

RURAL BROADBAND TASK FORCE
Monday, Sept. 24, 2018, 9:30 a.m. to Noon CDT
Varner Hall, Lower Level, Board Room
3835 Holdrege Street, Lincoln, Nebraska
MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ed Toner, Chair, Nebraska Information Technology Commission
Senator Curt Friesen, District 34, Chair, Transportation and Telecommunications Committee, Nebraska Legislature
Senator Bruce Bostelman, District 23, Nebraska Legislature
Mary Ridder, Chair, Nebraska Public Service Commission
Joe Fox, Director of Business Development , Nebraska Dept of Economic Development
Steve Wellman, Director, Nebraska Dept of Agriculture
Zachary Hunnicutt, Farmer, Hunnicutt Farms
Tom Shoemaker, President, Pinpoint Communications
Daniel Spray, Owner, Precision Technology
Timothy Lindahl, CEO/General Manager, Wheat Belt Public Power District
Anna Turman, CEO, Chadron Community Hospital & Health Services
Andrew Buker, Executive Director of Infrastructure Services, University of Nebraska
Ron Cone, Director of Network Information Services, ESU 10

MEMBERS ABSENT: Isaiah Graham, Vice-President, Homestead Bank

ROLL CALL, NOTICE OF POSTING OF AGENDA, NOTICE OF NEBRASKA OPEN MEETINGS ACT POSTING

Ed Toner

Mr. Toner welcomed members to the first Rural Broadband Task Force meeting. The meeting announcement was posted on the NITC website on August 8, 2018 and on the Nebraska Public Meeting website on August 27, 2018. The agenda was posted on the NITC website and Rural Broadband Task Force website on September 7, 2018. A copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was available on the south wall of the Board Room.

Roll call was taken. There were 10 voting members present. A quorum was present.

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Ed Toner

Task force members do not receive compensation for serving on the task force, but are entitled to receive reimbursement for any actual expenses incurred for such service. The Office Services Manager sent members information on the process for claiming reimbursement for travel expenses.

Nebraska's Open Meetings Act allows for video conferencing for up to half of the task force's meetings. If the task force would like to utilize videoconferencing, staff can make arrangements for videoconferencing.

INTRODUCTIONS

Ed Toner

Members introduced themselves and shared information on resources, broadband-related projects, and/or how their sector is using technology.

REVIEW PROGRESS IN REACHING GOALS FROM THE 2014 BROADBAND PLAN

Anne Byers, Nebraska Information Technology Commission

In 2014, the Nebraska Information Technology Commission developed a broadband plan in partnership with the Nebraska Broadband Initiative. Anne Byers provided an overview of the plan and an update on the goals set in the plan.

The plan described existing state policies and programs and identified recommendations related to encouraging investments in Nebraska telecommunications infrastructure and increasing the use of broadband technologies. The 10 recommendations were as follows:

1. Encourage investment in Nebraska's telecommunications infrastructure.
 - a. Provide support through the Nebraska Universal Service Fund.
 - b. Aggregate demand and act as an anchor tenant.
 - c. Explore ways to leverage FirstNet and Next Generation 911 investments.
2. Enhance the capacity of local communities to address broadband development.
3. Encourage the development of a skilled IT workforce.
4. Support innovation and entrepreneurship.
5. Support the use of broadband technologies in businesses and agriculture.
6. Support the development of libraries as community anchor institutions.
7. Support the use of broadband in education and health care.
8. Support the use of broadband by government and public safety entities.
9. Support efforts to attract new residents and retain youth.
10. Increase digital literacy and broadband access to the Internet.

Ms. Byers also shared updates on the goals from the 2014 broadband plan.

Comments from the members included:

- There is a need to factor out population centers in estimates of broadband availability.
- It would be good to have data comparing the cost of broadband in metropolitan and rural areas of the state. Although there may be availability in rural areas, it may not be affordable.
- Members discussed the need for the task force to define rural. There was not a clear consensus on a definition, although several members recommended prioritizing efforts to address areas outside city or town limits.

Ron Cone arrived at the meeting.

OVERVIEW OF LB 994 AND CHARGE TO THE TASK FORCE

Tip O'Neill, Telecommunications and Transportation Committee , Nebraska Legislature

Mr. O'Neill distributed a historical timeline of milestones relevant to LB 994. He also reviewed sections of LB 994 pertaining to the establishment of the Rural Broadband Task Force.

VISION AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

Ed Toner

Mr. Toner asked the members assistance with creating a vision statement for the task force based on the intent of the bill which reads as follows:

It is the intent of the Legislature that broadband telecommunications service in rural areas of the state should be comparable in download and upload speed and price to urban areas in the state where possible and that state resources should be utilized to ensure that the rural residents of the state should not be penalized simply because of their rural residence. It is further the intent of the Legislature that the residents of this state should have access to broadband telecommunications service at a minimum download speed of twenty-five megabits per second and a minimum upload speed of three megabits per second.

Due to the rapid changes in technology, members had concerns with having a minimum download and upload speed in the vision statement. Members suggested including the minimum numbers in the goals, rather than the vision. It was also recommended not to separate home and work accessibility. Many rural Nebraskans work from home or do work at home.

More accurate data collection would be very beneficial to the task force. Members were interested in examining what data is needed and exploring ways to get better data.

The members agreed on the following vision statement:

Broadband and telecommunications service in rural areas of the state should be comparable in download and upload speed and price to urban areas.

HOW NEBRASKA RURAL AREAS COMPARE TO NEIGHBORING STATES AND THE U.S.

Overview of Broadband Terms and Broadband Map

Cullen Robbins, Nebraska Public Service Commission

Mr. Robbins gave an overview of the different methods of connectivity: DSL, cable, fiber, fixed wireless, and satellite. Mr. Robbins also discussed how rural is defined by the Nebraska Universal Service Fund. Within the NUSF, rural is defined as a census block that contains fewer than 20 households with a density below 42 households/square mile. Also, areas must not be classified as a city or village by the U.S. Census, and are not within census-designated city limits.

Mr. Robbins provided a demonstration of the Nebraska Broadband Map to task force members.

Broadband Availability and Adoption Data Including Subscription Rates at Higher Speed Tiers

Anne Byers

Ms. Byers shared the following information:

- Nebraska ranks 32nd out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia in broadband availability.
- Nebraska ranked in the middle of our neighboring states in broadband availability of 25 Mbps/3Mbps.
- Nebraska ranks 4th for business download speeds, but 44th for residential broadband download speeds.
- Subscription rates in Nebraska by county vary significantly, ranging from 92% in Sarpy County to 38% in Banner County as of June 2016.
- Rural Nebraskans are more likely to rely upon the library for internet access than metropolitan Nebraskans.
- 74% of Nebraska libraries have internet service less than 25 Mbps down, affecting 269,000 patrons.

Rural broadband availability and adoption is associated with:

- Attraction and retention of millennials
- Greater economic growth
- Higher household incomes
- Small business growth

MEETING SCHEDULE AND PLAN OF WORK/TENTATIVE AGENDA TOPICS

Ed Toner

Meeting dates and times have been scheduled for the remainder of the year. Following are the dates and tentative discussion topics:

October 15:

- Connect America Fund
- Nebraska Universal Service Fund
- How will the task force examine “any effect of the Nebraska Universal Service Fund in deterring or delaying capital formation, broadband competition, and broadband deployment?”
- Other Nebraska programs and policies

November 7:

- What other states are doing
- Alternative technologies (e.g. new fixed wireless technologies, TV white space, low earth orbiting satellites)

December 10

- Public-private partnerships and other alternatives

Meetings will be held at Varner Hall from 9:30 a.m. CT to noon CT.

Future meetings could focus on additional topics the task force members wish to address, topics that need additional information/discussion, and the development of recommendations. The task force can establish advisory groups to have more expertise and opinions to assist with the study.

Spring dates will be scheduled around the Legislative schedule.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Honeycutt moved to adjourn. Ms. Ridder seconded. All were in favor. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

Meeting minutes were taken by Lori Lopez Urdiales and reviewed by Anne Byers and Tom Rolfes of the Office of the CIO.