



Legislative Priority Issue #2 2019 Legislative Session

Support for the Expansion of Broadband Access

Background

The Southwest Regional Development Commission (SRDC) is a nine-county Regional Development Commission as established under Minnesota Statute §462.381-462.398 the “Regional Development Act.” As a representative of local units of government in Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood and Rock counties, the SRDC represents 9 counties, 80 cities and 163 townships. The SRDC assists local units of government in the region with many economic development projects, a large component of which is being able to provide adequate Broadband Access for new and existing businesses to allow them to be competitive in a national and global economy.

Broadband Access

According to the Minnesota Office of Broadband, as of March 2018 79.26% of rural households in Minnesota have access to Wireline Broadband Service of at Least 25 Mbps Download/3 Mbps Upload speeds. The Minnesota Legislature has established clear goals in statute to guide the state’s broadband development efforts through the year 2026. It is a state goal that (1) no later than 2022, all Minnesota businesses and homes have access to high-speed broadband that provides minimum download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second and minimum upload speeds of at least three megabits per second; and (2) no later than 2026, all Minnesota businesses and homes have access to at least one provider of broadband with download speeds of at least 100 megabits per second and upload speeds of at least 20 megabits per second, (currently 58.99% as of March 2018).

Policy Positions

The SRDC supports \$50M in funding for the Minnesota Broadband Grant Program. In the last funding round there was about \$50M in applications for the available \$20M, not taking into account projects that were stymied by the challenge process.

The SRDC also suggests changes to the current DEED broadband grant program be adopted by the legislature to either remove the ability of existing providers to block projects or to hold the existing providers accountable for actually performing the broadband service expansion they are using as an excuse to block other development using the grant program.



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