

<http://connectohio.org/blog/post/study-connecting-ohio-can-mean-billions-dollars-benefits-if-done-right>

STUDY: Connecting Ohio Can Mean Billions of Dollars in Benefits If Done Right

Ohio is ahead of the curve when it comes to high-speed broadband Internet access. Ninety-two percent of those living in the Buckeye State have access, but connecting the more than 1 million who are still unserved or underserved would mean a one- to two-billion dollar economic impact, conservatively—benefiting Ohio’s communities, businesses, and families.

That’s according to a study just released from The Ohio State University’s Department of Agricultural, Environmental, and Development Economics. In it, the study’s authors point to one of the biggest barriers to connecting all Ohioans—a lack of coordination of efforts.

“Ohio leaders need to better leverage the existing data and information out there about where broadband is accessible and where it isn’t and integrate that into policymaking when it comes to things like infrastructure and transportation planning,” said Mark Rembert, a doctoral student and graduate research associate for the Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy at OSU, who worked on the study.

In 2008, the state began delegating some of those responsibilities to Connect Ohio, a state-based subsidiary of national nonprofit, Connected Nation. Connect Ohio seeks to ensure that all Ohioans have access to the opportunities enabled by high-speed broadband connectivity including better healthcare, educational opportunities, workforce development, and more.

“Connect Ohio has established itself as a vital resource by collecting Ohio’s broadband data, analyzing it, and making it accessible to state policymakers,” Rembert said. “Connect Ohio is also helping local governments that oftentimes do not think of broadband as being part of comprehensive planning. Further, Connect Ohio is a neutral third party—outside of the Internet Service Providers, government officials, and even residents—which enables the organization to better coordinate various cross-sector stakeholders involved in broadband.”

“Being independent is so important to facilitating broadband conversations between government, providers, and end-users,” said Stu Johnson, Executive Director of Connect Ohio. “Connect Ohio then takes these conversations a step further by gathering and mapping residential, business, and rural/Appalachia broadband data, which is key to identifying Ohio’s outstanding access issues and creating comprehensive plans with realistic solutions.”

Connecting the Last 1 Million Ohioans

Rembert and his co-authors listed five recommendations to accelerate broadband expansion in Ohio while minimizing the public cost: developing a state office to coordinate broadband expansion efforts across state agencies; utilizing groups like

Connect Ohio; adopting a state “dig once” policy; strengthening public-private partnerships so that public infrastructure can be used to expand broadband access without creating anti-competitive conditions; promoting local government policies that facilitate broadband; and establishing a broadband investment fund to finance infrastructure.

According to the study, that infrastructure fund would be “a targeted state investment that helps to reduce the large fixed costs of building broadband infrastructure in remote rural areas.” Many states have already established state broadband funds, including Minnesota, Massachusetts, New York, and Colorado.

“There are still a lot of Ohioans that don’t have broadband access,” Rembert said. “Making sure they get access will produce positive gains for the state, and the fastest way to do that is to coordinate that expansion and improve the state’s investment in it.”

Coordination... and a Whole Lot More

Through its Digital Works and earlier Every Citizen Online programs, Connect Ohio has also demonstrated success in improving adoption and use of online resources once Internet expansion takes place in an area—a key to positive economic impacts from broadband access.

“Digital Works is a good example of the kinds of programs the state should be looking at to counter potential negative effects as it expands broadband,” Rembert said. “A program like Digital Works addresses the lack of digital literacy among our residents because it trains people in tech skills and information technology.”

The study found that the average economic impact of home broadband access for consumers can be as much as \$2,200 a year. This is largely the result of access to goods and services that can often be found at lower rates online, which can create several cost-savings for Ohioans.

But Digital Works goes even further. In addition to digital-literacy instruction, the program offers job training and placement in remote or work-at-home jobs through its connections with more than 70 companies nationwide.

“Work-at-home jobs are one the fastest-growing segments of the workforce, and for rural areas, they also can be a savior for the economy,” Johnson said.

“The bottom line is this—broadband gives families, individuals, farmers, and small community businesses access to a global economy, healthcare, education, and more,” Johnson continued. “But only if those who are being connected know how to use the technology and leverage it to help themselves, their families and their businesses. To get us there, we need to be intentional about how we use our data and how we coordinate efforts.”

Related links: Read the full report entitled “[Connecting the Dots of Ohio’s Broadband Policy](#)”

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[The C. William Swank Program in Rural-Urban Policy](#) is a nationally and internationally recognized research and outreach program focused on priority issues related to rural and urban communities and their growth and prosperity. The Swank Program conducts and supports research, teaching, and outreach within the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences; the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center; and Ohio State University Extension.

Connected Nation is a leading technology organization committed to bringing affordable high-speed Internet and broadband-enabled resources to all Americans so no one is left on the wrong side of the “Digital Divide.” For more information, please visit: www.connectednation.org or follow Connected Nation on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).