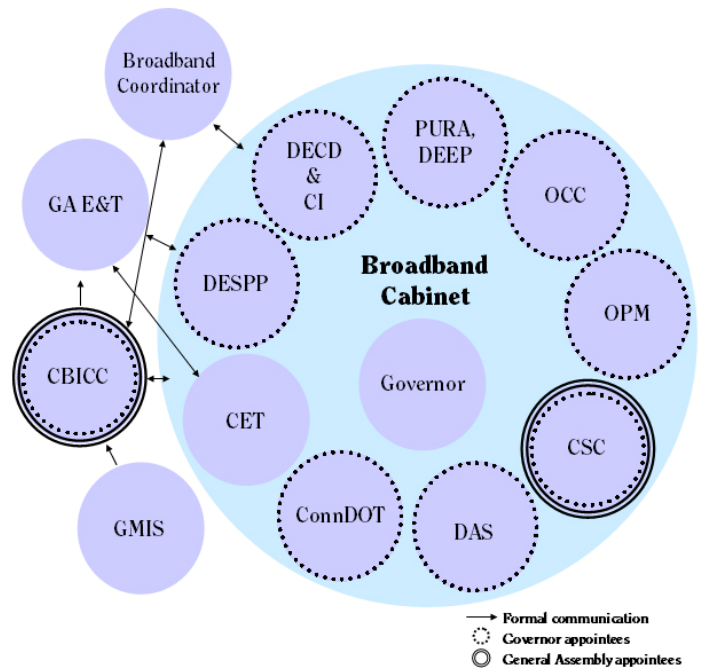
1. As the first step, Connecticut needs to create a sustainable mechanism for communication among existing broadband policy makers. In addition, progress needs to be continually monitored through the development and implementation of quantifiable metrics so that Connecticut remains competitive in retaining and attracting residents and businesses.
 2. Although Connecticut has enjoyed relatively high adoption rates, those in households with low incomes may fail to adopt broadband for several reasons, including having set a lower priority for the value of using the Internet; the expense of the technology, including hardware, to access broadband; and a perception that broadband service itself is unaffordable relative to other household expenses.
 3. Lack of digital literacy among some residents is another barrier to broadband adoption.
 4. Without streamlined pole attachment and cell-tower siting processes, competition and investment in newer broadband infrastructure will likely be inhibited.
 5. A fiber network spans the state, including rural areas, but the full potential of this network has not been realized.
 6. State policies that facilitate making broadband technologies accessible to all residents will be an engine of growth for the state.
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Focus Areas of the Findings and Recommendations

1. State Organization
2. Broadband Goals and Progress Metrics
3. Adoption of Broadband
4. Pole Attachment and Cell Tower Siting Processes
5. Broadband Infrastructure and Access

State Organization: The first recommendation of the report centers around the creation of a broadband cabinet. By working within the existing entities in the state that focus on broadband policy, this proposed coordination structure, the broadband cabinet, seeks to create a link between all the entities and ensure strong coordination and communication. The broadband cabinet creates a comprehensive process, shared by the legislative and administrative branches of government, to deliberate, develop and monitor effectiveness of broadband policy.



Concluding Remarks

Given that broadband technology is an enabler that significantly advances the ability of Connecticut's residents, organizations and businesses to communicate, learn, work, create, consume, access services, and recreate, it merits serious state attention.

- The recommendation regarding creating formal communication among existing policy makers places greater emphasis on broadband policy with the development of the broadband cabinet. This will help increase communication and coordination between state agency leaders who can impact broadband policy.
- The establishment of a broadband goal provides direction for policy makers and helps establish Connecticut as a broadband leader.
- In order to be a global leader in broadband capacity, Connecticut must ensure that the state maintains a competitive environment for broadband providers and remains attractive for continued investment. Streamlining the pole attachment and cell tower siting processes will ease the burden for providers in the market.
- Furthermore, since open access to the CEN is required as part of receiving ARRA funding, review the leadership, vision, mission, goals, sustainability, and management structure of the CEN so that it may adapt to the possible future demands on the fiber network.
- Although Connecticut does have some of the highest broadband access rates in the nation, there are segments of the population that lack broadband connections due to factors such as lack of interest or understanding of the need for an Internet connection as well as the cost of technology and broadband service. Therefore, it is hoped that the proposed recommendations will increase access rates by leveraging existing resources and working within the existing infrastructure of nonprofits and organizations that assist low-income residents.