



Lou Ann Texeira
Executive Officer

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November 18, 2015

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Agenda Item 9

Contra Costa Local Agency Formation Commission
651 Pine Street, Sixth Floor
Martinez, CA 94553

Broadband Services and LAFCO

Dear Members of the Commission:

BACKGROUND - In January 2015, Contra Costa LAFCO received presentations from Linda Best with the *East Bay Broadband Consortium* (EBBC), a regional initiative to improve broadband deployment, access, and adoption in Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties through a collaborative regional approach; and from Sunne Wright McPeak with *California Emerging Technology Fund* (CETF), a statewide non-profit organization dedicated in part to closing the “digital divide” by accelerating the deployment and adoption of broadband and information technology.

Both speakers encouraged LAFCO to become more involved in promoting and furthering these efforts. There was interest on the part of the Commission to continue the conversation.

In February 2015, the Commission discussed broadband as part of the Fiscal Year 2015-16 Budget Schedule and Work Plan Preview, and included consideration of a broadband policy as part of the approved budget and work plan adopted in March 2015.

DISCUSSION - While LAFCO has no specific authority over broadband services, we recognize that communities are increasingly reliant on access to these services, and that there is disparity in infrastructure and accessibility resulting in a digital divide. As noted in a recent report by the CETF, “79% percent of California households have a broadband connection at home, while 21% do not, citing cost of internet service as major reason that home broadband rates have left the hardest-to-reach Californians unconnected.” To bring the issue closer to home, approximately 17.4% of Contra Costa County residents do not have access to broadband services in their home, the majority of whom are minority and/or disadvantaged.

The advantages to equalizing and improving broadband services are numerous, and include:

- Improving access to public education, health, safety, and participation in government.

- Increasing economic competitiveness, attracting new businesses, and creating new jobs.
- Helping build sustainable communities.

What role, if any, should LAFCO have in broadband services? The conversation relating to broadband services has begun among LAFCOs. The 2015 annual CALAFCO conference featured a session entitled “Broadband Services: Which Side of the Digital Divide is Your LAFCO On?”

Currently, we are aware of one LAFCO that is directly involved in broadband service issues. Yolo LAFCO coordinated local agency participation in the development of a broadband strategic plan for Yolo County. A copy of the Final Yolo Broadband Strategic Plan, adopted in March 2015, is available on the Yolo LAFCO website at <http://www.yolocounty.org/general-government/yolo-lafco/shared-services/yolo-broadband/download-the-final-plan-here> and through the Contra Costa LAFCO office.

Locally, we are fortunate to have the EBBC, which is working in Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties to address critical broadband infrastructure, access, and adoption gaps that are contributing to the persistent “digital divide” across the region. Since 2010, the EBBC has been involved in a region-wide outreach and engagement process to develop the East Bay Broadband Strategic Framework and Action Plan which seeks to identify and leverage opportunities aimed at increasing: 1) the region’s broadband infrastructure investments, both public and privately financed; 2) affordable access to infrastructure and communication technologies; and 3) ability to access the benefits of using these technologies.

Should the Commission desire, there are a number of actions LAFCO could take to complement the work of organizations such as the EBBC and CETF, and to raise awareness of broadband service issues, challenges and benefits. Some examples are listed below:

- ❖ Adopt a resolution and/or policy supporting the efforts of organizations such as EBBC and CETF
- ❖ Adopt a resolution and/or policy encouraging the County and cities to adopt General Plan policies and standards that encourage broadband services
- ❖ Include broadband services among those services to be reviewed in LAFCO Municipal Service Reviews (i.e., cities and community service districts)
- ❖ Participate in a countywide staff level broadband working group that collaborates on these issues
- ❖ Support efforts to reach out to existing service providers and encourage service and improvements to unserved and underserved areas

RECOMMENDATION - The Policies & Procedures Committee has reviewed this report and recommends that the Commission consider possible actions and provide direction as desired.

Sincerely,

LOU ANN TEXEIRA
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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