

Assembly Bill 980 – Broadband Fiber Optic Cables: Priority Areas

Assemblymember Jim Wood

EXISTING LAW

Existing law provides that the California Department of Transportation, Caltrans, has full possession and control of state highways and associated property. Existing law requires the department to notify companies and organizations working on broadband deployment on its Internet website of specified department-led highway construction projects and authorizes those companies and organizations to collaborate with the department to install broadband conduits as part of those projects.

BACKGROUND

Many people in rural communities do not have access to broadband. In addition to individual residents, entire towns, including schools, hospitals, libraries and city governments have no access.

Californians view the Internet as a basic necessity. A strategy known as "dig once" helps lower the cost of laying down new high-speed Internet cables by making it unnecessary to tear up the streets every time a company wants to reach new homes with its underground network. Dig-once policies recommend laying a single tube, or conduit, in the ground through which all Internet wires can run. Once there, any company can add fiber cables through existing conduit — cutting the cost of broadband deployment by up to 90 percent, according to the [Federal Highway Administration](#). Making it easier and less expensive to offer new Internet service could potentially result in lower Internet prices and improved speeds. High-speed In-

ternet breaks down the barriers of distance and time and allows rural residents to participate in business, civic and personal life far beyond their geographic region.

Communities with broadband enjoy educational, social and economic advantages that result in both short- and long-term economic benefits. Short term, a community can experience increases in business and job growth, such as being able to use e-commerce to expand business and compete in today's economy. Long-term, these benefits can include population and income growth and an improved local tax base.

Farmers use broadband-based systems to improve watering efficiency and production forecasting, as well as gain access to timely weather information. Broadband provides a vital lifeline to small businesses, opening the door to expanded marketing opportunities, new marketplaces and the ability to accept credit card payments.

In classrooms, broadband allows students and teachers alike to access the educational and training content crucial to a 21st century education. No internet in the classroom results in an inadequate technology education, no ability to use online testing and no modern research skills.

Broadband is increasingly critical to health care for rural doctors who, with telemedicine, can consult specialists and experts, as well as for patients who are otherwise forced to travel long distances for medical treatment.



Coordinating highway construction projects with the installation of broadband facilities may save on costs incurred by repeated excavations. Coordination also helps to reduce deployment time by preventing the need to acquire duplicative federal reviews and permits for work done at the same location.

(916) 319-2002; cathy.mudge@asm.ca.gov

Because of these benefits, dozens of cities and counties throughout California have adopted local “dig once” policies, including Mendocino County, Santa Cruz, Fresno, Los Angeles, Palo Alto, Richmond, Riverside County, San Jose, Culver City, Vallejo, and Winters.

BILL SUMMARY

If priority areas are identified by appropriate entities, Caltrans can install conduit during planned road work, which can mitigate costs when cable is installed at a future date. Once the conduit is in the ground, installation costs of cable can be reduced to pennies on the dollar, and trenches would only be opened once, rather than multiple times.

AB 980 would use the “Dig Once” methodology and require Caltrans, as part of projects that are located in priority areas, as defined, to install broadband conduit capable of supporting fiber optic communication cables.

STATUS

Introduced

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact:

Cathy Mudge