

BROADBAND BREAKFAST

Sunne McPeak: Achieving True Digital Equity Requires Strong Leadership and Sincere Collaboration

Collaboration between community leaders will be essential in ensuring success of the Biden infrastructure bill in California.



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This week, President **Joe Biden** signed the infrastructure bill, which includes \$65 billion for expanding broadband deployment and access for all Americans.

The national plan is described as the most significant infrastructure upgrade in the three decades since the Cold War. “This is an opportunity to create an Eisenhower national highway system for the information age,” says a former White House National Security Council senior director.

For California – the nation’s largest state – it means a minimum \$100 million for broadband infrastructure that is designed to expand high-speed internet access for at least 545,000 residents, particularly in unserved and underserved communities, according to the White House. The federal funding will support California’s \$6 billion broadband infrastructure plan.

Closing the digital divide and achieving true digital equity requires strong leadership and sincere collaboration among public agencies, internet service providers and civic leaders to seize this unique opportunity to achieve strategic priorities in education, telehealth, transportation and economic development. The [2021 USC-CETF Statewide Survey on Broadband Adoption](#) highlighted that a significant number of Californians will be left behind because they are unable to access the internet and other digital functionality needed for vital activities.

Now, the question is how to ensure the public’s funds will be used as effectively and efficiently as possible. California must implement a thoughtful, aggressive strategy that will maximize immediate impact and optimize return on investment. Separately, for several years, CETF has been calling for broadband deployment as a green strategy for

sustainability; that urgency only grows in the wake of the COP26 climate meetings. As leaders begin to make historic investments, they should embrace these key principles for action:

- Prioritize and drive infrastructure construction to the hardest-to-reach residents — rural unserved areas, tribal lands, and poor urban neighborhoods — and then connect all locations, especially anchor institutions (schools, libraries and health care facilities), along the path of deployment.
- Require open-access fiber middle-mile infrastructure with end-user internet speeds sufficient to support distance learning and telehealth.
- Strive to achieve ubiquitous deployment in each region to avoid cherry picking for more lucrative areas.
- Encourage coordination among local governments and regional agencies to streamline permitting and achieve economies of scale.
- Develop an open competitive process to achieve the most cost-effective investment of new dollars by optimizing use of existing infrastructure that ratepayers and taxpayers already have built.

To learn more, please contact Sunne Wright McPeak at sunne.mcpeak@cetfund.org

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