

California Broadband Council

March 13, 2020

Meeting Minutes

The California Broadband Council (CBC) met on Friday, March 13 at 9:10am at offices of the Rural county Representatives of California at 1215 K Street, Suite 1650, Sacramento CA 95814 and via teleconference (per [California Executive Order N-25-20](#)).

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Introduction of New Members

Council Chair Amy Tong:

- Welcomed Council members
- Welcomed in person and teleconference attendees.
- Introduced new Council Members Secretary of Food and Agriculture Karen Ross, State Librarian Designee Anne Neville-Bonilla, and Tribal Liaison Christina Snider, who were added to the Council per implementation of [AB 488 \(Chapter 426, Statutes of 2019\)](#).

Secretary Ross noted she was happy to be part of the Council, looking forward to working with everyone, and thrilled about the fairgrounds study because there is a strong need for broadband access for rural communities.

Director Neville-Bonilla also noted she is thrilled to be part of the Council and pointed out that approximately 1,300 libraries throughout the state provide public access and training for community members in California.

Ms. Snider indicated she is looking forward to working with the Council and how the state can better serve tribes, particularly with the census and social distancing.

Director Tong administered the Oath of Office to new Council members Ross and Neville-Bonilla. New Council member Snider, who participated via teleconference, will be sworn in at a future meeting.

Roll Call

A quorum was established for the meeting.

| Member | | Designee | Present | Absent |
|--|------------------|----------------------|---------|--------|
| California Department of Technology Director | Amy Tong | | X | |
| California Public Utilities Commission President | Marybel Batjer | Marhta Guzman-Aceves | X | |
| California Office of Emergency Services Director | Mark Ghilarducci | Budge Currier | X | |
| Superintendent of Public Instruction | Tony Thurmond | Jerry Winkler | X | |

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|--|---------------------|----------------------|-----|---|
| Department of General Services Director | Daniel Kim | Evan Speer | X | |
| California State Transportation Agency Secretary | David Kim | Lori Pepper | X | |
| California Emerging Technologies Fund President | Sunne Wright McPeak | | X | |
| California Department of Food and Agriculture | Karen Ross | | X | |
| State Librarian | Greg Lucas | Anne Neville-Bonilla | X | |
| Governor's Tribal Liaison | Christine Snider | | X* | |
| Member of the Senate | Ben Hueso | Sarah Smith | | X |
| Member of the Assembly | Mike Gipson | Dr. Angelo Williams | X** | |

*Ms. Snider attended via teleconference.

**Dr. Williams arrived at 10:00am.

Agenda Item 2 – CalTrans New Contacts

Chair Tong pointed out that the meeting was a working session and focused on annual strategy, planning, and obtaining input of constituents to set the course of focus for 2020.

Designee Pepper introduced CalTrans Interim Broadband Manager Monica Kress-Wooster, who provided an overview of CalTrans Broadband staff changes since October. New staff include:

- Mike Keever as Deputy of Project Delivery.
- Cory Binns as Deputy of Maintenance and Operations.
- Monica Kress-Wooster as Interim Broadband Manager.
- A Broadband Coordinator to be hired.

Ms. Kress-Wooster noted the new staff changes are an opportunity to reset perspectives, collaborate more CalTrans work with broadband efforts, and keep momentum going.

Ms. Kress-Wooster also noted:

- In January CalTrans had a successful meeting with industry representatives and California Emergency Technology Fund leaders where topics included facilitating:
 - Standalone projects including improving the clarity of permitting policies and processes and developing a template for Complex Utility Partnership Agreements (CUPA).
 - Partnership Projects to improve website information such as maps, contacts, and guidance, and updating conduit and construction methods' standard plans and specifications.

- A proactive approach with CalTrans' internal team.
- Since being Interim Broadband Manager, she has realized some policies are outdated, she is looking into how to modernize them, and is taking a proactive approach to doing so.

Ms. McPeak complimented Ms. Kress-Wooster and Ms. Pepper for ensuring continuity in state transportation broadband efforts, the experienced and committed leadership Ms. Kress-Wooster brings, and noted the internet service providers are encouraged by this.

Ms. Guzman-Aceves asked if the transportation representatives have thought about open access requirements.

Ms. Kress-Wooster replied that the purpose of the encroachment process is to understand impacts and that the more we can synergize projects, the better we will all be.

Agenda Item 3 – 2020 Strategy and Planning

Ms. Tong and Ms. Guzman-Aceves lead the Council members in a discussion about the Council's strategy and planning for 2020. They pointed out that the Governor's Proposed 2020-21 Budget has a Broadband for All component that includes:

- Mapping state connectivity.
- Investing new resources to improve school connectivity.
- Optimizing the use of existing resources.
- Prioritizing connectivity across executive actions and policies.

They noted the Council members should leverage their collective expertise to implement and champion the administration's broadband policies.

Mr. Currier provided an update about the California Office of Emergency Service's (CalOES) internal focus to link its outward facing 911 system, which is currently in the process of transferring its systems with a goal of fiber connectivity into the 438 public access safety points in the state. The new system will be up and running at least six months before it goes live and transfers to being operational. CalOES is taking a holistic approach and willing to share information that does not compromise the state's cybersecurity efforts with other state agencies.

Secretary Ross noted that fairgrounds are a high priority because they are increasingly being used for evacuation centers and longer than normally used for such purposes. Ms. Ross also noted that precision agriculture to improve production and lessen environmental footprints was her second highest priority.

Mr. Currier noted that CalOES is monitoring the availability of networks to leverage all carriers and has already reached out to carriers about the impact of telework on services. CalOES wants to make sure the entire infrastructure works as we bring more users to the systems.

Ms. Guzman-Aceves provided high level overviews of state and federal broadband funding opportunities.

California Public Utilities Commission Communications Division Director Rob Osborn discussed federal funding opportunities in relation to CalOES efforts, battery backups, fairgrounds, high

cost fund areas, and how California could better use federal funding opportunities, including the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and how that fund works.

Ms. McPeak asked questions about obtaining such funding in a proactive manner.

- What is the outreach to tribes?
- Are states able to be matchmakers?
- Are there possibilities for alternative models to be brought in?

Mr. Osborn replied:

- There is dedicated staff for tribes.
- States can be matchmakers.
- They are looking at possible ideas for consortia or multiple parties.

Mr. Winkler discussed the Broadband for All monies earmarked for education in the Governor's Proposed 2020-21 Budget and Connect America funds. He noted that the California Department of Education is working with the Federal Communications Commission to push connectivity off school campuses and to students. He also pointed out that some districts are more prepared for distance learning than others.

Ms. McPeak pointed out that parents can access affordable broadband offers and acknowledged Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond for reaching out to school districts to inform them that such offers exist.

Mr. Winkler pointed out that we need to keep libraries involved.

Ms. Neville-Bonilla noted that the COVID-19 virus made for a fluid situation. Many libraries are open and some are closed. Libraries are part of local governments. Most libraries offer free WiFi. Many have WiFi device lending programs. Sonoma offers WiFi hot spot. AT&T has stopped data caps during the COVID-19 crisis.

Ms. McPeak noted only 30% of those eligible for affordable offers are aware of them and of those, half say they don't trust providers.

Mr. Speer highlighted Department of General Services priorities including:

- Utilizing state contracts to leverage the state's purchasing power.
- Supporting strategic corridor efforts.
- Expanding the Surplus Equipment Program and proposing and championing legislation to be able to do so.

Dr. Williams noted that California's diverse populations, and Assembly Member's Gipson's constituents, face many challenges. He was pleased to hear about the Surplus Equipment Program and Member Gipson is aware of how important it is to close the digital divide because broadband is a utility and a vital resource for education and daily life.

Ms. Pepper noted that the COVID-19 virus highlights the urgency to expand broadband along highway systems. She thanked Council partners including its members and the audience for their continued vigilance trying to be creative and innovative in our thinking. The California Transportation Agency and its departments are working through logistics and internal processes to prioritize efforts and welcome ideas.

Ms. Neville-Bonilla discussed library connectivity and the State Librarian's efforts to connect all libraries to high capacity broadband. 156 of 186 jurisdictions are connected. Different federal, state, and local jurisdictional deadlines continue to be a challenge.

Chair Tong asked members to share their top priorities.

Ms. Neville-Bonilla

- Coordinating funding opportunities.
- Bringing federal money to the state.

Ms. Pepper

- Determining how to utilize existing projects to expand access to broadband for unserved and underserved populations.
- Prioritizing corridors, both existing and future.
- Revamping websites to make them more user friendly, ensure information helps internet service providers, and helps others get information out.

Ms. Ross

- A unified command group.
- Getting federal funding to the state.
- Coordinating funding as a catalyst to open doors to possibilities including new funding models and engaging the Governor's Office of Economic Development, including the iBank.

Dr. Williams

- The Council's expertise because the Legislature depends on the expertise and advice of others.
- Surplus devices.
- Funding for outreach because there is a lack of outreach about low income services and the state needs the right appeal and to consider its urban and rural constituencies.

Ms. Guzman-Aceves

- Legislative help.
- Programs should focus on business models, needs.
- Programs should have the right goals.
- Partnerships are important because we know a lot about what the need is but need more coordination to see where the shared gaps are.

Ms. McPeak

- Support the administration's Broadband for All efforts and any associated legislation.

Mr. Speer

- Funding.
- Incorporate environmental benefits.
- Help with legislation for the Surplus Equipment Program.

Mr. Currier

- We need a one stop shop for funding sources to be able to identify what's available and how to navigate through the system (here's how you qualify).

- Vision on what a build out looks like – a holistic view that doesn't miss components.

Mr. Winkler

- Focus on digital equity, not just for students but for all
- There are immediate needs to get people on line.

Via motions, the Council decided to:

1. Make a formal request of providers to offer free Internet services until the end of April due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Create a task force to identify all funding sources, including state and federal funding resources, to be leveraged for Broadband for All efforts.
3. Create a task force to focus on digital equity prioritizing coordinated outreach efforts for education and awareness of programs and initiatives to unserved and underserved populations and make the existing surplus equipment task force a subcommittee of this task force.
4. Create a task force to identify and address broadband policies and programs that require legislation.

Agenda Item 4 – Guest Speakers Susan Strachan and David Espinoza presented their California State University, Chico Geographical Information Center Study Capabilities Assessment of Public Safety Broadband Infrastructure at Fairgrounds Serving as Evacuations Centers study.

Ms. Strachan and Mr. Espinoza presented an overview of their study.

Agenda Item 5 – Public Comment

Robert Tse of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) commented:

- With regards to fairgrounds, go for it. It needs to be done.
- With regards to tribes, there are other resources, including the Department of Interior Feasibility Grants for tribes will award 50,000 grants and applications are due May 8.
- Mapping is a big priority.
- The USDA has a library program with administers \$50,000-\$1,000,000 of grant funding and has applications due April 10.
- The United States Department of Education is having a digital equity summit on June 18-19 at UC Davis.

California State Food and Agricultural Board Member Joy Sterling noted that if the current situation [COVID-19] evolves, fairgrounds will be needed and they will need open access connectivity. Funding questions will come up during the budget process and there is an urgent need.

California Cable & Telecommunications Association President Carolyn McIntyre noted that with regards to the Keep Americans Connected Pledge, the major cable providers committed to not cancelling service, to waive late fees, and to open Wi-Fi hot spots to all Americans during this crisis.

CSU Chico, Geographic Information Center representative Davis Espinoza noted he was encouraged to see so many state agencies working together.

The meeting adjourned at 11:25am.