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Sagging economy needs a broadband race lift

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Broadband is widely viewed as an enabling technology that will eventually change the way Americans live and work. The Redwood Coast Connect (RCC) report touts that it can provide an economic catalyst for rural communities by allowing them to work from remote locations, but allowing them to keep clientele in a global market.

Spearheaded in part by California Gov. Schwarzenegger's Broadband Task Force, the recently released RCC report on bringing the Internet to rural, under-served communities highlights the benefits which accompany those with strong reliable Internet access. The report is also funded in part by the Headwaters fund. The Headwaters fund is public money that is used for the advancement of business projects, and the California Emerging Technology Fund.

What the RCC plan has done is what former mayor and Arcata City Councilwoman Connie Stewart did. Stewart took an active role in addressing major public-policy issues including health care, economic development, infrastructure and the environment. She explained that an outline of what needs to happen has been created with this report.

The plan now is to build lines, if possible along highway 299. There is, however, obstacles posed by the permit process. Groups, such as the Environmental Protection Agency, Coast Commission, State Parks, Caltrans and the Department of Fish and Game (just to name a few) have to compromise and find middle-ground that will appease both builders and conservationists for the plan to move forward. Gov. Schwarzenegger recently cut the red tape allowing the project to take off.

According to the CIA world fact-book, 223 million people in the United States have access to the Internet. That means 70 percent of the U.S. has the Internet. As the report illustrates, a community's inability to integrate new technologies means it will be left behind as the rest of the world moves forward.

Providing reliable Internet service to rural areas like Mendocino County would speed up the development of their infrastructure, and lead to an increase in many facets of life. Better communications for law enforcement provides better security, and it also improves safety by providing faster service to hospitals which is the sum of Executive Order S-21-06 ordered by Gov Schwarzenegger in 2006.

Humboldt County, Trinity, Del Norte, and Mendocino counties (11,000 square miles) all intend to be connected. According to the RCC report, the counties combined cover an area the same size as Connecticut and New Jersey put together.

Mendocino County is, as described by the RCC report, under-served. Sally Palacio, part of Mendocino's Advanced Planning Team, said though the county itself has urged and pushed for broadband Internet connection, it simply has no jurisdiction to tell SBC and AT&T where to start building. Which is why the RCC report will be presented to neighboring communities in hopes that broadband will help the counties become better connected, what the Emergency Technology Fund refers to as "bridging the digital divide."



Bryan Thomson

In today's internet necessary society unplugged computer cables are a bad sign.