

Goals and Strategies

Strategic Investment Goal 3: Critical Infrastructure: Invest in Critical Infrastructure - especially broadband; transportation including the Appalachian Development Highway System; and water / wastewater systems.

Action Objective 3.1: Promote the productive and strategic use of broadband and other telecommunications infrastructure to increase connectivity and strengthen economic competitiveness.

NC Strategy 3.1.5: Assist North Carolina's 29 Appalachian counties in charting a direction for telecommunications and securing assistance in implementing short and long-term strategies in community and economic development efforts.

Purpose Statement

This project will identify local assets and develop community profiles and strategies that can assist communities bridge barriers to broadband infrastructure.

Statement of Need

Developing a structure for broadband deployment is critical to the region's economic opportunities for attracting businesses and entrepreneurs in advanced technologies, export opportunities and professional and technical services. High-speed access is also critical for training the region's workforce to a level that the advanced manufacturing sector and other technologies demands. **Without direct and focused investment in this infrastructure, the region will slip further behind the rest of the state's technology advancements.**

Phased Work Plan

The WestNGN Broadband Project is comprised of two Phases. Phase 1 is currently underway, with the grant outputs proposed herein scheduled to start October 1, 2016 and includes the municipalities of:

- City of Asheville
- City of Hendersonville
- Town of Biltmore Forest
- Town of Fletcher
- Town of Laurel Park
- Town of Waynesville

Phase I: Develop Community Profiles for the Broadband RFP, which is in a sense, a marketing tool the region will use to highlight assets for future infrastructure investment. High-speed broadband deployment is a high priority and the communities have dedicated funds specifically toward the advancement of this project. They are also the most densely populated of the towns and cities within the five-county region and are located along the two interstate systems (with multiple broadband networks) - two important factors for broadband deployment in the western region.

Phase II: Develop a broadband analysis for Madison and Transylvania Counties that identifies middle mile segments, to improve rural broadband connectivity.

Land of Sky Regional Council will serve as project coordinator to convene municipal and community partners to develop a broadband deployment process for the region. This process is modeled after the two other Next Generation Network (or NGN) projects underway in the Triangle and Triad regions and we will use components of their methodology to further advance the western region through this critical infrastructure. The Education & Research Consortium of the Western Carolinas will continue to provide expertise and support to this effort through the asset mapping, broadband analysis, and RFP development process.

Project benefits & Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Priority

This project, as proposed, addresses one of the highest priority target areas in the Land of Sky Regional Council 2015 *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*. The lack, or under capacity, of broadband infrastructure in the region is listed as a predominant concern for emerging sectors such as technology, life sciences, telehealth, and other knowledge-based industries. Economic developers and Chambers of Commerce have identified broadband connectivity as a key indicator for economic opportunities within the region - both inside and outside the urban centers.

Collaborative Partnerships

Current project partners include:

City of Asheville

City of Hendersonville

Town of Waynesville

Town of Fletcher

Town of Laurel Park

Town of Biltmore Forest

UNC-Asheville

Community Stakeholders

Education and Research Consortium (ERC)

NC State University

NC Broadband Office

Community Care of Western North Carolina

Measurable Impacts:

A goal of the WestNGN Broadband Project is to attract and leverage private investment from telecommunications companies. The intent of the project is to highlight the conditions, assets, and collaboration of regional jurisdictions in order to gain high-speed service, greater capacity, and expanded infrastructure at competitive costs. Broadband is not necessarily the 'leader' for industries to locate in an area, but businesses are unwilling to locate to areas without adequate broadband. It is now considered a necessary infrastructure component. These are key elements to build a competitive workforce and attract technology and knowledge-based businesses and entrepreneurs to the region.