



Tobias Read
Oregon State Treasurer

Michael Kaplan
Deputy State Treasurer

February 3, 2021

House Committee on Economic Recovery and Prosperity
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Cate, Vice-Chair Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

As state elected officials, we share two weighty responsibilities: 1) prudently managing state financial resources, and 2) creating opportunity for all Oregonians. I write today in support of affordable, reliable statewide broadband as a means of meeting both responsibilities, particularly in this crucial reconstruction phase after the 2020 wildfires.

It was a privilege to serve as a co-chair of Governor Brown's Wildfire Economic Recovery Council (the "Council"). The Council was charged with evaluating economic and community needs arising from last fall's devastating wildfires. Our report can be found at the following link: "[Recovering and Rebuilding from Oregon's 2020 Wildfires: Key Findings and Recommendations](#)," Oregon Wildfire Economic Recovery Council, January 4, 2021.

The Council's work highlighted the notion that broadband is a utility essential to all, and not a luxury. As you know, broadband has become fundamental to all levels of education, employment and commerce, emergency response and law enforcement, healthcare, and agriculture. Each of these sectors, and every Oregonian within, needs access to affordable and reliable broadband. This means Oregon must support and build infrastructure as well as ensure widespread access for the end user.

A recent study for the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council found that nearly 26% of Oregon's urban households are considered "underserved." The study also revealed dismal numbers with respect to low-cost access to broadband in tribal lands. In fact, in five of nine of our tribal communities, fewer than 30% of residents have access to low-cost broadband, and in two of the five, no residents have such access. "[Broadband in Oregon: A Report of the Oregon Broadband Advisory Council](#)," Oregon Broadband Advisory Council, November 1, 2020. Clearly these numbers are unacceptable, in light of widespread usage of broadband across our economy and culture.



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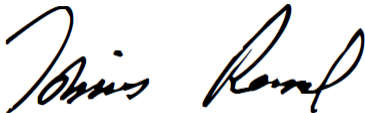
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The good news is that this legislative session, and also the reconstruction process after the fires, present Oregon with a chance to build back in a way that provides improved equity, and new opportunity, as recommended in the Governor's report.

My office recently submitted a comment letter to the FCC regarding a funding program arising out of the most recent stimulus package, and we will continue to monitor availability of federal funds. We hope a multi-level process will ease the financial burden at the state level, and will allow us to create the most comprehensive system of access we can possibly create. We encourage you to approach these issues while keeping in mind the importance of availability, and affordability. In other words, it is essential both to build the infrastructure, and make sure Oregonians can use it. In all these efforts, Treasury stands ready to support legislative broadband initiatives in any way we can.

I appreciate the Legislature's efforts to prioritize broadband as an essential utility, and as a means of building our state economy to include all Oregonians. I encourage you to work expeditiously to pass meaningful, effective legislation to continue to set the stage for Oregonians to move together into a prosperous future, and I'm eager to help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tobias Read". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "T".

Tobias J. Read