

## **Broadband Map Act now mandates new conduits**

*By Submitted*

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SACRAMENTO>> Assemblymember Jim Wood's (D-Healdsburg) Broadband Map Act, AB 1549, has undergone significant amendments expanding the scope of the bill, in an effort to ensure all Californians have access to modern communication technology.

AB 1549 would create a centralized database detailing where conduits available for fiber-optic cables are laid throughout the state. Recently, the bill was amended to require Caltrans to notify local broadband providers when it plans to open a trench capable of housing conduit. If there is no interest from private companies, Caltrans will install a conduit for future use.

"We need better connectivity in our rural communities, bottom line," said Wood. "In past decades the public sector invested heavily to deliver copper telephone lines and electricity across the country. This is a drop in the bucket compared to those investments, but it will make a world of difference for our communities in this 21st century economy."

AB 1549 proposes three major policy changes in an effort to incentivize Internet providers to deliver better connectivity in currently underserved rural communities.

First, it requires Caltrans to notify local Internet providers when it is opening a trench that could house conduit. Laying conduit in an already open trench dramatically decreases the cost of expanding the fiber-optic network.

Second, if private providers express no interest, AB 1549 would require Caltrans to lay its own conduit that could be accessed at a later date. This builds the basic infrastructure for future expansion and better connectivity.

Finally, AB 1549 now requires Caltrans to keep a central database mapping where conduits and fiber cables have been laid. Currently this location data is scattered among dozens of companies and agencies, making the creation of a comprehensive broadband access map nearly impossible.

AB 1549 passed smoothly out of the Assembly and met no opposition in the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee. Wood said he looks forward to the bill's continued progress in the upcoming Senate Appropriations Committee.

Elected in 2014, Wood (D- Healdsburg) represents the 2nd Assembly District, which includes all of Del Norte, Trinity, Humboldt and Mendocino counties, plus northern and coastal Sonoma County.

