

BROADBAND PROGRESS REPORT



COMPLETED

Hosted 4 Introductory Virtual Forums for Stakeholders and Service Providers

Mapping to Identify Fiber Infrastructure, Towers, and Demographics in 10 Counties

Developed a Starter Kit to Help with Project Identification in Counties

Initial Project Identification in 12 Counties

Forged Partnerships with 6 Internet Service Providers to Coordinate Infrastructure Mapping, in Discussions with 6 More Providers

East Texas Regional Broadband Initiative

ETCOG, through its East Texas Economic Development District (ETEDD), received funding from EDA to develop a grassroots regional broadband strategic plan. The grant will help the region capitalize on its strengths and opportunities related to long-term economic development, create or enhance an environment conducive to job growth, and improve infrastructure and overall community development to improve the quality of life. We launched this project in the winter of 2020 with the help of our contractors, TDC2 as a primary consultant and Design Nine as our broadband network planner.

Strategic Plan Funding

- \$375,000 planning grant from EDA
- \$161,000 required local matching funds
- The CEO, ETCOG, and ETEDD boards have approved a local match plan splitting the local match requirement equally between the 14 ETCOG Counties, 31 EDCs, and ETCOG
- The shared match will be \$3,500 per entity, payable over 1-3 years

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION MEETINGS HAVE BEEN HELD WITH THE FOLLOWING COUNTIES:

✓ANDERSON ✓CAMP ✓CHEROKEE ✓GREGG ✓HARRISON ✓HENDERSON ✓MARION ✓PANOLA
✓RAINS ✓RUSK SMITH UPSHUR ✓VAN ZANDT ✓WOOD



Our Economic Development Team

We are here to assist with questions and to help facilitate the broadband strategic planning in your area. Don't hesitate to contact us at (903) 218-6400!



Chuck Vanderbilt
Community &
Economic
Development
Manager



Lynda David
Economic
Development
Specialist



Daniel Seguin
Regional Disaster
Economic Recovery
Coordinator

What's next for Broadband Planning?

- Complete mapping work for all 14 counties
- Complete project identification meetings with every county
- Assist each county with development of their own rating teams
- Identify ISP partners for each project identified
- Complete design, engineering, and budgets for each project identified for procurement of grants and other funding sources
- Identify methods of maintaining and updating map data for future efforts

Texas House Bill 5

We are following closely the introduced Texas House Bill 5 that can add thrust to our broadband projects here in East Texas. Governor Abbott and Representative Ashby have reiterated that regional broadband plans developed by ETCOG and other COGs across the state will be prioritized for funding as dollars are set aside within the state and federal dollars trickle down, which is excellent news for us all. We are hopeful that this legislation will bring more accurate mapping to Texas.



What is Broadband?

Broadband is defined as access to internet at or above a certain speed threshold. Currently, the federal government threshold definition is 25 Megabits Per Second Download Speeds and 3 Megabits Per Second Upload Speeds. In plain English, this threshold should result in speeds fast enough to watch Netflix in 2 rooms at the same time and hopefully support a zoom call running as well. As expressed in the Regional Broadband Project definition, our goal would (easily) exceed this minimum threshold on every one of our projects. Our broadband speed threshold must meet the minimum standards our businesses need to conduct business on the internet at a cost they can afford.

What is the vision of the East Texas Broadband Initiative?

ETCOG's objective is to complete a locally developed strategic plan for an affordable East Texas rural broadband infrastructure that will link our communities to a robust broadband network with input from businesses, county and city governments, education, and healthcare.

By the close of the year 2030, no less than 90 percent of our regions' businesses, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions will have access to marketplace equivalent of gigabit internet services as it exists in 2016, at an affordable cost within reach of the average small business within our region.

Will ETCOG become a Broadband service provider?

No. ETCOG has no interest in becoming a service provider. We intend to partner with existing service providers in the region to expand their service area to unserved and underserved businesses and telework customers. This coordination and collaboration are important, so we do not duplicate existing efforts but instead compliment them.

Is ETCOG Partnering with Existing Providers?

Absolutely! ETCOG has already formed partnerships with many of the providers in the region and is actively working to secure agreements with as many who are willing to participate.

How does my county get involved?

This project will maximize return for our entire fourteen county region if every county, EDC, and local businesses are involved in identifying areas of high need and helping us identify very specific broadband development projects to address the business communities' most urgent needs. So far, we have met with 8 of our 14 counties to help launch their project identification process. Much of those processes will include the Cities, EDCs, Chambers of Commerce, and local businesses. If you are any of those entities, please reach out to your County Judge or Commissioner to see how you can assist in the process, or contact ETCOG.

Does ETCOG have funding to construct the projects that are currently being identified?

With the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting the need for universal broadband access, there are many legislative bills at the State and Federal level, some that have already passed, which allocate billions of dollars to broadband expansion. Those dollars will be distributed to shovel-ready projects and plans through grant applications by service providers and local governments. ETCOG has secured the funding to develop up to 70 projects in East Texas to be Shovel Ready when these grant applications open for funding. With your help, we want to identify, design, engineer, and establish budgets for 42-70 broadband development projects. When the grant funding windows open, East Texas will be at the front to fund and build the identified projects. Without the funding to identify and develop shovel-ready broadband projects, we would miss the opportunity to secure these dollars.



My area already has broadband. Why should my county, city, or EDC participate?

We have broadband access in our urbanized centers. However, in our bedroom communities where businesses, families and employees, and students live, there is not sufficient or affordable access to broadband service our companies and communities need. Whether you are a business owner or not, one can see the value of working from home, pursuing education and healthcare services online, and participating in the international exchange of information from home. East Texas' Rural areas have missed multiple opportunities for growth and development since the internet began, primarily due to the lack of affordable broadband access. Suppose we can keep our people here in East Texas with the same access as those in the urban areas. In that case, we can stem the out-migration, attract new businesses, and attract more people who will bring more economic prosperity to our rural areas. This will have a ripple effect for our small cities who benefit from those who drive in from rural areas to shop, eat, and access healthcare and educational services.

What happens after the projects are shovel-ready? What are the next steps?

As pursue funding to construct these projects, we will be seeking grant opportunities, most of which require local match dollars. This will be the next big hurdle that you can help with. Whether you know of local philanthropists interested in assisting or your organization has local dollars set aside for broadband, we will need your help to begin identifying local matching funds to make these projects happen.

What is the timeline? When will I get broadband (internet)?

Many of the funding opportunities will become available within the next 2 or 3 months. We need your help to identify the highest priority broadband projects in East Texas so we can submit applications for project funding in the coming weeks. Skilled broadband project engineering firms are ready to go right now. With your help, we want to offer as many shovel-ready projects as possible when the funding window(s) open. We may start seeing construction begin as early as the end of this year if we can get these project applications complete and funded. This is the best-case scenario.

Will we get broadband out to all of our population?

Our efforts are intended to help push broadband forward in our region. There are many barriers to getting our rural areas covered 100% with broadband. However, this will be a considerable step towards broadband access for all as we fund projects that will help providers connect more and more of our rural businesses and communities.

