

Broadband in Nebraska: Current Landscape and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

Vision and Goals

Nebraska’s broadband vision is that residents, businesses, government entities, community partners, and visitors have access to affordable broadband service and have the necessary skills to effectively utilize broadband technologies.

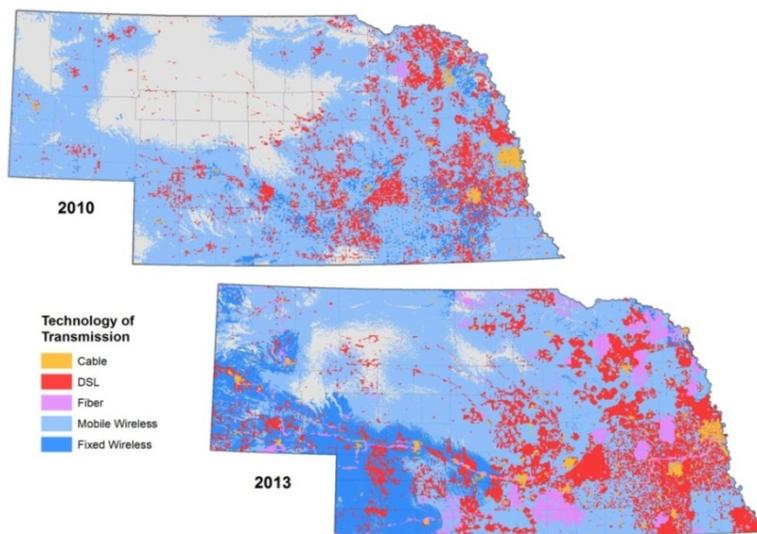
Goal 1: To increase economic development opportunities, create good-paying jobs, attract and retain population, overcome the barriers of distance, and enhance quality of life in Nebraska by facilitating the continuing deployment of broadband technologies which meet the need for increasing connection speeds.

Goal 2: To facilitate digital literacy and the widespread adoption of broadband technologies in business, agriculture, health care, education, government and by individual Nebraskans.

Broadband Landscape

Broadband provides high-speed access to applications such as the Internet. Broadband service is available to nearly all Nebraskans, with 99.5% of Nebraskans having access to service with download speeds of greater than 10 Mbps.¹ Nebraska ties for 12th on this measure.

Broadband availability in Nebraska continues to improve. The map below shows improvements in broadband coverage from 2010 to 2013. Some areas of the state remain unserved, however.²



¹ National Broadband Map (www.broadbandmap.gov) accessed August 1, 2014. Data from Dec. 31, 2013.

² Map created by Cullen Robbins, Nebraska Public Service Commission.

Mobile connections are becoming increasingly important to residents and businesses with over 80% of Nebraska businesses currently using smart phones.³ Although mobile broadband data coverage is improving in Nebraska, mobile coverage in some areas of rural Nebraska is still a challenge. Mobile coverage limitations in rural areas of Nebraska may impact the adoption and utilization of some precision agriculture technologies which rely on mobile broadband services.

Most households in Nebraska (82%) have broadband service. However, there are significant-rural-urban differences with subscription rates of 90% in Lincoln and 87% in Omaha, compared to 72% to 77% in other regions of the state.⁴

Nebraska businesses are utilizing broadband access to the Internet to expand their markets and reduce costs. More importantly, these businesses are creating jobs and increasing revenue through the use of broadband. A 2013 survey of Nebraska businesses found that broadband is having a positive impact on jobs, with 364 respondents reporting a net increase of 654 jobs due to using broadband.⁵

Internet applications relying on broadband networks are becoming increasingly important for agricultural producers. Most livestock producers use the Internet for market information, auctions, government and regulatory agency reporting report, and farm business planning. Most grain producers use the Internet for market information, crop management, government and regulatory agency reporting, ROI calculators, farm business planning, and GPS information.⁶

Recommendations

The following recommendations emerged from discussions with stakeholders:

- Leverage resources to encourage investment in Nebraska's telecommunications infrastructure.
- Enhance the capacity of local communities to address broadband development.
- Encourage the development of a skilled IT workforce.
- Support innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Support the use of broadband technologies in agriculture and businesses.
- Support the use of broadband technologies in health care, local government, libraries, and education.
- Support efforts to attract new residents and retain youth.
- Increase digital literacy and broadband access to the Internet.

³ Strategic Networks Group. (Jan. 31, 2014). Nebraska broadband eSolutions benchmarking report. Retrieved from <http://broadband.nebraska.gov>

⁴ Vogt, R., Byers, A., Hancock, C., Narjes, C., & Terry, R. (April 2014). Internet connectivity and use in Nebraska: A follow up study. Retrieved from <http://broadband.nebraska.gov>

⁵ Strategic Networks Group. (Jan. 31, 2014). Nebraska broadband eSolutions benchmarking report. Retrieved from <http://broadband.nebraska.gov>

⁶ Vogt, R., Narjes, C., Byers, A. & Hancock, C. (July 16, 2014). Technology use in agriculture. Cornhusker Economics. Retrieved from <http://agecon.unl.edu/cornhuskereconomics>