



The Charleston Regional
Chamber of Commerce

ISSUE: BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

BACKGROUND

Advances in computer processing power, along with widespread access to mobile phones and the internet, have changed how we communicate and interact with one another, gain knowledge and do business. According to the federal government, 56 percent of West Virginians lack access to high-speed internet. (https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-331734A1.pdf)

In the global economy broadband infrastructure is as essential to individual and community prosperity as roads, airports, electric, and water. People of all generations now depend on the internet for work, education, entertainment, healthcare and civic participation. When given access, businesses restricted to local markets can expand their market reach across the nation and even the world. Communities that lack this foundational infrastructure are unable to attract the businesses and industries needed to create jobs and expand opportunities.

West Virginia's rural population and mountainous topography do create a challenge to the expansion of broadband and infrastructure in general. Expanding access to rural areas when the capital investment required to provide access does not provide a viable return on investment in a reasonable timeframe is a tremendous challenge.

RECOMMENDATION

The strategy of creating a diversified and resilient economy can be defined broadly as a "strategy of innovation." In today's economy, lack of access to broadband services would be fatal to most business models.

The expansion of the internet infrastructure in the state is critical to the recruitment of young talented people, in keeping our skilled youth who are here now and to attract new businesses. The Charleston Regional Chamber of Commerce urges the West Virginia Legislature to rapidly identify methods to assist, stimulate or partner to achieve our broadband goals.