

PSC: Governor's task force on broadband access releases broadband report

Posted on Wednesday, Jun 30, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON - Governor Tony Evers today received the release of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access Report. The report details strategies for successfully expanding high-speed internet access to every residence, business, and institution in the state by 2025, including solutions to make broadband affordable for all communities. In July 2020, Governor Evers signed [Executive Order #80](#) creating the Governor's Task Force on Broadband Access and directed it to:

- Research and recommend forward-looking broadband policies and initiatives that address state broadband goals and needs;
- Promote the efficient, strategic expansion of the broadband facilities and adoption across the state;
- Explore strategic expansion opportunities in partnership with stakeholders across the state;
- Work collaboratively with the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC), State Broadband Office to promote and identify reliable and unique broadband goals and solutions; and
- Present its findings to the Governor and state legislature by June 30, 2021.

The report can be reviewed [here](#).

"I declared 2021 as the 'Year of Broadband Access' because getting Wisconsinites access to high-speed internet is critical for our state's continued economic recovery," said Governor Evers. "It's why I proposed nearly \$200 million for broadband in our Badger Bounceback agenda and am putting \$100 million in federal recovery dollars for expansion, and the recommendations included in this report will help us take the next steps toward getting folks connected."

The Task Force, created during the COVID-19 pandemic, consisted of experts,

stakeholders, and public officials who met virtually between August 2020 and June 2021. Brittany Beyer, Executive Director of Grow North Regional Economic Development Corporation, served as chairperson of the Task Force. Throughout the process, the Task Force received presentations from outside experts and comments from the public, which helped identify forward-looking broadband policies and initiatives that aim to close the digital divide in the state.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the evidence that, without broadband, our families, businesses, and schools in both rural and urban communities cannot reach their full potential,” said Brittany Beyer, Chairperson of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Access. “I want to thank the Governor for the opportunity to serve and my fellow Task Force members for their hard work and commitment. The Task Force has done a phenomenal job researching opportunities to get as many people connected to broadband as quickly as possible.”

Among others, the Task Force report included recommendations to:

- Increase funding for the Broadband Expansion Grant Program to help offset the costs for internet service providers and other applicants to serve difficult to reach areas;
- Establish a State Internet Assistance Program to lower the cost to obtain service and aid low-income families in sustaining internet service;
- Create a Planning and Implementation Grants Program to help regions and communities plan for broadband expansion;
- Increase construction and permitting coordination to streamline the process for providers to expand in a community;
- Collect internet access data from all ISPs at a household and business level of granularity to clarify who has reliable, high-speed access;
- Increase broadband consumer protections and pricing transparency so that people know what service they should expect and get what they are paying for; and
- Develop and fund a Statewide Digital Navigator program to assist people who are underserved due to inadequate service and solve a wide range of internet adoption issues.

“Since 2019, our state has allocated nearly \$60 million for broadband expansion, which, once built will connect or improve service to tens of thousands of families and businesses,” said Rebecca Cameron Valcq, Chairperson of the Public Service Commission. “Over the next few years, we stand to more than quadruple that number. Our state’s continued investments, along with the recommendations in this report, will help make sure Wisconsinites get connected and reach our full

potential.”

According to the [2021 Broadband Deployment Report](#) by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), roughly 394,900 people in Wisconsin lack access to quality broadband service. Wisconsin ranks 36th nationwide for broadband access in rural areas with 21.8% being unserved or underserved.

The Governor has a strong commitment to the continued equitable expansion and use of broadband services to meet the needs of all Wisconsin communities and residents. In the Governor’s first budget, signed in 2019, \$48 million was included for expansion grants. While the Governor’s original budget proposal included over \$78 million in broadband funding, \$48 million remained an historic investment. In the most recent budget, the Governor’s Badger Bounceback Agenda included roughly \$200 million for broadband expansion and adoption.

Through the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act the Governor provided \$5.3 million for broadband expansion projects, which connected more than 20,000 locations to high-speed internet by the end of 2020. Recently, the Governor provided \$100 million through the Federal American Rescue Plan (ARPA) Act Funds for Broadband Expansion Grants. Applications for the ARPA Broadband Access Grants are due on July 27, 2021. The PSC expects to make award decisions in early fall 2021.

To learn more about the work of the Governor’s Task Force on Broadband Access and its recommendations, visit [here](#). For more information regarding the Wisconsin Broadband Office and its current initiatives or grant programs, visit [here](#).