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STATE OF ALABAMA

Dear Citizens of Alabama:

In 2012, Alabama released, "Connecting Alabama, INNOVATE Alabama, a Strategic Plan for a Connected Future." We have made great strides in our state during that time. One of our biggest accomplishments has been the passage of the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act and the establishment of the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund.

We know we have a long way to go before all residents in Alabama have access to reliable highspeed broadband. In the meantime, we will continue with the implementation of the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund, we will begin a new planning process to benchmark how far we've come and determine what is still needed, and we will continue supporting applicants for federal funding.

Therefore, I am pleased to approve the Broadband Alabama Strategy as our interim broadband plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kay Ivey".

Kay Ivey
Governor

Broadband Alabama Strategy



*A strategic
planning
framework for
a connected
future*

*Updated: May
2019*

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Executive Summary

Broadband is essential to economic opportunity and the vitality of life in Alabama. Widely recognized as the infrastructure challenge of our day, some would go further to say that broadband has the potential to be *transformative* – especially for rural Alabama and all who call her home. Key elements of an advanced broadband capability across the state include (a) **availability** (*where it can be accessed*), (b) **adoption** (*who elects to use it*) and (c) **application** (*what they do with it*). The Broadband Alabama Strategy serves to articulate, organize and give momentum to a series of sustainable state-wide initiatives designed to advance the reach and impact of broadband in Alabama.

From 2008-2012, a state-wide broadband initiative sought to engage state and local leadership, citizens, business interests, service providers, educators, healthcare workers, public safety officials, and others in a discussion about the state’s broadband issues and opportunities and how best to address those issues in a way that is consistent with industry realities and appropriate state roles. Through this work, a number of region-specific broadband investment plans were developed and experienced various levels of implementation success. More recently, lawmakers and stakeholders have worked to identify policy priorities and funding mechanisms to improve broadband accessibility in rural Alabama.

On April 26, 2017, Governor Kay Ivey issued Executive Order Number 704, identifying the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs as the agency assuming the powers, duties, responsibilities, authority, and obligations of the Office of Broadband Development. Additionally, on March 28, 2018, Governor Kay Ivey signed the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act which established the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund. Finally, included in Governor Kay Ivey’s 2018 budget were funds to support the Broadband Alabama program and to fund a state-wide planning and mapping initiative. The strategy that follows focuses on the priorities identified in the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act and in Governor Kay Ivey’s broadband planning initiative.

Many of the strategies developed in the 2012 plan are relevant today. They have been updated to reflect the recent broadband actions taken by the state. While the state is taking the lead on ensuring implementation efforts continue, the state will engage stakeholders and convene discussions and activities to ensure an inclusive process.

Three facets to the advancement of broadband...

Availability – are quality, relevant broadband services available to people across the state?

Adoption – are important populations availing themselves to the service when it is available?

Application – are the applications in place so that people can achieve maximum potential?

The current state-wide priorities are highlighted below. As suggested previously, the state’s role with respect to these priorities will vary. In some cases, the state may indeed take a lead development and delivery role. In other cases, the state will serve primarily as a clearinghouse or point of coordination. Identifying the most efficient and effective approach for how the initiative will be organized in the state is an important first task for each of the initiatives outlined in the strategy. Across three key elements (see related graphic) the five initiatives are as follows:

1. **Financial Support of Broadband Deployment**
2. **Broadband Planning and Mapping**
3. **Broadband Ready Communities**
4. **Material Broadband Enhancements to Rural Hospitals**
5. **Policy Alignment**



Alongside these priorities stand a number of sector-specific efforts that are collectively working to take advantage of broadband today and well into the future. Key sectors include healthcare, education, public safety, agriculture, economic development, and government. These sectors often represent what are known as Community Anchor Institutions (CAI). CAI’s serve as important anchor tenants to a community’s broadband ecosystem (e.g., schools, libraries, hospitals/clinics, etc.). In that role they often represent a key customer for service providers and they frequently serve as an important resource for how citizens and businesses come to understand and access broadband, e.g., public access provided by our libraries, community college support to the small business community, etc. In summary, a healthy broadband environment is vital to the quality and economic potential of Alabama. The Broadband Alabama Strategy is a look forward to defining appropriate roles with effective partners as we collectively extend the promise – the availability, adoption, and application of broadband across the state.

Introduction and Background

The purpose of the Broadband Alabama Strategy is to prepare for future planning efforts and to take stock of current activities and priorities. The Executive Order that moved the functions of the Office of Broadband Development is located on the Broadband Alabama webpage. Additionally, the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act, information about the Broadband Accessibility Fund, and other broadband information are available on the Broadband Alabama webpage at <http://adeca.alabama.gov/broadband>.

Numerous broadband stakeholders have been working with lawmakers to write legislation to further encourage broadband deployment in rural Alabama. In addition to the current broadband legislation, other broadband policy priorities are being considered in both the House and the Senate. While the funding and policy considerations are being addressed, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs has begun the process to convene a state-wide planning and mapping initiative that will include a community readiness component. Finally, numerous state agencies have been tasked to assist applicants for federal funds in maximizing the competitive points that may be available if the state is providing monetary or other support.



These activities have all been driven by the acknowledgement that rural broadband must be and is a priority. The Governor, the Legislature, industry stakeholders, state agencies, and others have all come together to continue to make progress in providing broadband in rural Alabama.

The following offers a look at the current rural broadband priorities within the state along with the status of the strategies related to the priorities.

State-Wide Priorities

1. Financial Support of Broadband Deployment

Strategy: On March 28, 2018, Governor Kay Ivey signed the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act. In order to encourage high-speed broadband services in unserved rural Alabama and to promote economic development, education, health care, and emergency services, the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act established the Alabama Broadband Accessibility Fund. Through the fund, providers willing to serve rural areas that do not currently have at least one provider providing a connection to the Internet that provides capacity for transmission at an average speed per customer of at least 10 megabits per second downstream and at least one megabit per second upstream.

Additional functions under this priority include developing a process to assist applicants for federal broadband deployment funds to maximize competitive points and to use state funds as match to leverage federal funds.

Status: The legislature provided \$7.4 million to use for these grants. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs received 22 applications. Seven of the applications received awards and six additional projects are in the process of being amended to receive awards. Approximately \$2 million of the \$7.4 million were obligated. A second round of funding was opened in March 2019. As a result of the limited interest in the program, several amendments are currently under consideration.

An online questionnaire has been developed to allow applicants to request state endorsements and certifications for applications for federal funds.

2. Broadband Planning and Mapping

Strategy: The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs received \$2.5 million to facilitate several broadband related activities, including the procurement of planning services, state-wide mapping activities, and the oversight of a state-wide plan and mapping program. The planning and mapping may include:

- current broadband conditions and quality
- broadband availability
- broadband community profiles
- model ordinances and/or policies for approvals and permits
- model fee structure
- educational components for the community leadership
- region-specific recommendations for future broadband initiatives

- identification of local initiatives, resources and funding to be used in project development
- on-going planning and communication
- on-going mapping

Status: Currently, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is developing a request for proposals to procure assistance with developing the plan and map.

3. Broadband Ready Communities

Strategy: The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs received \$2.5 million to facilitate several broadband related activities, including the development of a broadband ready communities initiative. Communities receiving the broadband ready designation may be given priority for state broadband initiatives. Requirements may include:

- identify a local point of contact responsible for broadband matters
- create a local provision that projects will be reviewed within 30 business days
- actively participate in the regional planning process
- adopt model ordinances, policies, and other efforts to streamline the buildout of broadband

Status: Currently, the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs is developing a request for proposals to procure assistance with developing the broadband ready communities initiative.

4. Material Broadband Enhancements to Rural Hospitals

Strategy: Broadband plays a vital role in the future of healthcare; from electronic health records and video consultation to remote patient monitoring and the deployment of mobile health assets, broadband enables an increasing number of opportunities to reach more people, more effectively and more efficiently. The healthcare landscape is complex consisting of hospitals, rural health clinics, doctor offices and nursing homes. Supporting the advancement of broadband enabled applications and capabilities across this important sector is important to the state – and absolutely critical to the vitality of our rural communities.

Status: The current Alabama Broadband Accessibility Act includes a specific definition of hospitals in the priorities for funding portion of the Act. A broadening of that language has been proposed to include other rural healthcare in the grant award process.

5. Policy Alignment

Strategy: Broadband expansion (both in terms of access and adoption) happens within the context of state and local policy. Well-informed, leadership, coordinated and supportive local and state policy, and agency practice is necessary for efficient rural broadband deployment.

Status: Currently, stakeholders and lawmakers are working together to review existing and proposed legislation related to broadband funding, broadband providers, and broadband fees and regulations.

The Way Forward

Alabama will succeed in its effort to advance the reach and use of broadband through data driven planning. With this strategy, the state is now working to coordinate resources targeted at the five Broadband Alabama Strategy areas. Future planning efforts will engage a variety of organizations from across the state. Leadership and organizations that are invested in broadband deployment will move us forward.