

MAIN STREET MONTANA PROJECT

A BUSINESS PLAN *For Montana by Montanans*

Interconnectivity and Telecommunications KIN Meeting Minutes

July 9, 2015

10:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Helena, Montana

Co-Chairs:

Bill Squires, Blackfoot Telecommunications Group

Rob Ferris, Vision Net

KIN Members Present:

Chris Warden, Washington Companies, Missoula

Paul DeWolfe, Access Consulting, Missoula (via video conference)

Darryl Rensmon, Morrison-Maierle, Helena

Sarah Walsh, PayneWest Insurance, Helena

Thelma McClosky Armstrong, Billings Clinic, Billings (via video conference)

Paul Roble, Stockman Bank, Miles City (via audio bridge)

Judy Preston, Ronan Telephone

Mike Kilgore, Nemont Telephone Cooperative

Staff/Public:

Jim Molloy, Governor's Office

Michaela Wolfinger, Montana Department of Commerce

Mary Craige, Department of Commerce

Jennie Stapp, State Library

Casey Shreiner, Department of Labor

Minutes:

KIN members were previously provided minutes of the April 29, 2015 meeting, and the co-chairs requested that any additions or corrections be submitted after review.

PRESENTATIONS:

Dennis Parman, Deputy Director, Office of Public Instruction: The KIN received a presentation from Deputy Director Parman regarding the state of broadband connectivity in public schools and future educational needs. Items highlighted by Mr. Parman were:

- Mr. Parman chairs the Montana Digital Academy and offered comments on that program
- K-12 schools currently use a “relatively small broadband footprint” but he expects needs to continue to grow in the future as more electronic instruction materials become available, teachers adopt digital learning techniques, and equipment (iPads, etc.) become more readily available to students.

- Connectivity was sufficient this past spring in all but 4 of the approximately 829 schools for standardized testing.
- Education Super-Highway organization (ESH) is proposing that schools nationwide hit a benchmark of 1 Mbs per student bandwidth capacity. Mr. Parman likes that fact that ESH has reduced the benchmark to an understandable number, but is not sure that number is necessary in all size schools.
- Mr. Parman emphasized that the focus in education should be more on elementary than high school for implementing innovative technologies such as “bring your own device.”
- Statistics:
 - 70% of students attend 20% of public schools
 - MT has approximately 430 school districts
 - Approximately 310 school “systems” within those districts
 - Approximately 820 schools
- Have we gone “overboard” on emphasizing 4 year college programs and lost focus on 2 year and trade programs?
- The notion that school guidance counselors can be “career counselors” is misplaced.
- Emphasized the need for private sector partnerships with schools to institutionalized career counseling.

Governor Steve Bullock The KIN was honored to be joined by Governor Steve Bullock. Meg O’Leary, Director of the Department of Commerce, and Mike Cooney, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Industry, also joined the meeting at this time. The Governor thanked the KIN for its work to date. The KIN invited the Governor to share his thoughts and vision on various broadband issues, and the KIN reported on its progress to date. Of note the Governor addressed:

- HB14, and lessons learned in the past legislative session.
- The Governor stressed that he does not want to see any proposal that overbuilds or duplicates existing resources in the State. The challenge is to design a plan(s) that will leverage and incentivize private investment.
- All stakeholders need to start now educating policy makers (legislators) on the needs of business, education, and consumers for bandwidth now and into the future.
- Any forthcoming legislative proposal needs to be realistic, but that does not mean that we should not be educating on the full need.
- Use examples of effective public/private partnerships in other states.
- Coordinate e-rate at a state level to maximize federal dollars.
- A continuing task force may be advisable if that is part of the KIN’s recommendations.
- Improved broadband mapping is vital to economic development.

Meg O’Leary, Director, Department of Commerce, and Mike Cooney, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Labor and Industry: The KIN received a joint presentation from Director O’Leary and Deputy Commissioner Cooney regarding ongoing efforts to promote economic development and work force development. Both officials addressed several questions from KIN members. Highlighted topics included:

- 27% of Montana’s workforce is over age 55. This amounts to approximately 137,000 workers.

- Young workers (age 16-24) total only approximately 113,000 workers, so we are facing a shortage as older workers retire.
- Connecting students to the work force has to be a priority. Deputy Commissioner Cooney stressed the value of the Department of Labor’s apprenticeship program, and reported that over 1,000 occupations are “apprenticable.”
- The “REV UP” program provides specific grants in the manufacturing, energy, and health care fields for worker training and employment.
- Students/workers can utilize the MCIS tool for career planning. <https://mtcis.intocareers.org/materials/portal/home.html>
- An incumbent worker training program is available for small employers (under 20 employees).
- The Department of Labor and Industry has teamed up with the University System to hire a PhD level employee (Curt Lacey) to address workforce development, training, etc.
- The Department of Commerce is instigating a three-agency partnership for recruitment and retention of a skilled workforce.
- This partnership consists of The Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation, and Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, with an emphasis on parks to improve infrastructure in city and state parks to attract workers to our quality of life.
- The Department is working with communities to optimize their websites to attract workers.

KIN Committee Discussion and Next Steps: The KIN discussed the federal e-rate program, and it’s application (or non-application) to the KIN’s charge. The KIN discussed several issues raised by the Governor, Director O’Leary and Deputy Commissioner Cooney.

The KIN consensus was that the next meeting should be a facilitated meeting to start structuring the KIN’s ultimate report to the Governor. Rob Ferris and Bill Squires will work on condensing the information received to date by the KIN, and possibly issue a brief KIN survey on prioritization.

It is anticipated that the next meeting will be in the late September or early October.

Closing Discussion:

Next meeting in 60–90 days, depending on Governor Bullock’s schedule

Goal to have recommendations to Governor before end of 2015