Josephine and Jackson Counties Broadband Visioning Study

March 29, 2022
Project Background

Jackson & Josephine Counties have historically been Unserved/Underserved outside of the municipal areas due to the rural nature of each county's geography. The recent Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns has highlighted the need for ubiquitous broadband. The Federal government in the wake of the pandemic issued unprecedented Federal funding to stimulate local economies.

Recognizing this is a once in lifetime opportunity to bridge the digital divide in the region, the Counties jointly entered into an agreement with HR Green to perform a Strategic Broadband Vision Study to better understand the true Broadband service in the Counties. Unfortunately, this is necessary to cut through the “noise” of false reporting and poor tracking of current broadband services offered by large, national incumbent internet service providers and the FCC.
Project Background

Scope

Resident Survey - online survey to “ground truth” Broadband Access in each county.

Market Assessment – A report on the current Internet Service Providers in the market and services they offer

Internet Service Provider Outreach – Coordinated outreach to Private Sector to garner information about existing Broadband Networks and Expansion Plans.

Funding Opportunities – Provide an up-to-date list of Federal and State Programs that apply to Broadband expansion in the Counties.

Strategic Broadband Vision – The culmination of findings coupled with a County Commissioner Survey, and Vision workshop to determine the best path forward to improve Broadband in Jackson and Josephine Counties.
Key Findings

1. Broadband Availability is Well below State and Federal Averages
2. Broadband Availability and Satisfaction in Josephine and Jackson Counties is highly bifurcated between Urban and Rural.
3. There will be significant investment from Private sector in both Counties for the FCC’s Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) ...
   1. The Investment being made by private sector through RDOF only solves part of the access problem that exists in the Counties and at the Bare minimum of Service 25/3 as defined by the FCC for this Program.
4. There are opportunities to leverage new funding streams to solve broadband issues
5. There is a role for the County to facilitate broadband improvements
   1. In fact, the Study shows over 80% of respondents support The Counties playing a role to improve Broadband in the region.
Broadband Speeds

**Average Broadband Speed in Oregon**
- The average internet download speed in Oregon is **112.73 mbps**.
- **91.8%** of Oregonians have access to 100mbps or faster broadband.
- Almost 94% of consumers in Oregon have access to a wired connection with true broadband speeds faster than 25mbps.

**Jackson And Josephine Counties speeds in comparison**
- Results show that download speeds range between the first quartile of 2.94, the median of 9.77, and the third quartile of 27.8.
- The first quartile signifies that 25% of all respondents indicated their download speeds are below 2.94 Mbps.
- The third quartile signifies that 75% of all response are below **27.8 Mbps**.
- Similarly, for upload speeds, the first quartile is 0.76 Mbps, the median is 2 Mbps, and the third quartile is 7.875 Mbps.
Broadband Speeds

- 3345 Responses to the Survey
- Digital divide between urban and rural areas
- Many poor service areas in the two counties
Broadband Speeds

- Many areas qualified for the RDOF broadband subsidy because of poor existing service
- Significant areas outside of RDOF do not have a current plan for improved service
- RDOF requires that speeds be Minimum of 25/3 which is now defined as Underserved by the FCC. With the new Broadband Threshold defined as 100/20
Satisfaction Rates Survey Results
Survey Results

- Counties have a wide variety of providers
- Many are small local/regional providers
- Largest providers are CenturyLink and Charter
- Significant portion of population rely on DSL or Satellite
Satisfaction & Importance of Service Categories
Other Findings

- More than half of outages are more common than once per week
- Approximately half of respondents use the internet to work from home
- Half would be likely to recommend their ISP
- About a quarter of the population have considered moving as a result of poor internet
County Role

- Community considers internet as essential and very important
- Poor reviews of how current providers meet current needs
- Strong support for community involvement
Outreach to Providers

HR Green Conducted meetings with the following Internet service providers to discuss current and future broadband expansion plans.

**Hunter Communications**- Has RDOF areas they will be expanding and are targeting organic growth. Hunter has started to Offer Fiber to the Home Services in targeted areas in Josephine County and plans to continue to expand this offering in more geographies.

**Rogue Broadband** – Has no expansion plans, Citing lack of human capitol to reach new unserved areas.

**Lumen (CenturyLink)** – has large RDOF areas and will be expanding in both Counties because of this program

**Spectrum (Charter)** – has the Largest amount of RDOF funding in both Counties and will continue to build out because of this program

**Greenspring's Co-Op** – No plans to Expand currently.
Other Outreach

Oregon Broadband Office - The new Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act allocation of grants will flow through state Broadband offices. Based on this information HR Green and the Counties recognized that it would be beneficial to discuss the current Broadband Access issue in the Counties and inform them of the Counties Broadband Vision Study.

Rep. Pam Marsh - Rep. Marsh is very active with the Broadband Advisory Council and introduced HB4092. The Legislation that Rep. Marsh introduced and was recently ratified sets the States program for receiving and distributing the money from IIJA and the Capital Projects Funds. Her district include the Southern Part of Jackson County, Oregon House District 5, and is supportive of the Counties effort to address the Digital Divide.

Southern Oregon Education Service District -HR Green also met with Cory Kelly, CIO for the South Oregon Education District. Some of the Challenges the Counties face currently were addressed head on by the school districts during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the ensuing lock downs.
Upcoming Funding Opportunities

**FCC Broadband Programs**
- $3.2 B Emergency broadband Benefit Fund (EBB)
- $7.2 B Emergency Connectivity Fund – Applications closed August 2021
- $1.9 B Rip and Replace – Applications closed October 2021

**NTIA Broadband Programs**
- $288 M Broadband Infrastructure Deployment Program
  - Application window closes August 17
- $1 B Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program – Applications Closed September 2021
- $285 M Connecting Minority Communities Pilot Program
  - June 15 Program Final Rules – NOFO Release TBD
  - $2.5 B – State Tax Financing Bonds

**American Rescue Plan Act of 2021**
- USDA Broadband Programs $635 M – 1 B for Reconnect Broadband Loan & Grant Program

**U.S. Treasury**
- $350 B for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
- $10 B for Capital Projects Fund

**Infrastructure Bill of 2021**
- 42.5 B - Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD)
- $2 B – NTIA – Tribal Broadband Connectivity
- $2.75 B – NTIA – Digital Equity Act
- $1 B – NTIA Middle Mile Program
- $12.75 B – FCC – Affordability EBB Supplemental
- $2 B – FCC Device Voucher Program
- $2 B – USDA – Reconnect
- $2.5 B – State Tax Financing Bonds
Funding Eligible Areas 25/3 & 100/20 (FCC)
Funding Eligible Areas 25/3 & 100/20 (OOKLA)
Main Business Model Options for Broadband Expansion

1. Full Municipal Broadband
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Ft. Dodge

2. Publicly-owned, Privately-Serviced
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Aspen

3. Hybrid Ownership
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - McHenry County

4. Private Developer Open Access
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Private Developer
   - Private Developer
   - Private Developer
   - Several Service Providers
   - Project Thor

5. Full Private Broadband
   - Public Entity (City or Utility)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Service Providers (One or Several)
   - Denver

Note: 1) Private Developer is defined as private company that builds, owns and operates the network infrastructure and offers open access to it to several retail SPs that provide service on the top.
The Role of Government

- Wide variety of approaches
- Range of ownership, financing, and partnership strategies
- Most communities take active steps between public policy options and public/private partnerships