

California Broadband Report Offers Model For Other States

Report Describes Broadband Rollout Trends, Maps Availability, And Recommends Deployment Strategy.

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A California report offers a deep look into who has broadband there and who does not and may serve as a model for other states, said an official with Cisco Systems.

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's Broadband Task Force, which released thereportlast week, found that 96 percent of Californians have access to broadband, but speeds vary significantly region to region. Only about 54 percent of Californians have access to 10Mbps (megabits per second), and about 56 percent of the state's residents subscribe to broadband service, the report said.

The report makes several recommendations, but one of the other major benefits of the study is its household-level information about broadband service availability, said Jeffrey Campbell, Cisco's senior director of technology and communications policy. An examination of broadband availability with this granularity hasn't been completed in the U.S. before, he said. Charles Giancarlo, Cisco's former chief development officer, served as co-chairman of the Broadband Task Force.

The mapping "was necessary and important," Campbell said. "It's something that other states and the federal government can learn from. It's difficult to figure out how to start solving the issue of whether there's enough broadband ... when we just don't know where there is and isn't broadband in this country."

California is "poised to become the world's leader" in broadband if it adopts the recommendations in the report, said Dale Bonner, the secretary of the state's Business, Transportation and Housing Agency and a task force co-chairman, in a statement.

Critics of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission have long complained that the agency's broadband statistics aren't granular enough. Currently, the FCC counts a ZIP code as served by broadband if just one residence has service, but many ZIP codes are only partially served by broadband, critics say. A year ago, the FCC reported that broadband providers offered service in 99 percent of U.S. ZIP codes.

Only a handful of states have also attempted to map broadband service. Kentucky has been particularly noted for its mapping effort.

The California report contains a series ofmapsthat show where broadband is available and at what speeds. For example, most of Silicon Valley has broadband of 5M bps to 10M bps available, while some spots have faster speeds. But large chunks of California's far northern coast have no broadband availability, according to the maps.

All of California's broadband providers cooperated with the task force to create the maps, Campbell said. Broadband providers in the past have expressed concern that providing that information would give away their trade secrets, but the task force allowed the providers to give their data confidentially to a third-party aggregator.

The report shows that many Californians don't have access to the 10M bps necessary for telemedicine applications, specialized gaming and high-quality video, the report says. "It's not going to be good enough to have 500K [bps] broadband going forward," Campbell said. "We have to work to get it to people who don't have it at all, but also to ensure that the people who do have it available to them continue to get faster broadband and higher quality."

The report recommends that the state build out broadband infrastructure to all residents, permit providers to work with each other and create a statewide e-health network to encourage broadband use.

Broadband provider AT&T praised the work of the task force. The economy needs a strong broadband infrastructure as its "foundation," said Ken McNeely, president of AT&T California, in a statement. Such a digital infrastructure will mean new jobs for the state and ensure that California "remains a leader in driving new, innovative technologies."