



Legislation Text

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Report to Mayor and City Council

Tuesday, June 18, 2024

Consent

SUBJECT:

CONSIDER THE COMPLETED CITYWIDE BROADBAND ASSESSMENT STUDY (CITY COUNCIL)

I. SUMMARY

The Citywide Broadband Assessment Study (the Study) (Exhibit No. 1) thoroughly examines the telecommunication industry landscape within the City of Carson. This includes the locations of existing fiber optic cables and other assets, the service areas, and offerings of retail internet service providers (ISPs), the identification of premises lacking adequate broadband service, and the exploration of potential funding sources for broadband infrastructure. The Study also addresses issues of digital equity, aiming to ensure all residents have access to affordable high-speed internet. This Study and the accompanying recommendations support broadband network deployment and promote inclusive connectivity.

This Study serves as a valuable tool for assessing, prioritizing, and implementing future broadband-related programs, policies, and projects in alignment with City goals. It provides both short-term and long-term recommendations, which will require further refinement.

The City Council is requested to approve the Study as complete. City staff will continue developing and refining some of the recommendations discussed in the study for future review and consideration by the City Council.

II. RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE and FILE the completed Citywide Broadband Assessment Study, attached as Exhibit 1.

III. ALTERNATIVES

TAKE another action the City Council deems appropriate, provided it is consistent with applicable laws.

IV. BACKGROUND

The City Council, recognizing the important of reliable, fast, and affordable internet, directed staff to study internet availability and work on closing the community's digital divide.

In May 2023, the City awarded a contract to Magellan Advisors, LLC (Magellan) following a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) and interview process to conduct a Citywide Broadband Assessment Study. During the contract performance period, Magellan was acquired by EN Engineering, LLC also known as Entrust Solutions Group (Entrust).

The scope of the Study encompassed a review of existing conditions, an asset inventory assessment, a market analysis, a needs assessment, a gap analysis, a conceptual network design, a phased implementation plan, and a business model evaluation.

Key findings highlighted in the Study include:

- Digital inequities put the City at risk for division along socio-economic and digital lines. This has been at status quo when it comes to high-speed broadband: AT&T is deploying fiber-to-the-home and competing with Spectrum's gigabit service. However, 75% of the city has only one choice for broadband speeds - Spectrum cable service, which has much lower overall download speeds than advertised, and cannot exceed 35 Mbps upload. AT&T says more fiber neighborhoods are coming but did not share timelines.
- If it persists, digital inequity in Carson will exacerbate socio-economic differences, with lower speeds, higher prices, and no competition ultimately impacting household income, education levels and achievement, and healthcare access.
- Despite access to at least one gigabit provider, many residents subscribe to low-speed services at high prices, indicating challenges related to the Digital Divide. These include affordability, technology access, digital literacy, geographic limitations, or language barriers.
- Focus groups with Carson businesses highlighted significant concerns about the internet service availability, particularly in commercial and industrial areas, where frequent and sustained outages disrupt business operations.

- Without the robust competitive broadband environment enjoyed by many neighboring cities, Carson will remain a less attractive option for remote workers and businesses that require substantial broadband access.
- Prioritizing the build out of the city backbone network will improve their own connectivity, expand the city's smart city opportunities while creating a technical foundation to build from as the city works to address the digital divide.
- Across all focus groups, the necessity for ongoing dialogue, strategic planning, and collaborative action emerged as central themes. The City of Carson is called upon to lead these efforts, leveraging its unique position to coordinate among diverse stakeholders, drive technological adoption, and ensure that the benefits of broadband connectivity are universally accessible.

As part of the Study, a community survey was conducted from October 2023 thru January 2024, providing key insights into broadband access and usage. The survey revealed that Carson residents are not receiving the broadband value they are paying for, with more than one-third of all respondents noting dissatisfaction with their existing service.

The Study highlights significant infrastructure within Carson that warrants further evaluation and utilization for broadband purposes. This includes existing conduit and fiber cable pathways for connect facilities and neighborhoods, locations in the public rights-of-way for hosting distribution equipment, and opportunities to deploy smart city devices and applications.

The Study also presented two conceptual network designs: (1) a 20-mile backbone network, and (2) an 88.5-mile Fiber-to-the-Premise (FTTP) comprehensive fiber network, capable of delivering symmetrical speeds of up to gigabit levels and scalable to higher speed in the future.

Additionally, the Study identifies several business models, each with the potential to meet the City's goal to varying degrees and with certain trade-offs. Regardless of the business model selected, the Study suggests that there is a lack of competition and that the City may benefit from a more competitive environment to maximize choice, value, and quality for taxpayers and subscribers.

To fund the future design, construction, and implementation of a broadband network, the following sources were identified:

- Bond and Loan Funding
- Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program (BEAD)
- Broadband Loan Loss Reserve Fund

- California Advanced Services Fund (CASF)
- California Digital Equity Plan Programs
- California Last-Mile Federal Funding Account (FFA)
- California Teleconnect Fund
- Economic Development Administration (EDA)

The study concluded that significant broadband challenges exist, which City initiatives can effectively address, focusing on the extent of investment and urgency of resolving these issues.

V. FISCAL IMPACT

There is no immediate fiscal impact associate with the approval of the Broadband Assessment Study.

VI. EXHIBITS

1. Citywide Broadband Assessment Study. (Pgs. 5-118)

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