

South Central Kansas Regional Convening on Broadband Access & Expansion Summary Report July 31, 2019

On July 26, the Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP) and the South Central Economic Development District (SCKEDD) teamed up to host the South Central Kansas Regional Convening on Broadband Access and Expansion at Botanica. The event was sponsored by Ideatek, KanOkla Networks and KsFiberNet. Approximately 100 policy makers and business leaders gathered to identify barriers and solutions to high-speed broadband access and expansion across the region.

Speakers and panelists included:

- Lt. Governor Lynn Rogers
- Mike Zamrzla, District Director, Office of Senator Jerry Moran
- Rep. Joe Seiwert, Kansas House of Representatives, Co-Chair of the Broadband Expansion Planning Task Force
- Stanley Adams, Director of Broadband Initiatives, Kansas Department of Commerce
- Brent Legg, Vice President of Government Affairs, Connected Nation
- Jill Kuehny, CEO, KanOkla Networks
- Jade Piros De Carvalho, Marketing & Sales Manager, Ideatek
- Bob Wallentine, Vice President of Network Development, KsFiberNet
- Ryan Flickner, Senior Director of Public Policy, Kansas Farm Bureau

The purpose of the meeting was to engage elected officials (policy makers) and industry leaders to accelerate broadband connectivity across the region. Quality, high-speed broadband access is critical for economic competitiveness, business growth, job creation, healthcare, education and public safety.

Mike Zamrzla, on behalf of Senator Jerry Moran, spoke on three points of weakness:

- Broadband Availability
 - Invested \$1.5 trillion
 - 24 million Americans don't have access to fast broadband
- Broadband Mapping
 - Needs to be more accurate
 - Mapping is critical info
 - Farm Bureau played a big part in mapping
 - Senator is committed to making sure mapping is accurate
- Federal Funding
 - Existing federal programs to support expansion
 - Senator believes there are alternative ways to get funding
 - Senator is writing a letter to the FCC asking for funding
 - Rural broadband rates are going up
 - Expansion to rural areas is in a critical state
 - Congress is working on an infrastructure package

Lt. Governor Lynn Rogers noted that Kansans don't take broadband for granted and rural communities survive on broadband. If rural communities don't have quality high-speed internet access, residents leave and businesses can't survive. Schools and telemedicine are also in dire need of access to broadband. It's no longer a luxury. It's the backbone of commerce, education and many other services.

In 2018, Governor Jeff Colyer established the Statewide Broadband Expansion Planning Task Force. The committee is identifying locations across the state where broadband connectivity is problematic and develop plans for addressing those needs. Rep. Joe Seiwert, co-chair of the task force, shared the progress the committee is making towards finding solutions for under-served areas.

On Tuesday, July 30, at a telephone service association conference in Dodge City, Brent Legg, Vice President of Government Relations at Connected Nation, unveiled an updated and finished detailed broadband access availability map. Seventy broadband service providers participated in the map. Now that the mapping has been completed, an expansion plan can be developed including which technologies should be deployed and the best methods to finance broadband expansion.

Stanley Adams explained that not all broadband is created equal. Most funding available for expansion is at the federal level. However, his office is committed to enabling the development of a statewide digital communications infrastructure through public-private partnerships to meet the growing demand for quality broadband access in the key sectors of public safety, education, healthcare and transportation for all Kansans.

Panelists identified the need for more federal funding and flexible access to right-of-way in order to bridge the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Increased deployment of broadband services and infrastructure will improve long-term quality of life for all Kansans and will ensure our state continues to compete locally and globally.

Progress is being made. On Tuesday, July 30, IdeaTek Telcom announced it will deliver gigabit-speed fiber internet service to over 4,500 unserved or underserved locations in rural Reno, Sedgwick, and Harvey counties. This unique project carries significant economic impact for the affected counties. More than 650 miles of new fiber optic broadband infrastructure will be laid, representing a direct investment in the local rural economies of more than \$8 million within the first five years. IdeaTek expects to utilize multiple local contractors and add up to 10 full time high-tech jobs to its workforce based out of Buhler, Kansas. The internet build was made possible by the FCC Connect America Fund (CAF II), which assists in funding projects in rural areas that lack broadband services.

As a result of the Convening, REAP staff will be working with industry and policy makers to design a collaborative "tool kit" for elected officials which will explain the differences between types of internet/data/cellular services and possible ways to finance expansion. This toolkit will be made available to all REAP members. Staff will also meet with REAP members and regional partners to identify possible legislative priorities related to this topic for the 2020 legislative session.