



## Digital Divide Task Force

Meeting Summary

January 28, 2020 | 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

### Zoom Recording:

<https://youtu.be/LfeeyqdZ4pg>

**Members in Attendance:** Hasan Ikhata, Antoinette Meier, Jack Christensen, James Jimenez, Amy DeNinno, Sanjiv Nanda (SANDAG); Elaine Tulving (UCI Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center); Christina Moor (AT&T); Debbie Shireman (California Emerging Technology Fund); Al-Jafri Abu-Bakr, Chris Schmidt (CALTRANS); Danny Pasawongse (Chula Vista Elementary School District); Felipe Monroig, Alicia Berhow (Charter Communications); David Graham (City of Carlsbad); Kirby Brady, Sarah Moga, Xiomalys Crespo (City of San Diego); Teresa Valenzuela (San Diego Futures Foundation); Dennis Gakunga (City of Chula Vista); Jason Anderson (Cleantech); Sal Espinoza (Communications Workers of America); Nerea Urtasun (County of San Diego); Carla Leal (Cox Communications); Adrian Salas (Crown Castle); Hector Murrieta (IBW 569); Jeremy Ogul (Madaffer Enterprises); Jeff Hebert (San Diego Sheriff's Department); Nishal Mohan (Mohuman); Jessica Routzahn (National Association of Regional Councils); Erin Hogeboom (San Diego For Every Child); Michelle Jaramillo (San Diego Foundation); Stephanie Jungersen, Gary Knight (San Diego Futures Foundation); Katelyn McCauley (San Diego Economic Development Corporation); Barry Pollard (Urban Collaborative Project, Social Equity Working Group); Shahriar Afshar (Verizon); Sharlene Ornelas (SANDAG Social Services Transportation Advisory Council); and Jeffrey Nunez (Media 3).

### 1. Welcome

Hasan Ikhata, SANDAG Executive Director, welcomed taskforce members and reinforced the need for a regional approach to digital equity. He noted that those who lack broadband service are denied access to progress, which has been exacerbated by the COVID 19 pandemic. The taskforce brings together the wide range of stakeholders involved in various aspects of the digital divide to work collaboratively on real solutions that can be implemented in the near term.

### 2. Taskforce Introductions

Antoinette Meier, Director of Mobility and Innovation for SANDAG, led introductions asking members to share in the Zoom Chat feature one thing they are hoping the taskforce will accomplish. Highlights included:

*Equitable Access:*

- Broadband access regardless of income, location, or other limiting conditions
- Access to devices, digital literacy and navigation
- Safe spaces for accessing the internet and devices to promote learning that addresses the achievement gap
- Seamless technology usage for students & families with efficacy, efficiency, security and safety

*Equitable Development:*

- Balancing market forces to ensure we have more equitable development of broadband infrastructure
- Non-traditional/alternate broadband options to expand services
- Prioritize projects focusing on “redlined” areas
- Create incentives for providers to serve underserved communities,
- Treat broadband like a public utility, like water and electricity
- Involve community voices from the beginning, especially organizations that have already been working on this issue
- Provide local jobs and great wages for those who work in construction of broadband

*Streamlining and expediting development and data collection:*

- Establish a protocol for collecting and sharing data on digital equity regionally
- Solve the middle mile connectivity challenge
- Accelerate deployment, streamline permitting, data-driven approach, reduce redundancy, co-locate/collaborate
- Make it easier for local agencies to use fiber-optic infrastructure to deliver more free and low-cost connectivity options to those who need it

### **3. Why are we here**

Antoinette went over the taskforce goals and objectives that focused on fostering collaboration to develop the most beneficial broadband investments. The steps to achieve these goals begin with research and data collection to identify existing broadband gaps; the development of a collective understanding across disciplines about the need for digital equity; the creation of model policies, programs, and practices that lead to rapid broadband deployment and increased adoption throughout the region; the establishment of an agreement on specific actions, roles and responsibilities, and a timeline for implementation of the Action Plan between the various groups within the task force. In addition, the need to facilitate strategic partnerships and bring funding to the region to support digital equity initiatives is of importance. Another important step is to evaluate and monitor the Action Plan following implementation.

The workplan for developing the Regional Digital Equity Strategy and Action Plan begins by forming a Regional Digital Divide Task Force to focus on regional coordination and provide technical input on the development of a Regional Digital Equity Strategy and Action Plan. The Task Force also needs to conduct research and collect data on broadband gaps and best practices (Spring 2021) to develop the Regional Digital Equity Strategy (Summer 2021) and create the Action Plan (Fall 2021)

Antoinette explained the research areas for the task force: the identification of existing conditions and gap analysis in the broadband network within the region, what types of broadband infrastructure exists, the planning and permitting process of local jurisdictions, and the amount of customer choice when selecting broadband providers. In addition, a focus on the quality, cost of service, what communities do not have broadband subscriptions, and the performance of existing

broadband expansion programs are components of the research process. The final component of the research process centers on identifying best practices for permitting methods, rural and tribal broadband service models, partnership models, programs to increase broadband adoption, and other innovative service models.

#### **4. Discussion**

Next Antoinette led a discussion on the current state of broadband in the San Diego region, as well as what research questions the Taskforce is seeking to answer.

Task force members suggested including SDG&E in the taskforce due to their role with utility infrastructure in the region and implementation of fiber. Task force members reiterated the importance of fostering collaboration between entities to ensure more comprehensive broadband connectivity in the county. Also discussed were potential policy levers that could be used to influence service providers to expand and accelerate broadband connection to ensure the technology is distributed in a just manner to communities that have been left out in the past. It was also recommended that SANDAG focus on some of the regulatory barriers to broadband deployment.

#### **5. Highlights from Executive Order N-73-20 California Broadband Action Plan**

SANDAG Digital Divide Fellow, Amy DeNinno, reviewed [Executive Order N-73-20](#) and subsequent [Broadband for All Action Plan](#). The executive order mandates: a minimum broadband speed of 100 Mbps download speeds; directs state agencies to increase access to broadband under four areas: mapping and data, funding, deployment, and adoption; transportation will focus on fiber deployment with transportation projects along strategic corridors. It also directs the development of a California Broadband Action Plan by December 31, 2020.

The subsequent Broadband For All Action Plan, created by the California Broadband Council, established 3 primary goals as a framework for addressing the digital divide in California. These goals include: (1) All Californians have high performance broadband available at home, schools, libraries, and businesses (2) All Californians have access to affordable broadband and the devices necessary to access the internet (3) All Californians can access training and support to enable digital inclusion. The key actions to accomplish these goals broadly include: modernize broadband speed and performance standards; evaluate data at serviceable location level to bring greater accuracy and granularity; implement a Dig Smart Policy for state-funded transportation projects; develop a framework to define essential broadband service affordability standards.

#### **6. Legislative Activities**

Robyn Wapner, Manager of Government Relations for SANDAG, and Laurie Grover, Associate Government Relations Analyst for SANDAG, reviewed legislative activity related to the digital divide. Thirty-four states recently enacted legislation or adopted resolutions relating to the digital divide. There were a handful of bills introduced in CA:

AB14: This bill would authorize local educational agencies to report to the department their pupils' estimated needs for computing devices and internet connectivity adequate for at-home learning.

SB4: This bill would require the office to coordinate with other relevant state and local agencies and national organizations to explore ways to facilitate streamlining of local land use approvals and construction permit processes for projects related to broadband infrastructure deployment and connectivity.

AB34: This bill would declare the intent of the Legislature to enact legislation that would enact the Broadband for All Act of 2022, to become operative only if approved by the voters at the November 8, 2022, statewide general election, to authorize the issuance of state general obligation bonds to fund increased access to broadband services to rural, urban, suburban, and tribal unserved and underserved communities.

AB41: This bill would state the intent of the Legislature to enact future legislation that will improve California's "Dig Once" policy and expedite the deployment of broadband infrastructure in communities that are currently unserved and underserved.

SB22: would place the Public Preschool, K–12, and College Health and Safety Bond Act of 2022 on the ballot in 2022 to provide \$15 billion in funding to construct and modernize education facilities.

Sanjiv Nanda, Entrepreneur-in-Residence for SANDAG, shared updates on the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund through the FCC. In a reverse auction on December 7, 180 bidders won \$9.2 billion to provide broadband to underserved census tracts throughout the country over the next 10 years. Several local consortiums as well as Cox Communications won bids to provide broadband in our county. The FCC has moved towards defining the baseline download/upload speeds as 50/5 Mbps and above baseline as 100/10 Mbps.

## **7. Next steps and next meeting**

The next Digital Divide Task Force meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 25, 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. The focus of the next meeting will be on data collected from local jurisdictions and broadband service providers on existing fiber networks and on the local agency policies and practices related to broadband permitting and deployment.