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Legislative Update

Your Municipal Communications Resource

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TWO "Calls to Action"

by Dave Garb, Legislative Committee Chair

Last month JAG, the Jersey Access Group, had the distinct pleasure of presenting a special joint session with the League of Municipalities at their annual conference. It was on the Broadband Grants and Funding opportunities that was created from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act which was approved last year by the federal government.

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Congress has approved \$65 billion dollars to improve broadband deployment and adoption throughout the United States. This funding will flow from the Federal Government to the states for distribution. Our session helped communities to fully understand where that money is currently and how they will apply for it once it arrives. Our panelists of experts included: Valarry Bullard, Broadband Advisor to Governor Murphy; India P. Still, Deputy Executive Director Administration - Atlantic City Municipal Utilities Authority; Joseph Rivera, Manager of Broadband Access - NJ BPU; Ken Fellman - Helmer, Conley & Kasselmann, P.A.; Robert Boyle, CEO Planet Networks; Mayor Brian Wahler of Piscataway Township, and Bob Duthaler, President of JAG. They all shared their wisdom on this subject by explaining what was happening, what this money should be used for, and how they may contribute in order to be in the discussions about acquiring a part of this money for their own town's broadband needs.

BPU Broadband Assessment Survey

One of the best ways to try and obtain your share of this money was brought up by Joseph Rivera of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. Mr. Rivera mentioned that there is a survey going on right now to determine how the grants will be divided among our 564 municipalities as part of New Jersey's Broadband Assessment Project. The most notable part of this survey is that it needs participation from every citizen in every community. What this money is supposed to do is help the unserved, underserved and community anchor institutions in order to achieve statewide, 100% access to high speed internet service. This includes senior citizens and those living in poverty. So there is a great need to find out who and where these residents reside. Please click on the link <https://broadband-nj.com> to participate in this survey. Every voice is needed to help decide how the money will be distributed.

FCC National Broadband Mapping

Ken Feldman explained the new FCC National Broadband Mapping that was coming out in a few days. This map details the level of broadband service available across the country. Visit <https://broadbandmap.fcc.gov/home> and you will have the ability to drill down to your specific home. Everyone should examine your specific location for accuracy and if you find the information to be incorrect you can challenge its accuracy. For more details about this map, please read the article below from FCC Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel about this undertaking.

Watch or review the broadband session that was presented at the 2022 League of Municipalities conference.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k90uN9IWdOk&t=35s>

Following the Money: Accessing Broadband Funding

The information that was talked about was very valuable, especially to those municipalities who have been forced to contend with broadband issues. The pandemic exposed all of us to the crucial need for broadband with high speed internet. This session explained in simple terms what you and your citizens must do in order to be in the running to get a share of these amazing grants.

The New Broadband Maps Are Finally Here

November 18, 2022

By Jessica Rosenworcel | Chairwoman

Today, the FCC is unveiling the pre-production draft of its new broadband maps. These maps provide the best picture available to date of where broadband is and is not available across the country, and the maps will only get better from here. Here are the most important things to know about today's maps:

Broadband consumers are empowered like never before. Maps that show the availability of high-speed Internet service are nothing new. The problem is that the FCC's maps had previously relied on information that failed to paint the whole picture of who did and who did not have the internet. The FCC's older maps collected data at the census block level, meaning that if a single home was served in a census block, the whole block would show up as served on our maps. The net result was maps that were overly optimistic, lacked location-specific information, and subsequently glossed over gaps in coverage. With these new maps, the FCC has integrated the information from broadband providers with hundreds of location-specific data sources, giving us a far more detailed and accurate picture of fixed broadband availability.

These improved maps will mean direct benefits for consumers. Users now have a one-stop-shop to search for their address and find information about which internet service providers claim to offer service at the location, the broadband technologies they offer, and the maximum download and upload speeds they advertise for each technology. This greater transparency will create market pressures on internet providers to improve their coverage. The new maps will also help policymakers more accurately target investments to expand broadband to unserved and underserved areas and close the digital divide.

This is a beginning, not an endpoint, for the new era of broadband maps. While today marks an important milestone in the effort to create more granular and accurate broadband maps, this work is far from over. To emphasize how much more work needs to be done, we are calling the product we unveil today a pre-production draft. Releasing this early version of the new maps is intended to kickstart an ongoing, iterative process where we are consistently adding new data to improve and refine the maps.

The long-term success of this effort will depend on consumer and stakeholder engagement. To ensure that the maps are constantly improving, we have set up a system that allows consumers and others to challenge inaccuracies and provide feedback. Individuals who see that the information on the maps does not match up with what they know from their lived experience will be able to submit challenges, or request corrections, directly through the map interface. We will also accept bulk challenges to the reported availability data from state, Tribal, and local governments and other stakeholders who see problems we need to correct in multiple locations. We strongly encourage these parties to partner with us and share their input through the challenge process so we may continue to improve our maps. This crowdsourcing activity is an important part of getting the information we have right.

The last thing I would note about the release of today's maps is that they are the product of a lot of hard work, especially by public servants at the FCC. I want to thank the Broadband Data Task Force and the many, many dedicated staff throughout the Commission who have helped us get to this point. Thanks also to the Congressional leaders who spearheaded the Broadband DATA Act, which was the driving force behind today's release. This effort is a big improvement over the old system that simply stated if service was available on the basis of a single subscriber in a census block. But we have work to do to refine this information and make sure it is accurate and up to date. Let's get to it.

—Jessica

Calls To Action

- 1) Look closely at these maps to check their accuracy and to see how each of your towns measure up.
- 2) Make sure that you and your residents fill out the BPU's survey.

Please remember, everyone can be a great spokesperson for their own municipality!

JAG (Jersey Access Group) is an organization that advocates, promotes, and preserves the right to media production, distribution, civic engagement, and education in support of diverse community voices, through Public, Educational and Government access facilities and other forms of media.

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