

West Central Tribune

Editorial: Time to invest in outstate broadband, outstate families and businesses need it

By [Tribune Opinion](#) on Mar 13, 2014

The time has come for our Legislature and Gov. Mark Dayton to step up and invest in broadband Internet across Greater Minnesota.

The Legislature stated four years ago that every household within Minnesota should have access to high-speed broadband Internet by 2015.

It is not happening.

Minnesota currently ranks only 23rd in broadband service, with about 71 percent of households having broadband access, according to Connect Minnesota.

More than half of Minnesota households in Greater Minnesota lack wired broadband with download speeds of 10 megabits per second, according to Connect Minnesota. This indicates that parts of Minnesota are falling even farther behind without sufficient broadband capabilities.

This is crucial when one considers that Greater Minnesota citizens and businesses often have higher costs and distances to travel for business, education, family or travel reasons. These are all areas that can benefit from adequate broadband access, which helps level the playing field for all Minnesotans and their businesses.

A primary recommendation from the Governor's Task Force on Broadband in its 2014 report was for Minnesota to create and fund a \$100 million Broadband Infrastructure Fund. This program would provide loans or grants to providers to establish and improve broadband access in Minnesota's outstate regions. Minnesota's estimated need is more than \$3.2 billion to provide adequate broadband infrastructure throughout the state.

Dayton did not include funding for the broadband program in his latest budget proposal. That is disappointing.

Broadband access is a growing issue in Greater Minnesota and these regions can no longer wait until next year.

The Legislature should pass and Dayton should sign a bill creating a Broadband Infrastructure Fund to facilitate installation and improvement of broadband access across Greater Minnesota.

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