This document provides a high-level summary of the Community Broadband in Yolo County webinar that took place on August 11, 2020, hosted by Valley Vision and the Woodland Technology Alliance. A full recording of the webinar can be found at this link. It is recommended that the recording be viewed together with this summary, to fully appreciate the conversation that took place among panelists and the audience. For any further questions, please contact Isa Avanceña at isa.avancena@valleyvision.org.

Webinar: Community Broadband in Yolo County

Tuesday, August 11, 11:30 AM to 1 PM

Panelists and Moderator

David Espinoza, Broadband Project Leader for Valley Vision.
Tara Thronson, Deputy to Supervisor Saylor in Yolo County District 2.
Karen Rosenkilde-Bayne, Member of the Board of Trustees of the Woodland Joint Unified School District (WJUSD).
Samantha Samuelsen, Legislative Aide for Assemblymember Cecilia Aguiar-Curry at the California State Assembly.
Moderated by **Dr. Larry Ozeran**, President of Clinical Informatics.

What is the state of broadband in our community?

What is the state of broadband in Yolo County?
- According to the latest California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) data, Yolo County has around **96% broadband service availability**, based on the state standard of 6mpbs down/1mbps up. From a total 73,648 households, around 2789 have service below this speed or no service at all.
- In terms of adoption, there are 57,545 subscriptions and consumer connections (about 81% of the households).
- The West part of the County shows adoption levels at 60-80%; the North part of the County at 40-60%; the Central part of the County at more than 80%; and the Southeast part of the County at 60-80%.

Why is Yolo County not achieving the theoretical potential of 96%?
- The issue is **pricing**. Comcast, Wave, and AT&T all offer reduced pricing for about $10 a month, if the family has a child enrolled in the federal free and reduced lunch program. But there are those for whom that amount is still a non-starter. Additionally, it is not always easy to sign-up for these programs. A community technology partner who can do outreach and assist community members in the enrollment process would be beneficial.
- Sometimes providers will advertise affordable plans, set-up service, and then subsequently deem the family ineligible. It is one thing to offer the plans, but it is another to make sure that families remain eligible and do not subsequently encounter barriers.
- There are also **barriers to those who are undocumented**. Eligibility for low-cost internet programs is based on enrollment in federal free and reduced lunch programs. This can deter those who are fearful of enrolling in a federal program.
- Some providers have said that they no longer ask for a social security number, or request any other information that may create a barrier. But this is unconfirmed, and such barriers may still exist.
- **Ultimately, although community members see the value of having internet service, the issue is cost**.

What are some of the regional coalitions that exist to promote equity in broadband?
- The **Connected Capital Area Broadband Consortium's (CCABC)** main focus is to advance availability and access to households, as well as aggregate demand for community anchor institutions, businesses, and industrial customers. Members of the CCABC include local governments; internet service providers (ISPs); anchor institutions in healthcare, education, and emergency services; and businesses.
- The **Sacramento Coalition for Digital Inclusion's (SCDI)** main focus is improving access to computing devices and digital skills. It is led by the Sacramento Public Library, the City of Sacramento, Valley Vision, and the Social Venture Partners (SVP) of Sacramento.

What progress have these regional coalitions made in the last year?
- This year, the CCABC assisted in getting three California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) applications submitted.
- The CCABC also prepared materials on best practices for permitting, zoning, and streamlining for all types of infrastructure buildout, and promoted CPUC tools for evaluating internet coverage and speeds.
- Valley Vision, manager of the CCABC, finalized and released the Strategic Broadband Corridors Report, in partnership with the California Emerging Technology Fund.
- Valley Vision also wrote and released the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, together with its partners.

What are the broadband needs of the community?

Two big issues that were identified were (1) access to sufficient speeds and (2) pricing.

What is Yolo County's community outreach strategy in assessing community needs?
- Looking at the County's Broadband Strategic Plan; referencing the CPUC maps; and ground truth testing.
- Staying in touch with the community at the ground-level.

How does Yolo County assess the capability and accessibility of broadband in the county?
- Some of the questions the County asks infrastructure providers and ISPs relate to the minimum and maximum speeds that can be sustained; whether or not there is redundancy in place; and what the cost will be to residents. Ultimately, if the County is providing access to a private company, that company needs to be fulfilling the needs of the public.

How does Assemblymember Aguiar-Curry evaluate capability and accessibility?
- The aspiration is to get community members sufficient internet access to be able to do telework, telehealth, and distance learning — and working towards this in a thoughtful way that first targets those most in need (i.e., those with internet speeds below 6mbps down/1mbps up), and then moves the needle.
- AB 570, a bill that the Assemblymember is sponsoring, would prioritize middle-mile and fiber buildout, as well as provide better resources for anchor institutions.

How has COVID-19 impacted the ability of schools to reach students? Is it accurate that 100% of WJUSD have access? And if so, where do we go from there?
- 100% of WJUSD students have a chromebook, but not all have internet access.
- There is a gap between those who can pay for internet access and those who qualify for free hotspots from the school district or low-cost internet programs from ISPs.
- Additionally, eligibility for hotspots is based on enrollment in federal free and reduced lunch programs, which often deters those who are fearful of enrolling in a federal program. Moreover, federal free and reduced lunch programs are based on federal living standards. For those in California, those income levels do not equate to what it actually costs to live in this state.
- Another issue is the fact that cell towers in the city simply cannot accommodate the increased load, due to increase in people doing telework or distance learning; in rural areas, where satellite is often the only option, it is too expensive and does not allow for synchronous learning.

- Some characteristics of Woodland that could work in its favor, in terms of infrastructure buildout: (1) It is relatively flat, which makes building infrastructure potentially cheaper than it would be in more mountainous terrain; (2) Its proximity to Sacramento (the state capital), and the number of people from Woodland who work in Sacramento, could potentially be used as leverage to get more connectivity.

What does the State require from ISPs?
- AB 570 would allow the CPUC to make a finding that an incumbent ISP is not able or willing to provide service, and award grant funds instead to ISPs who are able and willing to do so. The bill also provides a separate pot of money that would be used to build out middle-mile connectivity, and connect to anchor institutions and tribal lands.

What does the County require from ISPs?
- The County's role is to ensure ISPs serve underserved areas, whether that is achieved through negotiations, potential partnerships, or other ways of working with them.

What are some other barriers to improving internet access in Yolo County?
- The limited number of ISPs, especially in rural areas, which results in a lack of competition.
- In some cases, ISPs are hard to connect with, or are not responsive.
- There are issues with respect to funding eligibility for federal and state programs, as well as issues around the definitions of "rural" for purposes of qualifying for funding.

What solutions should be explored to fill these needs?

- There is a need to revisit what constitutes "access" in our present world, especially given the increase in telework, telehealth, and distance learning, because of the pandemic.
- There is a need for multiple approaches to deal with these issues, including but not limited to: dig-once/dig-smart policies, alternative business models (e.g., coops), accelerating physical infrastructure development, among others. There is a need for state, regional, county, and local strategy, and the question of how to think more broadly about all these pieces.
- There is a need to rethink our model, because the traditional financing model simply does not work.

This section is taken from the "Chat" function of the Zoom webinar.

If you live in Yolo County, how fast does your connection get?
- "25mbps. Tried to upgrade but infrastructure cannot support anything faster. And if it rains, it drops."
- "I live in Davis and I pay for Xfinity wifi for my household. It is costly but it's the only internet in the area we could find."
- "45/12 best case (rarely), even though I pay for better service."
- "We typically get between 7 to 20Mbps down and 5 to 6Mbps up. Our broadband costs $86/month."
- "Rural friends in Yolo County don't have affordable access to broadband outside of their phone."
- "I have heard, anecdotally, of a grower in Yolo County, outside Woodland, who pays $600/month for internet access through AT&T, and his son/nephew in an adjacent farm, has no access, or has declined to subscribe at the rate offered."

If you know a person who doesn't have access to the internet, what county do they live in?
- "Yes. Yolo County."
- "Yes."
- "Yes, Yuba County."
- "Yes, Santa Cruz."

Are you spending less than $25, more than $50, or $25-50?
- "More than $50."
- "Greater than $50."
- "> $50/month for broadband."
- "$25-50. 25mbps service (can't get faster due to infrastructure)."
- "$86/month."

How often would it be useful for us to have these?
- "Bi-monthly."
- "Monthly to every other month! Especially if there is a summary sent out for folks who couldn't make it. After COVID is over, quarterly is probably fine every other month... unless there's major movement."