



Georgia Broadband Plan



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Introduction



Brian P. Kemp
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STATE OF GEORGIA
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As our state has transitioned to a digital economy, many areas – mostly rural – have been left behind. Broadband has become essential to business, education, healthcare, agriculture, and quality of life, yet an estimated 1.6 million Georgians currently lack access to vital high-speed internet service. As I outlined in my plan, [A New Day for Rural Georgia](#), I am committed to ensuring we improve access to healthcare, enhance educational outcomes, support small businesses, and foster economic growth. Access to broadband is fundamental to these goals.

Through 2018 legislation, we launched the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative. The purpose of the Initiative is simple: facilitate deployment of essential broadband services – specifically in currently unserved areas – so that all Georgians can have access to quality healthcare, enhanced educational resources, essential small business resources, and an attractive quality of life. Each of these elements is necessary to realize economic growth, which has been lacking in some rural parts of our state.

I am pleased to share the state's first Broadband Plan. This plan highlights significant coordination and progress over a relatively short period of time. As you will see in the following pages, the collective efforts have initially focused on building a framework outlined in legislation. Moving forward, we will continue to hone our focus to encourage the private sector to help us address key objectives and priorities.

I appreciate the investment that private providers, state agencies, and local officials have contributed to date. With an engaged group of experienced providers, along with local communities and our federal partners – such as USDA and the ReConnect Program – the State of Georgia is well positioned to address the broadband need.

Thank you for your interest in and continued support of the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Kemp".

Brian P. Kemp

Purpose of the State Broadband Plan

The State Broadband Plan highlights the objectives and activities of the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative. The purpose of the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative is to coordinate efforts to deploy high-speed broadband connectivity so that all Georgians have access to healthcare, education, economic growth and expansion, and other quality of life essentials.

An estimated 1.6 million Georgians lack access to high-speed internet service, which is widely acknowledged to be a significant barrier to economic growth. To address this issue, legislation was passed in 2018 to promote broadband deployment in areas not currently served at a minimum broadband speed of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload (25/3). The Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative (GBDI) was launched as a result of this legislation, and efforts to date have primarily focused on developing the framework outlined in the following pages.

Under the leadership of an Executive Director, GBDI is coordinating activities among 5 state agencies (Department of Community Affairs, Department of Transportation, Department of Economic Development, Georgia Technology Authority, and State Properties Commission). Additionally, a Stakeholder Advisory Council consisting of representation from private telecom and cable providers, local government, and electricity cooperatives are actively engaged to ensure proposed solutions are useful and practical.

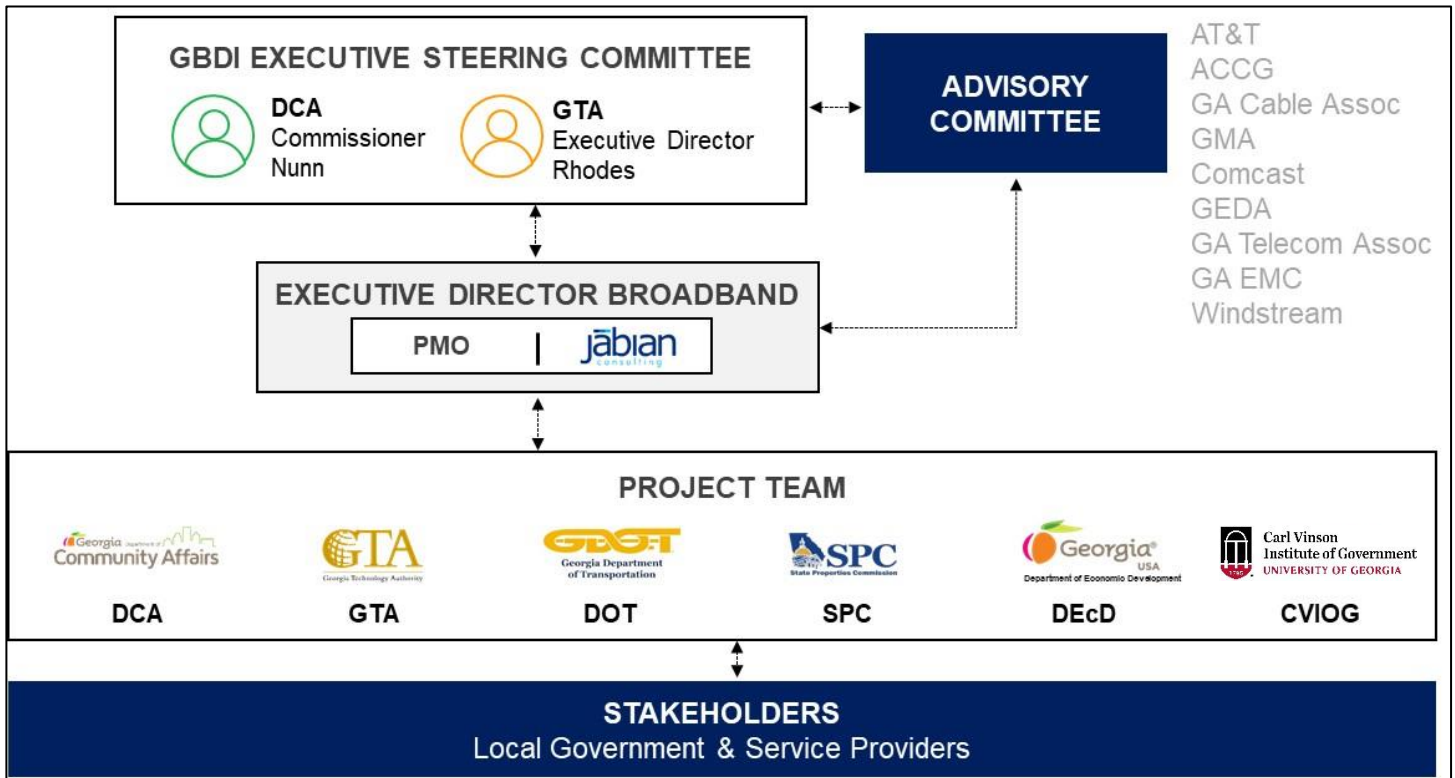
This Broadband Plan explains the detailed framework development efforts underway, including enhanced mapping of unserved areas, local broadband planning, and development of a grant program framework. This plan also supports broadband providers who are actively pursuing grant and loan funding through the US Department of Agriculture's ReConnect Program.

Executive Summary

The basic framework of the Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative is rooted in Senate Bill 402, which was enacted in 2018. A progress report of GBDI activity is highlighted in the following pages. To ensure progress towards the ultimate objective of serving unserved Georgians, this Broadband Plan will be revised and honed going forward to highlight state objectives and priorities. A primary focus of the State Broadband Plan is to identify, evaluate and recommend options which can be implemented by governments and providers.

Through the leadership of an Executive Director, GBDI is coordinating activity among 5 state agencies to implement 13 projects directed by legislation. The governance structure, which includes oversight from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), is designed to engage key stakeholders and leverage their expertise while balancing a variety of interests. This offers stakeholders a voice in the process and a channel to provide feedback on the methods, processes, and regulations intended to improve broadband services in rural Georgia.

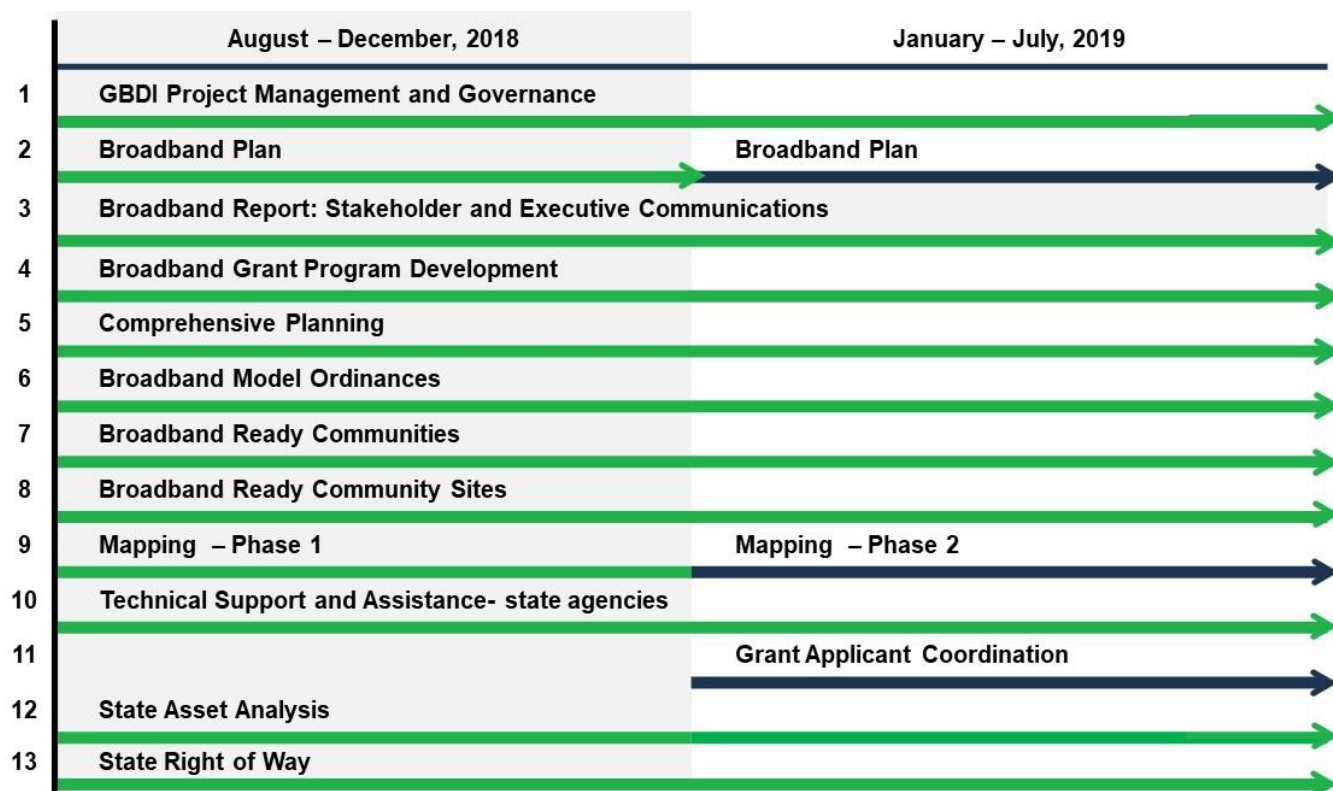
Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative Governance Framework



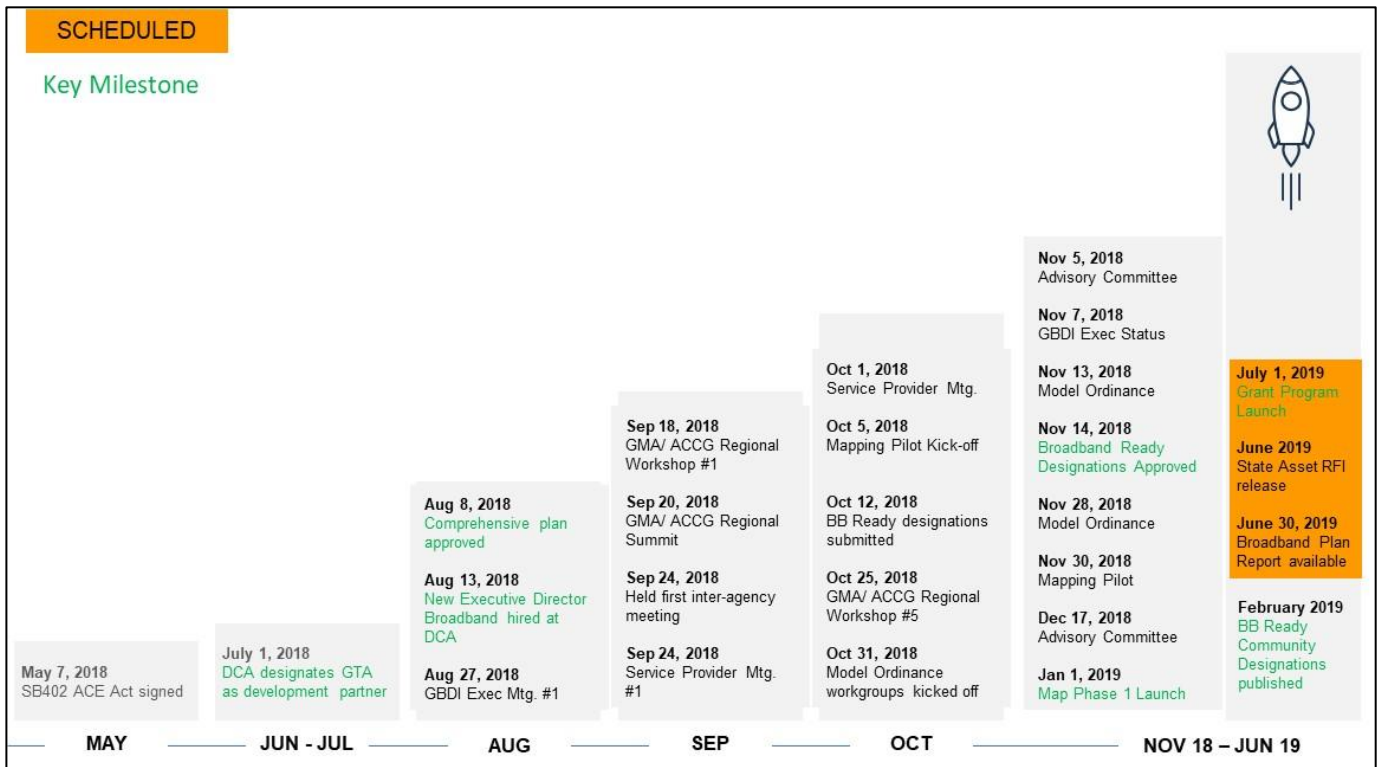
In addition to engaging key stakeholders and state agency partners, the GBDI team has actively engaged with broadband offices in other states, federal agencies (including US Department of Agriculture, Federal Communications Commission, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Appalachian Regional Commission), as well as other subject matter experts.

To achieve GBDI project objectives, resources and responsibilities have been aligned with each of 13 projects. These projects and their timelines are:

Projects and Timelines



Milestones and Progress



Summary of Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative to Date

- Established the five-agency coordination for framework and governance
- Created a dedicated team across state agencies with a new Executive Director of Broadband at the Department of Community Affairs
- Assigned roles, responsibilities, and deadlines for implementation of the legislation
- Initiated the stakeholder Advisory Committee
- Engaged 44 retail broadband providers in the mapping project
- Established stakeholder working groups and developed the Model Ordinance and Mapping
- Designated the mapping program to GTA by DCA
- Contracted the mapping services with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG)
- Completed the FCC analysis and developed a two-phase mapping strategy and project plan
- Completed and launched the Phase 1 mapping for a January 2019 deadline (<https://broadband.georgia.gov/>)
- Developed the Phase 2 statewide mapping for address-level accuracy and requirements
- Implemented the Phase 2 broadband mapping pilot to meet requirements
- Completed the Comprehensive Plan requirement
- Facilitated approval for the Broadband Ready Communities and Sites programs by the DCA Board
- Began developing the grant program for spring review with DCA Board
- Conducted briefings for GMA/ACCG, providers, and EMCs

Broadband Data Collection and Mapping Update

DCA and the GTA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on July 1, 2018. This designated GTA as DCA's authorized agent to gather and/or create the broadband data and maps required to satisfy the mapping requirements of the legislation. This mapping and analysis will show where broadband services are unavailable in Georgia and clarify where broadband services might be funded through a grant program.

GTA contracted UGA's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG) to execute a broadband mapping strategy which will support the state's goals. GTA has contributed resources to assist CVIOG with the mapping plan, which involved both publication of an initial map (Phase I) based entirely on FCC data and a subsequent enhanced mapping program (Phase II) that launched with a three-county pilot.

Phase I is complete and consisted of analysis of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Form 477 data, which is submitted by providers. This data has been used to compile the Phase I broadband maps. Analysis of 2017 FCC data indicates 45,920 "unserved" census blocks in Georgia. These census blocks are presumed to be 100% unserved, as the FCC methodology considers a census block "served" if a single location within the geography has broadband access. There are 347,969 individual locations in the "unserved" census blocks.

Legislation stipulates that GBDI will focus on "unserved" areas (based on broadband speed of 25/3). Given the widely-recognized inaccuracies of the FCC methodology, Phase II mapping and analysis is anticipated to identify additional locations that are not captured in FCC data.

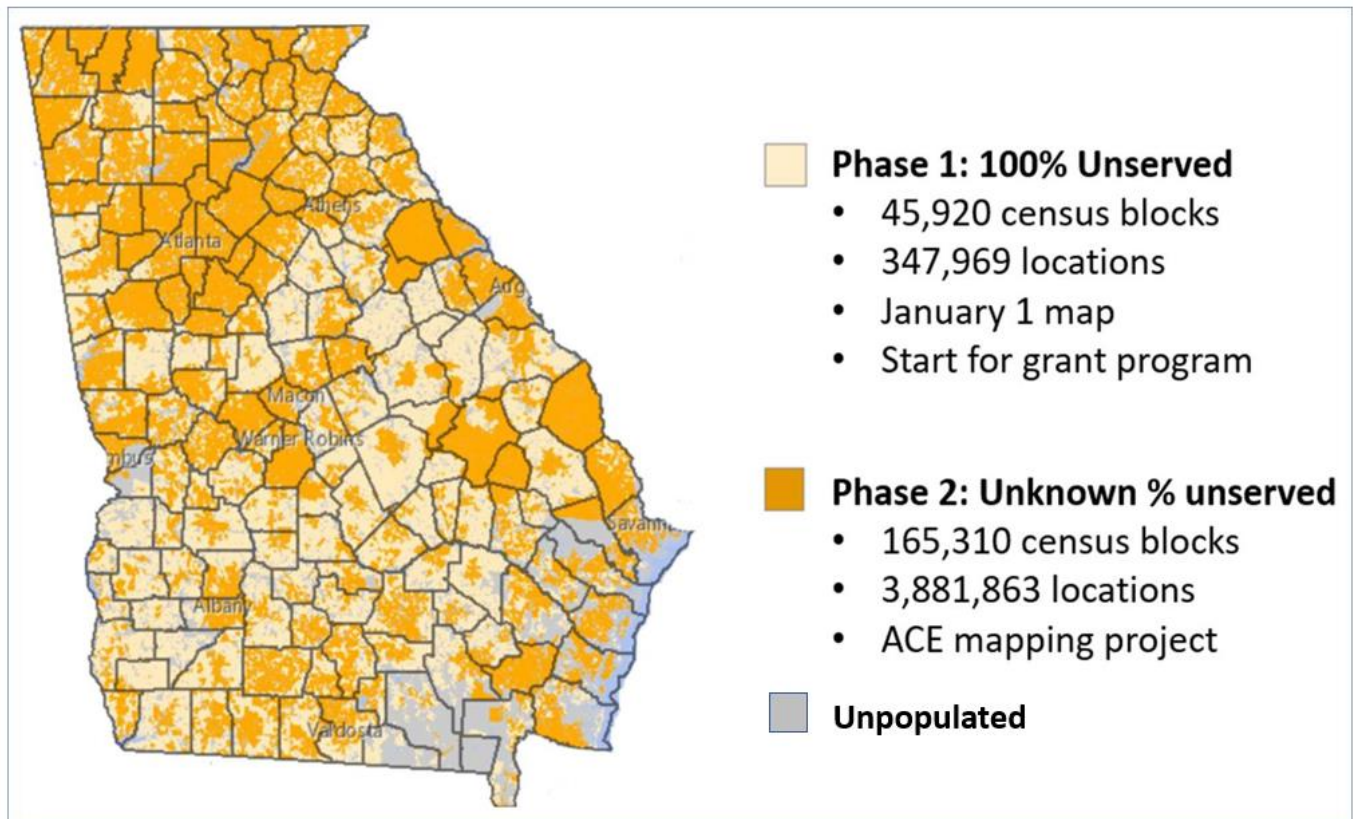
Phase II, which is underway, will evaluate each of Georgia's 165,310 census blocks and an estimated 3,831,863 locations. To accomplish this objective, it is necessary to develop a Master Address File (which currently does not exist) by county. This data will then be shared with all existing providers, who are expected to share – under strict trade secret protection – the precise data about which locations they currently serve.

Given the enormity of Phase II task, a pilot program was launched in September 2018 focused on 3 counties for which existing Master Address File data was available. Providers in Elbert, Lumpkin, and Tift Counties were provided location-level address data and requested to respond with service availability data. This proved to be an excellent learning process, and provider feedback enabled some improvements in the process. The three-county pilot was completed in March 2019, and analysis suggests the process is extremely useful.

To compile a comprehensive Master Address File by county, GBDI is requesting and collecting address data from local governments, property appraisers, e911 coordinators, and power companies. The address data will be geocoded for map address accuracy. To date, the response from providers, local governments, and EMCs to assist in this collection and mapping effort has been positive and invaluable. However, this process will take time, and interim alternatives – such as purchasing data that is less accurate and reliable – are also being considered.

The Master Address File will ultimately be integrated with broadband availability data from broadband service providers. Phase II mapping will produce address-level data to identify unserved census blocks and locations across the state.

Mapping Project: Phase 1 (published January 1, 2019) and Phase 2

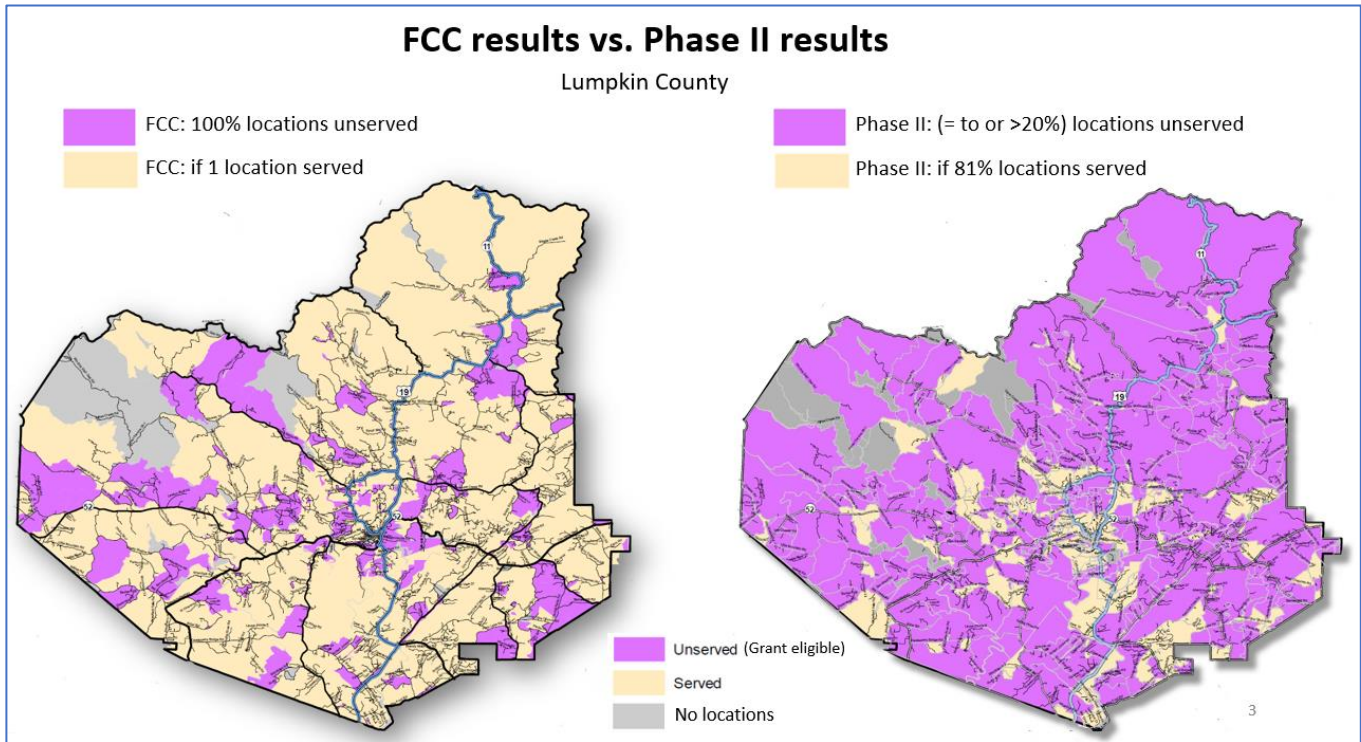


To ensure participation by the retail service providers in the development of state-wide mapping, briefings were held with 44 broadband providers. To date, provider participation has been exceptional.

Participating Retail Broadband Providers

Company	Company	Company
Alma Telcom (ATC)	ComSouth	Northland
ATT	Cox	Pembroke Pines
Brantley Tel	Dalton Utilities	Pineland Tel
Bulldog Cable, Pinpoint Communications	Darien Com	Plant Tel
Bulloch Tel	ETC Com, Elijah Tel	Planters Tel
CenturyLink	Fairpoint, GTC Consolidated	Progressive Rural
Charter	Flint Cable (Public Service Tel)	Ringold Tel
Chickamauga Tel	Frontier Com	TDS Tel
Citizens	Glenwood Tel-GTC	Trenton Tel
City Cairo-Thomasville	Hargray	Truvista
City Camilla	Hart Tel-HTC	Waverly Hall Tel-Wavecom
City Monroe	Kings Bay	Wilkes Tel-Relyant com
city of Elberton ElbertonNet	Mediacom	Windstream
City Thomasville	Mediastream: Vyve Broadband	WOW (formerly Knology)
Comcast	N. Ga Net NGN	

Phase I FCC Mapping vs Phase 2 Enhanced Mapping



Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative Grant Program Update

DCA has supported GBDI in its development of a grant program framework. It is widely recognized that part of the rural broadband dilemma stems from the fact that less densely populated areas do not currently offer a strong business case for broadband providers. The goal of the proposed grant program is simple: to provide a mechanism to tweak the economics for providers and to encourage them to expand 25/3 broadband service to unserved areas, should public funding be made available. In addition to leveraging DCA's knowledge and experience, the GBDI team has reviewed broadband grant programs in Tennessee, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New York.

The grant program is being designed to leverage Phase I, then Phase II, maps to determine areas of eligibility and greatest need. With communities and providers in mind, the goal is a streamlined process that provides appropriate incentives to leverage private investment, while mitigating risks and avoiding over-buildout. Community partnership will be a central component, based on constitutional limitations of the state's Gratuities Clause.

Key design components currently being developed and defined are requirements for pre-application; grant applications; eligible activities; requirements for eligible providers; broadband service and performance requirements; and grant scoring elements.

Broadband Comprehensive Planning

A fundamental local government responsibility is planning. Since 1989, each community has been required to submit a comprehensive plan to the state every 5 years. Comprehensive plans encourage community vision and guide growth, including strategies related to community character and quality of life, land use and property rights, and economic development. Per legislation, DCA planning rules were amended to require a broadband element in each community's comprehensive plan. This requirement is intended to ensure that communities consider broadband service and community needs, and that they adopt strategies to promote broadband in their community. DCA has and will continue to communicate this new requirement through its 12 Regional Commission partners, Community Planning Institutes, and other regular interactions with local communities across the state.

Broadband Model Ordinance

To assist local governments with the process of developing a useful local ordinance to encourage broadband investment and expansion, GBDI worked in collaboration with local governments and providers to develop a model ordinance. The purpose of the model ordinance is to demonstrate that the local government has taken steps to reduce obstacles to broadband deployment. The model ordinance is available on the GBDI website ([Model Ordinance](#)) and has already been adopted by several communities.

Broadband Ready Designations: Communities and Sites

A local government that has amended their comprehensive plan to meet DCA requirements and have adopted a model ordinance (DCA version or a version approved by DCA) is eligible to apply for a Broadband Ready Community or Broadband Ready Community Site designation. The purpose of broadband ready designations for communities and sites is to show a local unit of government has taken steps to reduce obstacles to broadband infrastructure investment. The Broadband Ready Community designation information has been posted on DCA's website ([Designations](#)).

Technical Support and Advisory Services

In addition to the coordinating among state agencies and broadband providers, GBDI is working closely with USDA and other federal entities to access all available resources to aid unserved Georgians. In December 2018, USDA announced its ReConnect Program, with an initial \$600 million in grant and loan funds for rural broadband. USDA's Jannine Miller presented to the Stakeholder Advisory Council about this program, and GBDI has worked with several active deployment projects to encourage and facilitate USDA funding applications.

In April, Governor Brian Kemp sent a letter to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue reiterating the state's commitment to rural broadband and to ensure the state will do all that we are able to facilitate investment in serving the unserved. This letter of support highlights 3 important steps – including the publication of this Broadband Plan – which enable Georgia applicants to claim 20 scoring points on the USDA application.

Additionally, the GBDI team, leveraging GTA's subject matter expertise, is monitoring technological advances that may be eventually factor into the rural broadband equation.

Analysis of State Assets for Broadband

GTA is assisting the State Properties Commission (SPC) in conducting an analysis of state assets that might be used to expand broadband availability in unserved areas. Leveraging GTA's resources and relationships, combined with SPC's consolidated database of real property assets, this assessment is designed to identify potential property options, essential requirements, and recommendations for potential implementation.

Currently, a Request for Information is under development that might inform next steps in state property analysis. The purpose of the RFI is to develop market insight such as supply and demand related to potential broadband deployment using state properties (e.g., land and buildings). The assessment will examine both wired and wireless deployment alternatives and should be complete by December 2019.

Broadband on State Rights-of-Way

GDOT currently has in place a permitting process to allow the installation of fiber, broadband, wireless small cell, and other telecommunications infrastructure on non-limited access state rights-of-way. The permitting process is outlined in the Department's Utility Accommodation Policy and Standards Manual which can be found at http://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/utilities/Documents/2016_UAM.pdf

GDOT is currently pursuing a Public Private Partnership project to allow the installation of broadband infrastructure on limited access interstate rights-of-way. Limited information is currently available on this project as it is under active procurement. Publicly available information on this project is posted at <http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Innovative/P3>.

State Broadband Plan

In addition to progressing on the initiatives highlighted in this Broadband Plan, GBDI aims to refine this document to highlight State priorities such as access to quality healthcare, enhanced educational capabilities, economic development and growth of small business, and basic quality of life issues that require high-speed internet access.

Investments in Unserved Areas

The goal of the project is to identify, evaluate and recommend investment options which can be implemented by governments and providers. The test of any recommendation is whether its results will have a measurable impact on the number of unserved locations that can become served.

Broadband infrastructure investment decisions are business-case based. They must provide a sustainable and positive ROI for providers to expand into unserved areas. The broadband planning team will partner with local governments and provider partners on a plan to address unserved areas. Recommended strategies or policies must either lower broadband investment costs or provide financial assistance to broadband in unserved areas so that they can be served and become economically self-sustaining. While the project team implements the initial broadband plan set forth in the legislation, it is also listening to

stakeholder and provider input. The team will evaluate a wide range of opportunities to promote increased broadband infrastructure investment throughout rural Georgia.

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships (P3) could play a critical role in bringing sufficient broadband to unserved areas. The legislation currently includes the use of P3 models on GDOT Interstate rights-of-way along Georgia interstates. These partnerships could take a variety of forms and could include coapplying for funding, working with providers to create carrier neutral locations and facilities, providing greater access to rights-of-way, providing incentives to providers to lower costs, or creating efficiencies to accelerate broadband deployment. There are examples in other states where governments and providers have partnered to increase broadband availability, and they will also be evaluated.

Increased Access to Funding

The capital cost to provide broadband services to all unserved areas in Georgia is estimated at over one billion dollars. The deployment of broadband to unserved areas statewide will require significant access to funding. While a statewide grant program will make an impact to some unserved areas, widescale change could require a broad spectrum of funding incentives and mechanisms.

Contact Information

For any questions or comments, please contact the Department of Community Affairs.

Department of Community Affairs

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