POLICY SOLUTIONS FOR THE 86TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE:

Recommendations to improve broadband access in rural and underserved areas across Texas
I. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the generous supporters of Glasshouse Policy, who make our work possible. Like us, our partners and donors are committed to increasing civic participation and collaborative public policy making in a manner that is transparent and inclusive.

Our work ahead of this legislative session in particular would not have been possible without a broad universe of program partners and supporters. In particular, we want to thank the following people and organizations for helping turn an idea into a years-long effort to close the rural divide:

Many thanks are owed to Senator Perry, Senator Watson, Representative Anderson, Representative Cyrier, and Representative Price. All of these legislators provided early, critical leadership on this issue. Not only did each of them help Glasshouse Policy organize town halls and lead stakeholder discussions in their districts, but they also provided us the pathway to turn these community-sourced ideas into viable legislation.

Glasshouse Policy owes a great deal to the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, which provided the initiative much-needed validation during its early days and served as a critically important convening force as we hosted events in libraries across the state.

This initiative would not have been possible without the partnership of AARP. AARP brought its legislative expertise and immense grassroots organizing power to bear for this initiative.

Glasshouse Policy is very thankful for the participation and expertise of Professor Sharon Strover at the University of Texas Technology and Information Policy Institute. Professor Strover brought much-needed academic rigor to our policy development process and served as a font of information for policies other states have piloted to provide broadband access to rural and underserved areas.

Finally, Glasshouse Policy thanks Carl Perry, a Glasshouse Policy intern who contributed a great deal of sweat equity to this initiative. While still a graduate student at the University of Texas LBJ School, Carl put in long hours helping us develop white papers and briefing materials.
WHO WE ARE

Glasshouse Policy was founded in 2014 to refocus the political process on the interests of everyday Texans. By acting as a forum for the general public, policymakers, academics, and all other interested stakeholders to debate, compromise, and ultimately craft crowdsourced policy solutions to the major issues the public faces today, Glasshouse Policy engages new ideas, new voices, and new constituencies on critical community issues.

Glasshouse Policy’s flagship initiative is the Texas Capitol Project, through which we focus on a single policy issue prior to each Texas Legislative Session. In an effort to effectively solicit feedback from Texans, Glasshouse Policy undertakes community engagement and feedback events across the state to discuss community ideas, suggestions, and priorities when considering possible legislative action.

This report, and the consensus produced by our policy roundtable participants, mirrors the values that Glasshouse Policy is based on – collaboration, consensus, and transparency.

HOW WE WORK

Glasshouse Policy is a crowdsourced, collaborative think tank that uses a combination of town halls, stakeholder roundtables, and online crowdsourcing to produce actionable, collaborative policy solutions to Texas’ most pressing problems. In anticipation of each session of the Texas Legislature, Glasshouse Policy identifies one issue at which to direct its unique method of policy development and then works to engage Texans across the state in a dialog focused on developing policy solutions to that issue. After collecting input across the state regarding how Texas can best solve that issue, Glasshouse Policy works to bridge those ideas to traditional, in-person roundtables, where we host stakeholders, lobbyists, advocates, and academics in a collaborative conversation designed to build legislative compromises around citizen-sourced ideas.
Broadband internet is defined by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) as internet connectivity at a speed of 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload. According to USTelecom industry statistics, broadband access is a key metric driving today’s modern economy, contributing more than $1 trillion annually to the U.S. economy. Yet as of 2013, the US was ranked #16 in the world for broadband connectivity, leaving over 47.4 million Americans underserved. As society becomes more reliant on the Internet, communities without access to broadband are being left behind. Lack of high speed broadband access in rural, underserved, and unserved areas adversely impacts almost every aspect of life: education, banking, health care, and business. To help close the digital divide, states all over America are taking strides to address this issue, with at least 22 states introducing more than 31 bills or resolutions related to rural broadband in 2017.

Texas took initial steps to address this issue with the creation of the Texas Broadband Task Force in 2009 and the addition of broadband connectivity to the 85th Texas Legislature Interim Report. Despite those efforts, according to the Texas Computer Education Association, Texas is still facing challenges to providing quality broadband access, including a lack of a “coordinated vision or plan ensuring that districts in all areas of Texas have access to affordable broadband.”

Recently, Microsoft published a study suggesting that far fewer Americans have access to high-speed internet than the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) estimates. Microsoft concluded an estimated 162.8 million people do not use the internet at broadband-level speed – more than six times the FCC’s estimation of 24.7 million. In Texas, the digital divide is particularly stark. According to Microsoft, 14.6 million Texans - more than half the population of Texas - do not use the internet at broadband speeds, indicating that many of those individuals do not have access to a broadband internet connection. While the FCC estimates that 1.8 million Texans lack access to a broadband internet connection, there is strong evidence that the number of Americans without access to broadband internet is much higher than the FCC’s estimates indicate. We will discuss this discrepancy in more detail later in the report.

Without a coordinated effort to address this issue, the digital divide in Texas will continue to grow both along the rural and urban divide as well as along economic lines. Ultimately, accessible broadband is critical to rural Texas’ continued economic and social viability.
TEXAS BROADBAND AVAILABILITY AND USAGE ANALYSIS

Maps showing FCC fixed broadband availability and broadband usage based on Microsoft data in Texas.

FCC indicates broadband is not available to 1.8M people.

Microsoft data indicates 14.6M people do not use the internet at broadband speeds.

In support of closing the rural connectivity gap in Texas, Glasshouse Policy partnered with AARP, the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC), and the University of Texas Technology and Information Policy Institute to host a series of town halls and stakeholder roundtables across Texas. The goal of this initiative was to gain a shared prioritization of policy objectives among citizens and other key stakeholders across the state to provide better access to broadband internet in rural and under-connected communities in Texas.

We began by convening a series of town halls across the state to help determine local priorities, ascertain and assess public sentiment, and help inform policy solutions to this issue. We paired each of these town halls with local stakeholder meetings at which representatives from entities such as internet service providers (ISPs), school districts, emergency services districts, counties, and city councils were given the opportunity to provide input on the problem and showcase locally piloted solutions that could be translated into statewide action. We then hosted a series of stakeholder roundtables in Austin to get meaningful industry and legislative feedback on the solutions we heard from Texans across the state.

In total, Glasshouse Policy hosted three public town halls and six private stakeholder roundtables across the state leading up to the 86th Legislative Session.

Glasshouse Policy’s first event was hosted in Hewitt in partnership with Representative Charles “Doc” Anderson, who serves as Chair of the Texas Legislative Rural Caucus, a group of representatives and senators representing rural areas across Texas. Senator Charles Perry and Representative Four Price hosted the second series event in Amarillo. Senator Kirk Watson and Representative John Cyrier hosted the final event in Bastrop.
Despite the difference in region for each town hall, the stories that Glasshouse Policy heard were relatively consistent. Members of rural communities at each of our public town halls complained of slow and expensive internet service, oftentimes with only few or even a single provider from which to choose. For some individuals, their homes or land were totally disconnected from internet service providers. Many could only access quality internet via their local library, which some described having to visit regularly to pay bills, apply for jobs, access social media, and use email.

Residents from exurban and rural areas also complained of an inability to discern where adequate home broadband service could be found. The FCC offers a website that purports to tell users what ISPs provide service at a given address, describing the specific technology used by the provider and at what speed service is provided. However, as many rightly noted at Glasshouse Policy’s town halls, the FCC’s mapping data can be misleading, as it tends to overstate available service in a specific area. This can lead to confusion and frustration as both individuals and businesses plan moves from better connected areas to more rural, less connected areas.

Through this process, many town hall participants described a “haves and have-nots” narrative about the Texas digital divide. Being well-connected to the internet, and all of the social and economic opportunities that connectivity provides, is a privilege unique to people in the cities and suburbs of Texas. In rural parts of the state, lack of connectivity is the norm.

For the public and private stakeholder participants at Glasshouse Policy’s round tables, the statewide broadband picture is much more complicated.

By many metrics, Texas took incredible strides in broadband accessibility over the past three years. In 2016, Governor Abbott announced a partnership with the national nonprofit, EducationSuperHighway (ESH) to connect more Texas students to broadband internet. In addition, two state budget appropriations made by the 85th Legislative Session in 2017 aided broadband accessibility gains across the state. Foremost, the Legislature appropriated $25 million to the Texas Education Agency to provide matching funds for the Schools and Libraries Universal Service Program administered by the FCC, which is also known as E-Rate. The 85th Legislature also appropriated $1 million in funding to the Texas State Libraries and Archives Commission to assist Texas’ libraries in accessing E-Rate funding.

By leveraging private, state, and federal funding, along with the expertise of ESH, Texas connected nearly 2.7 million more K-12 students to broadband-speed internet at school.
However, despite this tremendous progress, broadband access gaps still remain in Texas’ rural areas, especially for households in sparsely populated areas outside of towns and away from major roadways. Both the FCC and private studies conclude that rural residents of Texas, especially West Texas and in the Panhandle, suffer from limited access and lower internet speeds. Citizens expressed a consistent frustration that these issues - whether it be access, cost, or speed - remained unaddressed by state leaders.

Furthermore, stakeholders complained about a lack of coordination between the various private and public entities working to deploy broadband and telecommunications infrastructure in underserved areas across Texas. Specifically, attendees noted that infrastructure investment can be duplicative in nature, especially in circumstances where a lack of coordination leads to overbuilding, which potentially wastes precious public investments in broadband facilities.
After soliciting ideas from across the state about how to best provide broadband access to rural and underserved areas, we hosted a series of roundtable discussions in Austin aimed at developing compromise-driven legislation based on those ideas. The following organizations represent a cross-section of the participants that participated in our policy roundtable process.

- AARP
- AMA TechTel
- Association of Rural Counties in Texas
- AT&T
- CenturyLink
- Charter Communications
- Frontier Communications
- Rural Caucus of the Texas House of Representative
- Texas Association of Counties
- Texas Association of Regional Councils
- Texas Cable Association
- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Texas e-Health Alliance
- Texas Education Agency
- Texas Electric Cooperatives
- Texas Medical Association
- Texas Sorghum Association
- Texas State Library and Archives Commission
- Texas Statewide Telephone Cooperative
- Texas Telephone Association
- Texas Workforce Commission
- University of Texas Technology and Information Policy Institute
- Verizon

The first legislature-focused stakeholder roundtable was hosted on October 22, 2018 in partnership with Representatives Anderson and Cyrier. Glasshouse Policy offered the following potential legislative options as a starting point for discussion on possible legislative action.
1. CREATE A STATEWIDE OR REGIONAL COORDINATING ENTITY

The creation of a state coordinating body or entity would inform legislators on the tools rural communities need to implement affordable internet infrastructure. Such an entity could establish criteria defining underserved areas, facilitate information sharing among key stakeholders, coordinate planning and funding efforts, and better leverage public-private partnerships to increase competition among internet service providers (ISPs). The coordinating body could help initiate an evaluation of telecommunications dollars being appropriated to agencies on the state level to facilitate new, efficient ways to utilize existing funds.

A coordinating body, like the Wyoming Broadband Advisory Council, could enable legislators to gain a better understanding of what needs to be done to ensure efficient implementation of broadband expansion projects. Wyoming invested in broadband infrastructure by creating a grant fund and coordinator position at their Business Council and creating a Broadband Advisory Council to oversee the agency’s efforts. Through this Council, Wyoming recently adopted a Broadband Enhancement Plan to act as a guiding document for expanding and enhancing broadband connectivity in the state.\(^\text{16}\)

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Overall, this concept was well-received by the stakeholder community, and no specific objection to it was raised during Glasshouse Policy’s stakeholder roundtables. From a policy perspective, a statewide coordinator, or as one roundtable participant put it, “a state employee whose job is waking up in the morning and being worried about rural Texans’ access to broadband,” is a natural governmental response to a universally-acknowledged challenge. Many other states have appointed or funded similar positions, either as formal advisory councils working alongside state government or as official government offices housed in the executive branch.

The main topic of stakeholder discussion concerning this idea was where should such a coordinator or office be placed in state government. The three most discussed options were housing the coordinator inside the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), within the Governor’s office, or decentralizing the coordinator by funding individual regional councils of government via a grant program to hire a coordinator on a case-by-case basis. Overall, a general consensus on this specific question was not achieved, although most stakeholders disapproved of the decentralized approach.
Texas’ regional councils of government are existing associations of local government entities that could serve an important coordinating role in the development of rural broadband. Regional councils of government could bring together sources of funding, ISPs, and municipalities together under one cohesive framework, streamlining the process for rural areas across the state. Regional councils could also work to collaborate with “use sectors” to create appropriate information resources and tools that will have a multiplier effect on the State’s efforts to increase broadband projects. Regional councils in other states have been successful in providing internet access directly, creating public-private partnerships, and overcoming last-mile connection challenges. When regional councils of government are given adequate funding for planning and coordination, many connectivity challenges become easier to solve.

Leveraging the FCC’s Healthcare Connect Fund, the Brazos Valley Council of Governments is deploying a private network with Ciena and CenturyLink to build a middle mile broadband network by initially focusing on connecting hospitals, school nurses, emergency service sites and rural clinics with the hopes to eventually expand the network to include community anchor institutions. The project, COGnet, aims to provide various services to anchor tenants and potential last mile providers to help extend service and provide competition in the region.

The North Central Illinois Council of Governments (NCICG) oversees the LaSalle County Broadband Initiative, a regional program that is creating an 870 mile fiber optic network for nine Illinois counties. The broadband initiative is a public-private partnership, but the NCICG has played the most crucial role in the success of this project. The Council has worked with local government officials to assess needs and to facilitate the permit process, and it worked with Northern Illinois University to develop grant applications for state and federal funding for construction costs. NCICG has played a crucial role in providing a reliable, fast internet connection to hundreds of community anchor institutions, and, subsequently, the individuals served by those institutions.

Regional councils of government were constant and valuable participants in Glasshouse Policy’s regional discussions on broadband. Regional councils’ current work in many communities already puts them at the nexus of statewide telecommunication, national security, infrastructure planning and development policies. However, many stakeholder participants felt that any coordinated statewide effort around rural broadband should ultimately be housed within a statewide policy framework.
3. STREAMLINE PERMITTING

Varying and cumbersome permitting processes can thwart providers from building out broadband infrastructure. Between obtaining approval from multiple state and federal agencies that often lack cross-agency coordination, fees and permits, lengthy applications, and various review processes, there are several administrative barriers to expanding broadband infrastructure. Facilitating efforts to streamline processes, including pre-approving technologies, and providing dedicated permit inspectors can also ease the barrier of entry for private and public investment. Creating a more predictable and harmonious permitting process could help facilitate the growth of infrastructure projects in Texas.

In Hawaii, House Bill 1342 was passed, which requires the State and counties to address all broadband-related permits within sixty business days or the application will automatically approved on the sixty-first business day. Hawaii also passed Senate Bill 1161, which exempts certain broadband infrastructure projects from state and county permitting requirements. This bill specifically sought to streamline upgrades or replacement of existing utility poles to improve telecommunication cables.22

This concept came from a general desire expressed at each town hall to lower regulatory barriers, and thus regulatory costs, for broadband deployment. After discussion with the ISP and industry community, no permitting or regulatory issues at the statewide or municipal level could be identified as barrier to broadband deployment in rural areas.

4. ADOPT A SWIFT-LIKE MODEL FOR BROADBAND

Diverse terrain can pose a problem to solutions addressing the dearth of broadband access in Texas because the challenges faced often vary from region to region. In order to address the diversity of this issue, it may be useful to develop a model similar to the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT) for individual broadband projects in political subdivisions.23 Texas could ensure broadband expansion in a way that is familiar to the state by proposing to invest in statewide broadband expansion through Texas’s Rainy Day Fund. If passed, local entities across the state could work with the Texas Economic Development Council or local Economic Development Corporations to apply to utilize mechanisms used in SWIFT such as reduced interest rates, flexible financing options (deferred loans and extended repayment terms), board participation, and multi-year commitments, which could help promote local investment in major broadband infrastructure projects.
5. ALLOW FOR SPECIAL DISTRICTS AND SERVICE AUTHORITIES TO ENHANCE BROADBAND SERVICE

Special purpose districts are useful in providing services that general purpose local governments are unable to provide. They act as separate, legal entities from the localities that form them and often are seen as “single purpose” forms of government. Creating new special purpose districts or utilizing existing health and safety or economic development special districts would allow counties, cities, and other public stakeholders to form their own institution to provide certain communications services, including high speed data and internet access services they would otherwise not be permitted to provide as a municipality. Like any other service authority, this type of entity would be able to sign contracts, apply for financing and either directly own and operate systems or partner with incumbent providers to deploy, operate and maintain telecommunications systems.

Through Virginia’s Wireless Service Authorities Act, counties, cities and towns in Virginia are allowed to form their own Wireless Service Authorities to provide certain communications services, including but not limited to, high speed data and internet access services.24

6. LEVERAGE THE REFURBISHING AND REBUILDING OF EMERGENCY SERVICES TELECOMMUNICATION NETWORKS

By focusing on connecting hospitals, police departments, fire departments, and other community anchor institutions, municipalities could work to address the middle-mile issue of bringing broadband infrastructure into their communities. From there, smaller, local ISPs would be able to use existing infrastructure to bridge the last-mile infrastructure directly into individuals’ homes. At the local level, development agencies could combine existing major road or utility projects with broadband development to reduce costs significantly. Additionally, there is potential to leverage existing task forces and commissions, such as the Governor’s Commission to Rebuild Texas, to support the rebuilding of communications infrastructure and help restore communications services that were critical during Hurricane Harvey and other disasters.
Kansas’ Senate Bill 2359, requires rural telecommunications companies to be represented on the 911 coordinating council, and to invest in broadband access in schools, hospitals, and libraries. In Gallup, New Mexico, the city’s utility is planning to deploy infrastructure for public safety that will also enable private sector services to operate where private sector infrastructure has not emerged.

Similar to the above SWIFT discussion, this concept was deemed too far reaching and out of scope to be tackled in such a small time frame headed into the Legislative Session.

7. CREATE A “DIG ONCE” POLICY

“Dig Once” policies and strategies are a simple, cost effective way to promote broadband development. Such a rule calls for laying a single tube in the ground through which different service providers can wire their fiber optic cable any time trenches are created to access utility lines. While the cost of fiber optic cable is relatively low, labor, permits, and engineering costs can drive up the overall price of broadband installation dramatically. According to the Federal Highway Administration, one dig policies can reduce the cost of broadband deployment by up to 90% by creating an underground conduit for other ISPs and municipalities to use. This type of policy is particularly useful in isolated areas with difficult terrain.

In New Mexico, one of the two bills signed into law to address the digital divide in 2017 was a bill to ensure that trenches are kept open and available to provide the opportunity for broadband conduit to be inserted underground anytime trenches are made to access utility lines. The “Dig Once” rule also enabled the use of funds from the Local Economic Development Act for trenching and conduit installment needed to develop broadband in cities and counties.

This concept was generally well-received by the stakeholder community. The sole suggestion expressed by any stakeholder was that any proposed Texas “Dig Once” policy not be a new mandate, requirement, or burden on industry.

8. INITIATE A STATEWIDE OR REGIONAL MAPPING EFFORT

Accurate mapping of existing broadband infrastructure is key to efficient resource allocation and service coordination. Currently, incomplete and self-reported data has led to an outdated, less-than-accurate portrait of available broadband access across the state.
A comprehensive, statewide broadband map is needed to help policymakers enact precise legislation to assist isolated communities and reduce duplicative spending. Currently, the FCC maps connectivity by census block which, in rural areas, can span city blocks and counties. Specifically, the FCC considers broadband to be “available” for an entire census block if at least one location within a census block has access to broadband. This means that within a census block, internet access can vary greatly. By leveraging existing entities at the local level such as county governments, the state would be able to provide a simple avenue to collect accurate information regarding connectivity and cable placement through processes such as easement agreements. A focus could be placed on evaluating speeds at community anchor institutions like hospitals, schools, and emergency services.

The Georgia Rural Broadband Survey solicited online responses from residents between 2016 and 2017 in order to quantify availability, subscriptions, and speeds for individuals living in rural areas. The survey asked participants if they could afford the broadband service available in their area (if such a service existed), and it asked how important internet access is in their lives. The final question was open ended, letting respondents detail how they would like the State of Georgia to improve broadband services. Data was summarized at the city and county level and is now available for policymakers.

This concept was contentious throughout the stakeholder roundtable process, and ultimately, no consensus could be achieved on how to fund, coordinate, or execute a statewide mapping effort. The two primary concerns from industry were that granular data on where broadband facilities currently exist is proprietary and that any statewide mapping effort could prove duplicative as the FCC seeks to reform its own mapping efforts in the coming years.

9. CREATE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Amend Chapter 2267 (Public-Private Facilities and Infrastructure) to allow for the use of public-private partnerships (P3s) in deploying IT/communications facilities infrastructure projects at the state, county, city, and school-district levels. Through a P3, cities and counties would be able to offer private partners grants, exclusive development rights and revenue sharing opportunities. A P3 could offer an alternative to an entirely government-owned and operated municipal network, allowing a city to build out its own infrastructure and deliver service without serving as a network operator.
Rural municipalities have several potential avenues through which they can pursue funding for broadband development. In addition to revenue capture subsidies such as tax increment financing, local governments can apply for grants through the U.S. Department of Commerce, the Department of Agriculture, and the Federal Communications Commission. Grants range in purpose, providing funding for planning, end-user hardware, fiber optic cable, installation, and even distance learning and telemedicine. Due to constraints in Texas law, municipalities are unable to obtain the license necessary to implement a broadband network on their own. Consequently, many of these grants require a partnership with an established internet service provider.

Massachusetts’ Last Mile Program partners with municipalities on “innovative, sustainable, locally-led strategies” to develop broadband infrastructure for isolated communities. In 2014, the state allocated $40 million for these unserved areas: $18 million for professional services and $22 million for construction. The Massachusetts Broadband Institute oversees the flexible grant program, and towns apply to it directly. These towns must partner with an established broadband vendor, but they are allowed to own the network infrastructure. If they choose to enter a public-private partnership, the grant will only cover the cost of construction.

This concept was generally well received at the Glasshouse Policy stakeholder roundtables. As many admit, the dearth of broadband in rural areas is largely, if not entirely, an economic problem — there are not enough customers in many rural parts of the state to justify capital expenditures to build out and operate a high-speed network. While Texas will never appropriate enough money to close the rural broadband gap outright, that number is both large and difficult to calculate, a state appropriation to support broadband accessibility in rural areas could help fund feasibility studies, pilot projects and professionalized strategic planning to better allocate limited local, state and federal dollars in support of rural broadband access.

Industry stakeholders expressed deep concerns with this concept. Specifically, stakeholders feared that any change to existing Public-Private Partnership statute could create a ‘backdoor’ for eventual municipal owned and operated broadband networks.

10. PROVIDE STATE FUNDING AND FINANCING

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Glasshouse Policy engaged in roughly four months of collaborative policy discussion with our stakeholders using the above list of initial policy ideas, ultimately fostering consensus around some of policies initially presented to our stakeholders.

**BROADBAND COORDINATION**

Create a coordinating body housed at the Public Utility Commission of Texas. The coordinating body should be responsible for the following functions:

- Serve to coordinate the efforts of state agencies and local units of government in the deployment of broadband.
- Develop broadband investment and deployment strategies.
- Pursue and obtain federal sources of funding for rural broadband projects.
- Develop a framework to measure broadband access in and designate areas of this state that are underserved and unserved.
- Serve as an information clearinghouse in relation to federal programs providing assistance to local entities with respect to broadband.
- Manage and award funds allocated to the broadband office for broadband projects.

**STATE BROADBAND INVESTMENT FUND AND GRANT PROGRAM**

Create a new state fund to provide grants to public or private entities for projects that stimulate the installation and maintenance of broadband in rural communities and other underserved or unserved areas of the state with respect to broadband. Using this fund, the state broadband coordinating office should provide grants to public or private entities for projects that stimulate the installation and maintenance of broadband in rural communities and other underserved or unserved areas of this state with respect to broadband.

**DIG ONCE POLICY**

Empower the state broadband coordination office to collaborate with the Texas Department of Transportation and private entities to encourage and coordinate efforts to plan, relocate, install, or improve broadband conduit in highway rights-of-way in conjunction with any current or planned highway construction.
In addition, the coordination office shall develop a strategy to facilitate the timely and efficient deployment of broadband conduit or other broadband facilities on state-owned land and in state-owned buildings. Finally, the coordination office should submit to the legislature a report that explains the actions taken by the commission in carrying out the Dig Once policy, the number of current and planned projects receiving assistance from the commission, any gains in broadband speed or access associated with the projects, and any costs or cost savings to the state, private entities, or end users of broadband services associated with the projects.

ALLOWING FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE PROJECTS IN BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT

Amend Chapter 2267 of the Government Code to allow for the use of public-private partnerships (P3s) in deploying IT and communications infrastructure projects at the state, county, city, and school-district levels. However, any legislation should also preserve the current prohibition on municipalities owning and operating broadband infrastructure as service providers.
VIII. ENDNOTES


6 Ibid.


19 REDINet - Northern New Mexico Economic Development Initiative: https://nnmredi.org/initiatives/redinet/.


21 iFiber - North Central Illinois Council of Governments: https://www.ncicg.org/ifiber/M


32 Last Mile Program: https://broadband.masstech.org/last-mile-programs/program-unserved-towns/flexible-grant-program