SANDAG

Digital Divide Taskforce

Meeting Summary

May 13, 2021 | 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Zoom Recording: https://youtu.be/8ByRMYTibjg

Members in Attendance:

Abu-Bakr Al-Jafri (Caltrans), Adrian Salas (Crown Castle), Ady Huertas (San Diego Public Library), Ana M. Ardón (National Latino Research Center), Angelica Santiago (National Latino Research Center), Bill Valle (City of Chula Vista), Chris Schmidt (Caltrans), Christine Moore (AT&T), Cody Petterson (County of San Diego), Danny Pasawongse (Chula Vista Elementary School District), David Graham (City of Carlsbad), David Reed (University of Colorado), Debbie Shireman (California Emerging Technology Fund), Dennis Gakunga (City of Chula Vista), Elaine Tulving (Anza Borrego Desert Research Center), Elizabeth A. Dooher (Caltrans), Gary Knight (San Diego Futures Foundation), Gary Williams (Zayo Group), Gladys Palpallatoc (California Emerging Technology Fund), Hector Murrieta (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers), Irina Prokhorova (San Diego Futures Foundation), Jason Anderson (Cleantech), Jeffrey Nunez (Media 3), Jeremy Ogul (Madaffer Enterprises), Jessica Routzahn (National Association of Regional Councils), Jim Madaffer (Madaffer Enterprises), Jordan Latchford (San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation), Joe Britton (San Diego Gas & Electric), Katelyn McCauley (San Diego Economic Development Group), Kelsey Baird (City of San Diego), Konane Martinez (National Latino Research Center), Matthew Rantanen (Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association / Tribal Technical Working Group), Meagan Openshaw (City of Imperial Beach), Michael Hadland (Charter Communications), Nerea Urtasun (County of San Diego), Omar Zevallos (San Diego Gas & Electric), Patty Chavez (Parent Institute for Quality Education), Paul Morris (San Diego Housing Commission), Ramesh Rao (UC San Diego Qualcomm Institute), Reyna Ayala (City of Imperial Beach), Roland Ok (Southern California Association of Governments), Sal Espinoza (Communications Workers of America), Shahriar Afshar (Verizon), Sharlene Ornelas (SANDAG Social Services Transportation Advisory Council), Sydney Householder (Communications Workers of America), Xiomalys Crespo (City of San Diego); Amy DeNinno, Audrey Porcella, Danielle Kochman, James Jimenez, Krystal Ayala, Laurie Grover, Lindsey Hansen, Robyn Wapner, Tim Hornyak (SANDAG)

1. **Introduction of New Taskforce Members**

Antoinette Meier, Director of Mobility and Innovation at SANDAG, introduced a new taskforce member organization: National Latino Research Center.

2. **Digital Equity Strategy Updates**

Digital Equity Communications Plan

Lindsey Hansen, Public Communications Officer at SANDAG, shared progress on the Digital Equity Communication Plan goals (Educate, Empower, Encourage, and Execute). Digital divide communication efforts moving forward will focus on increasing awareness of the digital divide and the importance of working towards digital equity.

Lindsey presented near, medium, and long-term deliverables to communicate and conduct outreach in support of the digital divide within the region. Deliverables include informational documents, the creation of a dedicated Digital Divide web page, the formation of a speaker's bureau, and identifying partnership outreach opportunities.

As an outcome of this discussion, taskforce members expressed support for coordinating social media and outreach efforts. Taskforce members are asked to share social media handles with Lindsey and are also encouraged to coordinate on social media by sharing account handles by either tagging @SANDAG on Twitter or @SANDAGregion on Facebook and Instagram posts, or to email Lindsey Hansen at lindsey.hansen@sandag.org.

Economic Impact Analysis of Universal Broadband

Krystal Ayala, Senior Regional Planner at SANDAG, shared an overview the planned economic impact analysis of universal broadband for the San Diego region. The economic impact will use a comprehensive approach and evaluate a variety of factors including gains in labor productivity , impact on jobs, wages, personal income, business development & commercial growth opportunities, and efficiencies and cost savings that can be realized in delivery of public services, transportation operations, or household transportation costs. Taskforce member Ramesh Rao recommended adding education, workforce training, and access to healthcare services into the economic analysis.

A technical advisory group consisting of taskforce members has been formed to provide further input on the methodology and data inputs used to conduct the economic impact analysis. Taskforce members are encouraged to join the technical advisory group.

Cisco Partnership

Antoinette Meier and Jeremy Stanley, Business Architecture Leader at Cisco Systems, unveiled a new partnership between SANDAG and Cisco Systems. Cisco will help to develop a roadmap to streamline the deployment of broadband with an emphasis on communities that are

underserved or unserved. Cisco will offer no-cost consultant support and will conduct over 50 interviews with digital equity stakeholders to identify and understand policy barriers that impede broadband expansion. The roadmap that Cisco develops will offer potential policy solutions to address these barriers and directly inform the Regional Digital Equity Strategy and Action Plan. David Reed recommended that SANDAG connect with the Google Fiber Team to augment the development of the regional strategy. Taskforce members may be asked to participate in stakeholder interviews.

SR 67 Fiber Deployment

Antoinette shared an opportunity to expand fiber along an 18-mile stretch of SR 67 from Lakeside through Ramona to SR 78 in partnership with Caltrans. This opportunity will serve as a "Dig Once" demonstration by adding microtrenching and fiber to the planned SR 67 Pavement Rehabilitation project. SANDAG and the County of San Diego are providing local funding to support this effort and augment state funding from the California Transportation Commission.

The project has several benefits including the potential to expand affordable broadband for the 225,000 residents that live within SR 67 communities as well as implementing intelligent transportation solutions that improve safety and mobility. SANDAG, in partnership with Caltrans and the County of San Diego, will gauge interest from interested broadband providers to partner on the project and expand critically-needed broadband access. Construction will commence in late-summer and is slated to be complete by November 2021.

3. **Broadband Gap Analysis**

Summary of findings

Antoinette updated the taskforce on mapping efforts that illustrate the presence fiber and broadband accessibility. The fiber presence by census block map displays what census blocks in the region have fiber present. Presence of fiber does not equate to broadband access as illustrated in the fixed broadband map, which indicates where fixed broadband meets the federal threshold (25 Mbps/3 Mbps). The I-8 corridor is an example of an area in which fiber is present yet internet speeds are below the federal threshold. Census ACS data was used to illustrate the ZIP codes where broadband adoption by low-income households is low. Antoinette emphasized how ACS data provides a high-level snapshot of broadband adoption but does not provide an adequate representation at more granular levels needed for community-based analyses.

Antoinette also shared a survey conducted by SANDAG that detailed remote work policies and practices from employers and employees in the San Diego region. The survey found that 39% of businesses and 42% of employees reported problems with internet service interfering with remote work.

Ookla Partnership and Speed Test Data Demonstration

Antoinette Meier and Rob Perry, Sales Director, U.S. & Government Accounts at Ookla, presented a new partnership with Ookla's Ookla for Good™, that allows SANDAG access to Ookla's Speedtest tool for 90 days and 12 months of downloadable speed data for San Diego County.

Rob Perry conducted a brief demonstration of Ookla's Speedtest Intelligence portal, a data dashboard that provides an overview from a city and ZIP code of user Speedtest results, and how the tool can be used to analyze internet speeds within the San Diego region.

SANDAG will host an additional demonstration of the Speedtest Intelligence portal to interested taskforce members. Taskforce members are encouraged to attend. SANDAG will also be producing maps and doing addition data analysis using the downloadable data.

Broadband survey of underserved communities

Krystal Ayala shared information about a survey pilot to better understand household broadband adoption and affordability in underserved or unserved communities. The survey will be piloted in the Borrego Springs community in coordination with taskforce member Elaine Tulving from the Anza Borrego Desert Research Center. This survey provides an opportunity to engage with community-based organizations, schools, and other community members to evaluate broadband adoption, affordability, and performance. Krystal also shared plans to learn from the pilot in Borrego Springs to expand the survey to other communities in the region leveraging community based organizations. Support from taskforce members is needed to distribute the survey.

Paul Morris shared that the San Diego Housing Commission is sending out a survey to over 2,000 community members in the next few weeks. Findings from the survey will be shared with the taskforce. Xiomalys Crespo and Kelsey Baird also shared that the City of San Diego will be conducting outreach to Promise Zone residents about the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB). Krystal will follow-up with Paul, Xiomalys, and Kelsey to coordinate outreach efforts. More information will be shared at future taskforce meetings.

4. **Legislative and Funding Program Updates**

Laurie Grover, SANDAG Associate Government Relations Analyst, and Robyn Wapner, SANDAG Principal Government Analyst, shared legislative updates.

Laurie Grover shared an overview of broadband related legislation and initiatives at the federal level. The U.S. Department of Treasury announced the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds that were established as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act to provide $350 billion in emergency funding for eligible state, local, territorial, and tribal governments. Eligible agencies will be able to access relief to address broadband infrastructure needs. The Coronavirus Capital Project Fund is a $10 billion fund established to provide to state, local, territorial, and tribal governments to fund capital projects directly enabling remote work,

education, and health monitoring. The Treasury Department will begin accepting applications for review in summer 2021. The President's American Jobs Plan also includes funding to improve the country's digital infrastructure and provide affordable and reliable broadband service to all communities.

Robyn Wapner shared state legislature updates related to broadband. SB 4 and AB 14 pertain to extending the California Advanced Services Fund from 2022 to 2033, and from 2022 to perpetuity, respectively. The bills also make changes to the fund by expanding the projects and entities that can apply. AB 34 would enact the Broadband for All Act, creating a bond measure in 2022 to provide funds for broadband-related projects. SB 28 would enact the Rural Broadband and Digital Infrastructure Video Competition Reform Act of 2021 that would require the California Department of Technology to compile an inventory of state-owned resources that could be used for broadband and expand the authority of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to regulate cable video franchises. The bill would also require the CPUC to consult with local governments regarding franchise violations. SB 378 would require local jurisdictions to allow microtrenching. SB 556 would enact the California Connectivity Act, which would require local governments and municipal utilities to make streetlights and traffic poles available for small cells. SB 556 also regulates how much could be charged for small cell attachments.

Robyn also detailed funds California is set to receive from the federal government through COVID relief funding that has the potential to provide increased funding for broadband efforts in California. SANDAG has submitted a letter of support to budget committees on the State Senate and State Assembly supporting the request from the California Association of Counties for $8 billion to be used for broadband.

Krystal Ayala shared that SANDAG will be monitoring legislation once bills move past their committees in early June. Staff is also working to develop a policy brief that can serve as a resource to taskforce members.

Funding Program Updates

Audrey Porcella, Grants Planning Associate at SANDAG, shared funding program updates. The California State Library High Speed Broadband Grant focuses on libraries and public agencies that are accepting applications on a rolling basis with $5 million in potential funding. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) grants provides funding for new grant programs, including the Broadband Infrastructure Program and Tribal Broadband grants. These grants require partnerships among state agencies and broadband providers.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Grants, Rural E-Connectivity Program and Community Connect Grant Program provide a funding opportunity for rural local, state, and tribal governments, along with non-and for-profit organizations, are eligible for these funds.

The US Department of Transportation Grants are other potential funding opportunities to support "Dig Once" policies and incorporate fiber into transportation projects.

   5. **Next Steps and Upcoming Meetings**

A demonstration meeting for the Ookla Speedtest technology will be held in the weeks immediately after the taskforce meeting and interested parties are encouraged to attend. Meeting times will be announced when dates are finalized. More information on the kick off of the economic analysis will be shared in the coming weeks. The Cisco partnership will commence later this month and taskforce members may be asked to participate in stakeholder interviews.

An outline of the Digital Divide Existing Conditions Draft Report will be shared with the taskforce in June 2021 followed by the draft report in July 2021. The next Digital Divide Taskforce meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2021 from 10 – 11:30 am.