

## Hawaii Seeks 1 Gbps Statewide Broadband Access by 2018

Brian Heaton | September 20, 2011



With its picturesque beaches and natural beauty, Hawaii has traditionally been a popular vacation spot. But state officials are hoping the islands will also be known as a broadband paradise in the next few years, as a plan is developed to roll out statewide 1 Gbps high-speed Internet access by 2018.

The Hawaii Broadband Initiative, released by Hawaii Gov. Neil Abercrombie's office last month, directs state agencies to work with stakeholders to make affordable 1 Gbps broadband connectivity available to underserved and rural communities, businesses and public institutions throughout the state.

Funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is already being used to eventually provide the gigabit connectivity at public schools, libraries and other buildings. But the initiative aims to expand that high-speed connectivity to help increase innovation, improve Hawaii's economy and spur job creation.

The Hawaii Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA) and the Department of Business Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) are the key agencies that will spearhead the project.

But a number of other agencies and individuals will be involved, including [Sonny Bhagowalia](#), Hawaii's new CIO. Bhagowalia said his role in the Hawaii Broadband Initiative is to work with DCCA and DBEDT to provide insight and guidance on how the program is established.

"My job is to work with these folks and provide a framework from which this broadband program can be delivered and some architectural competence that could help out to make sure there is a method to the madness," Bhagowalia explained.

The High Technology Development Corp. (HTDC), a technology-based economic development group for Hawaii, will have also have a large role in laying the groundwork for high-speed broadband access across the state.

According to Yuka Nagashima, executive director and CEO of HTDC, her agency's tasks will center on supporting the two lead agencies to identify the needs of broadband providers, the demands of customers, and discovering what state legislation needs to happen to make statewide 1 Gbps broadband speeds a reality.

Ultimately she said the HTDC would serve as a communications bridge between state government and the private sector on the project.

## Regulatory Hurdles

On the surface, funding for such a lengthy and technical undertaking would seem to be one of the project's top challenges. Nagashima didn't see it that way, however.

"I think investment is important, but it's our approach that is going to be the most important," she said. "Government entities were established for a long period of time and the groupings of how we were are not in-line with how the government works best."

To illustrate her point, Nagashima said that permitting codes are developed by each of the local regions in Hawaii. Those codes aren't necessarily consistent for broadband providers, however. For example, if those providers said they wanted to lay a cable from one county to another, it likely couldn't happen expediently. Various policy and regulatory hurdles need to be overcome to make it possible.

Bhagowalia agreed. He said in meetings with Internet service providers and government personnel the conversations immediately focus on regulatory issues.

"There are some arcane rules we'll have to look at in some areas," Bhagowalia said. "In one of the meetings, it was discussed that sometimes a telephone pole is owned by six entities, so you need six permissions to put up a little antenna."

The state also has its own requirements for broadband because certain areas require higher speeds, he added. So if broadband is already available in an area, discussions need to happen about providing ways within the Broadband Initiative to upgrade it.

## Funding Sources and Geography

It's uncertain what the ultimate cost for a project of this magnitude might be. Nagashima said that it didn't make sense to throw out a cost estimate yet, because Hawaii still needs to identify the obstacles providers would face to build-out to certain areas.

"We're going to look for all sources available for funding, but it's not necessarily a cash matter," Nagashima explained.

"If it's the case to incentivize the providers to do something they weren't planning to do because our current regulatory framework doesn't meet with their business model, it could be something as simple as moving a regulatory requirement or rethinking the requirement to exempt them for a certain task or telecommunications project," she added. "That's really important for us to investigate."

Being an island state, geographic and cultural concerns are also a concern, which makes the delivery of 1 Gbps broadband a little more challenging.

As a result, Bhagowalia said that a "mixed media" delivery of broadband is likely. While cable will be an option, he envisioned a suite of broadband services, including cable and wireless, particularly when it comes to areas that are sacred lands or rural sites where laying cable wouldn't be practical.

"The benefits outweigh the risks, as we need our rural areas to be in the Information Age," he maintained. "Interaction with government, services, disaster recovery, messaging — those [are the] benefits we see in the future. The world is going digital and we need to be on par with it. Since we are one or two decades behind, we have to catch up quickly."

## Realistic Expectations

Seven years may not seem like a long time, particularly where a government project is concerned. In addition, given that technology advancement typically works in much shorter time frames, it could be fair to wonder if 1 Gbps speed may not be adequate by the end of the decade.

Nagashima felt, however, that both the time frame and speed were reasonable goals and said the important thing was to set the goal and "start paddling."

"In terms of 2018, who knows if 1 Gbps is the right number to target," she said. "But for us to get started, we needed a clear goal that we need to communicate to everyone in the community. Once we set the goal, it's almost irrelevant what the goal is once we start growing together."

Bhagowalia said the seven-year window is realistic. But he cautioned that in order to meet the 2018 deadline, a structure has to be introduced at the outset, which is what he is trying to do.

“It’s doable, which is why we’re trying to bring some discipline into the process,” he explained. “Program management, the concept of governance, the concept of dashboards to show progress, leading and lagging indicators — these are the things we need to put together. We don’t want the Wild West and people doing their own thing.”

<http://www.govtech.com/policy-management/Hawaii-Seeks-1-Gbps-Broadband-Access.html>