
News Release

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SCAG commits to developing a Broadband Action Plan to help cities, counties address the digital divide

Los Angeles – The nation’s largest metropolitan planning organization on Thursday committed to helping its 191 cities and six counties bridge the digital divide and increase broadband access in underserved communities throughout Southern California.

Within the SCAG region alone, 10 percent of households do not have access to adequate internet speeds or have no internet access whatsoever. These households are disproportionately located in low-income or rural areas, where the population is predominantly Black, Latino or over 65 years old.

A resolution adopted by the Regional Council of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is aimed at addressing a problem that has become even more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic as schools, many jobs, healthcare and a significant number of government services have gone online. Without adequate broadband infrastructure, underserved communities find themselves at a bigger disadvantage, resulting in a widening of the equity gap.

The resolution adopted Thursday directs SCAG staff to develop a Broadband Action Plan, which would include:

- Developing a model resolution and policy paper for local jurisdictions, addressing the digital divide.
- Pursuing grant funding opportunities and partnerships to assist local jurisdictions with broadband implementation.
- Convening a working group to develop ways to facilitate rapid deployment of broadband technology such as streamlining the permit process, lowering fees to a reasonable level, and reducing the cost of entry and operation of broadband systems within underserved communities.
- Including broadband planning, data and research findings, and strategies as part of SCAG’s work in promoting an inclusive Regional Economic Recovery and Strategy.

“Closing the digital divide is critical to our commitment to addressing economic and social disparities within communities of color,” said SCAG President Rex Richardson, Vice Mayor of Long Beach.

“Broadband has become essential infrastructure for the 21st century, but as many as 10% of Southern California households – disproportionately located in low-income communities – continue to be left out in the cold.”

Under Richardson’s leadership, SCAG declared racism a public health crisis, established a special committee on equity and social justice, and focused its 2020 Southern California Economic Summit on developing an inclusive recovery strategy.

Those efforts have underscored just how onerous the digital divide has become, and the need to expedite the development of broadband infrastructure and prove connectivity at an affordable rate.

“It’s a vicious cycle for residents in disadvantaged communities, who are struggling to participate in the digital landscape due to lack of affordability or infrastructure,” said Kome Ajise, SCAG’s Executive Director. “Our aim is to build regional cohesiveness and work with local municipalities to develop the framework and support they need to address this critical task.”

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About SCAG

SCAG is the nation’s largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and nearly 19 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to plan for a livable and sustainable Southern California now and in the future. For more information about SCAG, please visit: www.scag.ca.gov.