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Broadband Investments Will Overcome Logistical, Supply Challenges

In this first issue of 2022, **BROADBAND COMMUNITIES** looks ahead to how the industry will adapt to changes and challenges and pursue opportunities, especially given new funding sources.

Supply chain woes, workforce shortages, and logistical challenges slowed the pace of builds in recent months, but consumer demand will drive strong broadband investments in 2022 – particularly in fiber-to-the-home networks.

Jeff Heynen, vice president of broadband access and home networking for the Dell’Oro Group, said in a report that many telcos converted copper networks to fiber in 2020 and 2021. “This trend will accelerate in 2022, in particular, because of the investments made this year in new optical line terminal ports,” he said. “With the sustained influx of new capital from both governments and private equity, 2022 spending should be equally strong.”

PUBLIC, PRIVATE FUNDS

Service providers and communities will leverage public and private funding for new broadband projects. President Biden’s \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which includes \$65 billion for broadband, will be a crucial source. In addition to expanding broadband reach, the bill requires funding applicants to offer low-cost plans, providing educational and job creation opportunities.

Heynen acknowledged that government funding is important, but hasn’t “pushed private investment to the sidelines.” As part of the IIJA,

Congress allocated nearly \$42.5 billion for the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program to fund last-mile broadband projects. The National Telecommunications Industry Association (NTIA) will administer the program. Several articles in this issue explain expected project impacts.

Some impacts from government funding are already obvious. Working with rural broadband provider partners, New York state’s Southern Tier 8 Regional Board applied for a \$22 million NTIA grant, which it’s using to expand internet access in underserved areas (see p. 74). Similarly, government funding is expanding broadband to hard-to-reach parts of Wyoming (p. 78).

States also are leveraging American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds: up to \$360 billion is allocated for broadband. Pew Charitable Trusts said fund allotments range from \$5 million in Hawaii to \$3.77 billion in California. State and local government entities will support mapping, public space connectivity, and health care connectivity projects.

Many challenges remain, but providers agree expanding broadband will be a top priority in 2022 and beyond. Are you ready? ❖

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