

Broadband Project Examples Sought

Jim Baller, a very well respected D.C. telecom attorney who represents local governments, is seeking information concerning public broadband projects around the country that have assisted economic development. He will be using the information to support local governments in the ongoing controversy over municipal broadband projects. Private companies are advancing legislation in numerous states that will make it difficult or impossible for local governments to provide broadband services. If your community has information that is relevant to his research, please respond:

Over the last decade, I have seen or heard of dozens of cases in which public communications initiatives have had a significant impact on a community's economic development, educational and occupational opportunity, environmental protection, security, and quality of life. I have also heard of many cases in which the lack of advanced communications infrastructure resulted in the loss of opportunities to attract new businesses or to prevent the loss of existing ones.

Now, with your help, I would like to create a compendium of as many of these examples as possible, in as much detail as possible. We will use the compendium, and make it available to you, to help educate federal, state and local legislators and officials, businesses, institutions, the financial community, the media, and the public about the relationship between public broadband initiatives and the well-being of our localities and our country. Also, a rigorous scientific study of this relationship is currently underway, and I hope that the compendium will assist the researchers in targeting specific communities for further in-depth analysis.

Let me give you some examples of the kinds of information that I am hoping to obtain, but please feel free to provide any other information that you believe should be included in the compendium. Please do not assume that you need not respond because I am already familiar with your information, or that someone else will provide it. Also, even if you have already provided the information to someone else, please respond to this request as well. A good record can -- and should -- be played more than once. Let's not leave anything to chance.

-- If you know of a public communications project that played an important role in enabling a community to attract new businesses or retain and expand existing ones, please furnish as much information as you can, including the identity, size and character of community involved (rural, urban, etc.); the nature and scope of the project; the number and identity of the business(es) in question; the number of jobs created, retained or lost; the average pay of these jobs; your estimate of the value of these jobs to the community in terms of increased tax revenues, enhanced property values, increased spending in the local economy, and anything else that you can quantify or estimate (please explain your methodology). Be sure to include your contact information and that of other knowledgeable individuals. In particular, please ask the businesses involved to contribute to your responses. (Doris Kelley, special thanks for all the work that you have done in this area, but this does not take you off the hook to provide more!)

-- Please furnish specific and detailed examples of how the lack of advanced communications infrastructure hampered communities in attracting new businesses or resulted in the loss existing ones. Name names and give numbers. (Paul Kalv, let's be sure to include Danville's experience with AOL). If a community turned a significant potential loss around by taking matters into its own hands (e.g., Scottsburg and Auburn, Indiana), that makes a particularly good story.

--Please provide examples of how public communications systems have enabled local businesses to operate in new ways or made them more productive or profitable. In particular, include examples of local firms that are now reach beyond the local economy to do business statewide, nationally or internationally?

--If you are aware of a public communications system providing telecom, cable or broadband services, please compare the incumbent's rates, quality of service, number of channels, etc., before and after the public system went on stream. Compare the incumbent's current rates, quality of service, number of channels, etc., with what it is doing in nearby communities in which it does not face such head-to-head competition. If you know or can estimate the aggregate number of subscribers served by the incumbent and public providers, you can estimate the annual benefits to the community. For example, suppose that an incumbent was charging \$40/month for cable service to 1000 subscribers before the public system went into business. Suppose further that the public system took 25% of the market by charging \$30/month, and the incumbent responded by dropping its own rates to \$30/month. Now, all 1000 subscribers pay \$30/month for service for which they would have paid \$40/month if the public system had not entered the market. In this example, the community will save \$120,000 a year (1000 subscriber x \$10/month x 12 months). That's \$120,000 that will circulate several times in the local economy, rather than leave for Philadelphia or New York or Omaha, increasing local spending, revenues, jobs, etc.!

--If you are aware of noteworthy community programs that public communications systems made possible or contributed to, please send the the information along. Please be sure to include stories about programs that may give young people reasons to stay in the community, that enhance the quality of life for the elderly and disabled persons, and that narrow the "Digital Divide" for persons in rural areas, persons of low income, Native Americans, and new Americans.

--If you are aware of specific incidents that merit attention, please include them. For example, Steve Johnson of the Washington Public Utility District Association recently told a group of us about how a public fiber system in Washington State enabled doctors to perform an emergency rescue operation via telemedicine.

Obviously, I could give many more examples, but I know that you understand what I'm seeking and how high the stakes are for all of us who believe deeply in municipal broadband. **Please e-mail your information to me by the end of February.** Thanks very much.

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