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Background Brief on ...

Telecommunications

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Telecommunications issues continue to grow in importance as telecommunications increasingly becomes mission critical to Oregon organizations in business, education, healthcare, public safety and government. Telecommunications is recognized in Oregon law as a key component of infrastructure along with roads, bridges, water systems, and electric power.

Most Oregon communities recognize the value of access to advanced telecommunications facilities. “Advanced Telecommunications Facilities” means “high-speed, dedicated, or switched broadband telecommunications infrastructure or equipment that enables users to send or receive high quality voice, data, or video telecommunications using any technology” [ORS 285B.486].

Oregon’s Infrastructure

Telecommunications infrastructure has become a strength and strategic asset for Oregon over the past five years. Significant improvements in Oregon’s telecommunications infrastructure have been made by telephone companies, cooperatives, cable companies, wireless companies, competitive access service providers, and municipalities with the construction of:

- Fiber backbone networks
- Fiber distribution networks
- Legacy copper telephone company distribution networks enhanced with new digital subscriber services
- Cable company fiber and coaxial cable distribution networks
- Third generation (3G) mobile wireless distribution networks
- Fixed wireless distribution networks
- Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) networks and emerging Worldwide Interoperability for Microwave Access (WiMAX) networks
- Enhanced satellite services

The key applications driving the adoption of broadband services continue to be e-commerce, e-government, distance-education, telecommuting and telemedicine.

Telecommunications-Related Legislation

Senate Bill 15 - Extends Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council to 1/2/2010 – The Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council (ORTCC) is studying alternative approaches to providing coordinated statewide, regional, and local telecommunication

services, including providing services to unserved or underserved areas of the state.

Senate Bill 17 - Creates the Task Force on Telecommunications Law Revision - The task force, made up of legislators, industry representatives, and consumer representatives, is conducting a comprehensive review of ORS Chapter 759, which governs telecommunications.

Senate Bill 838 - Creates the Oregon Innovation Council - The charge of the Oregon Innovation Council (**Oregon InC**) is to develop an innovation strategy for the state and to focus on the commercialization of research, technology transfer, and the development of research facilities. Oregon InC promotes traded sector industries and global competitiveness and is in direct alignment with the state's broadband telecommunications policy.

Senate Bill 1071 - Creates a Virtual School District - The Oregon Virtual School District was created within the Department of Education to provide online courses to kindergarten through grade 12 public school students. Programs should be available in the 2006-07 school year.

House Bill 2101 - Public Safety Wireless Infrastructure Replacement Plan - Oregon faces problems with aging radio systems used by its emergency services first responders (police departments, sheriff's departments, fire departments, and emergency health care providers), and the current systems lack interoperability. The State Interoperability Executive Council (**SIEC**) is developing a Public Safety Wireless Infrastructure Replacement Plan.

House Bill 2234 - E-Commerce designated Enterprise Zones - The number of E-Commerce designated enterprise zones is being expanded from four to ten, effective July 2007.

Current and Emerging Issues

Network Neutrality - Network neutrality is the principle that Internet users should be able to access any web content they choose and use any applications they choose, without restrictions or limitations imposed by their Internet service provider. Congress is currently revising the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and debating this issue.

Universal Service Funds - Congress and the Federal Communications Commission (**FCC**) are debating revision of the laws and rules governing Federal Universal Service Fund collections and disbursements. Federal changes, when implemented, will have implications for the Oregon Universal Service Fund.

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