Equity Working Group Meeting

December 8th, 2022
1:00 – 2:30 p.m.

The meeting was held via Zoom teleconference. A video recording of the meeting is available upon request. The meeting presentations are available here.

ATTENDEE LIST

Presenters:
Roland Ok, SCAG
Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund
Selwyn Hollins, Director of the County of Los Angeles, Internal Services Department
Shayna Englin, Director of the California Community Foundation, Digital Equity Initiative

SCAG Staff:
Anita Au
Annaleigh Ekman
Diego Jimenez
Jennifer Martinez
Leslie Cayton
Lyndsey Nolan

Webinar:
Alberto Velasquez, Cox Communications
Alicia Berhow, Charter-Spectrum
Angel Garfio, Orange County Transportation Authority
Dr. Anissa "Cessa" Heard-Johnson, South Coast AQMD
Caitlin Brooks, Ventura County Transportation Commission
Cesar Aranguri, Indigenous Ark Urban Technologies
Dr. Chandra Richards, UC ANR
Charles Guiam, City of Anaheim
Deborah Glickman, City of Palm Desert
Del J. Heintz, Heintz Government PR Group
Edwin Peart, LeSar Development Consultants
Emma Swanson, County of Ventura
Eric Sasaki, LA County Internal Services Department

Webinar (cont'd):
Felipe Monroig, Charter Communications
Gail Shiomoto-Lohr, City of Mission Viejo
Gladys Palpallatoc, National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Jeff Sorenson, County of San Bernardino
Jessica Nguyen, County of Ventura
Jessica Peter, 211 San Diego
John Heffernan, AT&T
Josh Candelaria, Viewpoint Advocacy
Jude Miranda, Caltrans District 12
Julia Nelson-Young, San Joaquin Council of Governments
Lane Garcia, South Coast AQMD
Lee McCall, Inland Empire Health Plan
Lori Huddleston, LA Metro
Margarita Macedonio, City of Santa Ana
Martha Van Rooijen, Inland Empire Regional Broadband
Mayra Vega, City of Ontario
Michael Hadland, Charter Communications
Niu Gao, Public Policy Institute of CA
Randal Hernandez, Verizon & Long Beach Economic Partnership
Sandra Cuellar, Charter Communications
Serena Liu, Caltrans
Sherilyn Evans, Corporation for Education Network Initiatives in California
Steve PonTell, National CORE
Steven Jones, City of Bell Gardens
Terry Theobald, Ventura County Information Technology Services
Vicki White, South Coast AQMD
Victoria Ostermann, Inland Empire Health Plan
Vilma Lopez, El Sol Neighborhood Educational Center
Walter Siembab, South Bay Cities Council of Governments
Whitney O'Neill, Charter Communications
Yoliviviana Sanchez, Imperial County Public Health Department

MEETING SUMMARY

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Anita Au, Program Manager II, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) | au@scag.ca.gov

Anita welcomed all participants.

2. SCAG DIGITAL ACTION PLAN

Roland Ok, Program Manager II, SCAG | ok@scag.ca.gov

Presentation Summary:

SCAG staff provided a thorough overview and framing of broadband, including the technologies involved and what the digital divide entails. Roland highlighted several benefits of broadband (e.g., accessibility, civil engagement, economic development, education, public health, public safety, and sustainability), and explained that the digital divide is seen through a lack of access to these benefits and commonly described as the gap between those with internet access and those without it. Availability, affordability, and literacy contribute to the divide. Populations mostly affected by the divide are communities of color, senior citizens, and tribal communities, which are communities that are typically unserved or underserved. Approximately 1.9 million people in the SCAG region do not have access to broadband. Some causes of the divide are high cost and little return, uncompetitive markets, and permitting issues resulting in high subscription rates with stagnant speeds in areas with high concentration of poverty.

Roland shared SCAG's efforts towards bridging the digital divide. Resolution 21-629-2 Pledge to Bridge the Digital Divide was adopted in 2021 allowing SCAG to develop a Digital Action Plan, collect and invest in broadband data, conduct technical studies, incorporate broadband into SCAG's programs, and secure funding for local jurisdictions. SCAG's proposed Digital Action Plan included goals and strategies, gap assessments of state and region, work efforts not only from SCAG but federal, state, and local governments, private sector and non-profits, proposed actions, and deliverables. Roland shared that broadband is a green strategy and would be necessary in creating "Smart Cities" which would use technology to make programs and systems more responsive. Roland concluded with the next steps SCAG will follow for the Digital Action Plan and what can be done to bridge the digital divide.

For more information about SCAG's broadband efforts, including the proposed Digital Action Plan, visit scag.ca.gov/broadband.

3. A DISCUSSION ON EQUITY ISSUES IN BROADBAND AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Moderator: Roland Ok

Panelists
- Sunne Wright McPeak, President and CEO of the California Emerging Technology Fund
- Selwyn Hollins, Director of the County of Los Angeles, Internal Services Department
- Shayna Englin, Director of the California Community Foundation, Digital Equity Initiative

Panel Summary:

Sunne McPeak presented on the behalf of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF) and shared that it is a state-wide non-profit that the California Public Utilities Commission directed to be established out of mergers in 2005. Sunne shared that they understand the digital divide is simply another reflection of the economic divide. Concentrated poverty is so difficult to escape and rooted in systemic racism that it is not really about technology alone, it is about how we use technology to improve people's lives. Cities and counties can function more efficiently by offsetting vehicle trips. Digital equity is a 21st century civil right and that is the lens they approach their work. CEFT along with California Department of Transportation pursued a Sustainable Communities grant to demonstrate broadband as a green strategy, by offsetting trips greenhouse gases are reduced by reducing vehicle trips essentially diminishing traffic. Sunne shared CETF partnered with SCAG to respond to the

Shelter in Place stemming from the coronavirus pandemic. Sunne concluded by stating that high-speed broadband generates more economic development resulting in better jobs and that is an essential strategy in helping people get out of poverty if they're stuck on the wrong side of the digital divide.

Question: What do you think local agencies can do to either initiate broadband programs or advocate for broadband programs? How should they go about in securing broadband resources?

> **Sunne**: The most simplistic answer is the jurisdiction simply saying that they are going to do it. That can be a resolution from the board of supervisors or council. Don't hire a consultant or spend large sums of money on expertise while already having that internally. With the people already there, do an initial scan/assessment of the current infrastructure and how many people are not online. We have a resource guide for local and regional elected officials that was recently updated and provides what jurisdictions are doing throughout California serving as a blueprint for resolutions, policy, or an element of the General Plan. We have released a template for a Digital Action Plan and a checklist for best practices. Using those tools and working through committees/community expertise will allow to initiate broadband programs. First step is to identify the priority areas and put that into the SCAG process for the request of prospective partnerships. Second, you can promote the affordable connectivity program, such program provides a $30 subsidy for internet services. Anyone on Medical, Cal Fresh, School Lunch Program, and Pell Grant you can automatically qualify for that program.

Sunne provided the following links:

- CETF Local Government Check List for Digital Equity: https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/ewg120822-local-government-checklist-for-digital-equity.pdf?1670368103
- Valley Vision/CETF Broadband Resource Guide: https://www.valleyvision.org/resources/getting-connected-a-broadband-resource-guide/

Selwyn Hollins presented on behalf of the Internal Services Department which was assigned by the Board of Supervisors in Los Angeles County to be the lead department advocating for equity and ensuring that residents in underserved and underrepresented communities have affordable and free internet access.

Question: What are some tips that you can give to staff from local jurisdictions if they want to initiate a program of their own?

> **Selwyn**: I acknowledge that not many cities in Los Angeles County are facing resource challenges. I strongly encourage and support collaboration between private sector, academic institutions, community organizations, etc. Collaboration is crucial because working by yourself will become extremely difficult. When collaborating, past experiences and knowledge can be shared which is beneficial. Also, must prioritize broadband improvements needed in their particular jurisdiction. A holistic approach should be used because there is not one solution that will fix everything.

Question: Can you share some success stories from Los Angeles County?

> **Selwyn**: The Board of Supervisors issued a 5-signature letter to the SCC advocating for changes to the E-rate program that enables schools and libraries to serve as hubs for community broadband networks in Los Angeles County. The ACP will have a big event this Saturday where they will be at seven Los Angeles County libraries in underserved areas promoting the ACP. 100 laptops will be given away to people participating in the event. The free internet program's goal is to provide people with free or low-cost internet program at speeds well above the federal standards. The program must go through prequalification process, but some cities will have demonstration projects soon. There are currently many MOUs in cities in Southeast Los Angeles; Internal Service Department share their assets and resources to work together with communities in need.

Selwyn provided the following links:

- LA County Community Broadband Network Pilot Projects announced so far: https://www.deletethedivide.org/cbn-projects/
- LA County Board of Supervisors 5-signature letter to FCC on E-Rate Program: https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/174398.pdf

Shayna Englin presented on behalf of California Community Foundation which invests in partners that are investing in long term systemic solutions to address the root causes of the most pressing issues in Los Angeles County, including the digital divide. Shayna is the Director of the Digital Equity Initiative, a multi-year project to provide financial and programmatic support to the Digital Equity Los Angeles Coalition.

Question: Could you share your perspective on broadband pricing and its impact on equity? What are some insights from the CBO/non-profit perspective on working with communities impacted by the digital divide?

Shayna: The Digital Equity Coalition has about 70 organizations, where all but four organizations do not have the digital divide as their central mission. The wide range of community-serving organizations recognized the importance of broadband regardless of the equity issue they were working in. In the context of the focus on equity and dedication of funds to this purpose, we want to take advantage of providing for immediate needs and to think about long-term solutions. We have engaged in community-led and driven research to amplify the realities on the ground, with some of that research being affordability and how it is driving low-adoption rates in high-poverty communities. For us, the call to action for localities is to look at the data and do some investigation because these pricing issues may become a significant challenge to efforts in closing the digital divide. They should also look at what the options are for local jurisdictions and what kind of solutions they can invest in.

Shayna provided the following links:

- ACP Dashboard: https://acpdashboard.com/
- Community Broadband Network Podcast featuring Anza Electric Cooperative: https://muninetworks.org/content/fiber-sea-mountaintop-community-broadband-bits-episode-447

Question: Does access to a computer include smart phones?

Sunne: Smart phones are wonderful pieces of technology, but they're mobile; if one person in a household has one and then they leave, then the rest of the household does not have access. We encourage residents who qualify for Lifeline, who probably also qualify for the Affordable Connectivity Program, to take advantage of that. Multiple channels to get to the internet is a good thing!

Question: Any last thoughts from the speakers?

Selwyn: There is currently a lot of federal and state funding available and there are resources to help jurisdictions apply right now. Don't miss this opportunity.

Sunne: Totally agree. The biggest chunk of funding has come through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which is all subject to the state doing a Digital Equity Plan and a Broadband Equity Access and Deployment plan. Input on these plans will help the community get better access to these dollars. California also has the California Advanced Services Fund for adoption dollars, with future funding committed. The first step is to get a policy started, do some strategic thinking.

Question: Walter Siembab, South Bay Cities Council of Governments, brought up that there are multiple approaches to digital equity. Walter points out that the state's approach is focused on universal service, whereas SBCCOG is focused on universal access, modeled after public access of the cable industry. All help with these efforts is appreciated. Walter clarifies that his comment is that the state is not funding/acknowledging universal access.

Sunne: Universal access and universal adoption are compatible; they are complimentary efforts.

4. **UPDATE ON CONNECT SOCAL 2024**

Leslie Cayton, Associate Regional Planner, SCAG | cayton@scag.ca.gov

SCAG staff provided an update on Connect SoCal 2024. For the most up to date information about Connect SoCal, visit https://scag.ca.gov/connect-socal

Upcoming milestones/opportunities to engage with the Plan include:

- Early 2023: SCAG submits Draft Technical Methodology to CARB
- January 19, 2023, 10AM to 12PM: Technical Working Group
- Connect SoCal 2024 Subcommittee meetings:
  - January 18, 2023, 9AM to 11AM: Next Generation Infrastructure
  - January 19, 2023, 9AM to 11AM: Racial Equity and Regional Planning
  - January 23, 2023, 9AM to 11AM: Resilience and Conservation
- Spring 2023: SCAG begins General Outreach

Question: Regarding the Local Data Exchange status update, are the 25 extensions separate from the 35 pending responses?

Answer: They overlap, some are pending.

5. **ANNOUNCEMENTS & OFFERS, REQUESTS, AND CONNECTIONS**

Annaleigh Ekman, Associate Regional Planner, SCAG | ekman@scag.ca.gov

The White House Council on Environmental Quality, Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool
- Version 1.0 of the tool is now available: https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/

The Department of Health and Human Services' Environmental Justice Index
- A national, place-based tool designed to measure the cumulative impacts of environmental burden through the lens of human health and health equity
- Access the EJI Explorer and learn more here: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/eji/index.html

SCAG 2022 Racial Equity Baseline Conditions Report
- Provides a snapshot of current existing inequitable conditions in the SCAG region
- Report now available: https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/2022racialequitybaselineconditionsreport_final.pdf

SCAG Racial Equity and Regional Planning Subcommittee
- Meeting #2, October 20: Community Perspectives
- Meeting #3, November 17: Best Practices and Strategies
- Agendas and Recordings available: https://scag.ca.gov/racial-equity-and-regional-planning-subcommittee

2023 SCAG Sustainability Awards
- Highlights projects that use innovative planning to improve the mobility, livability, prosperity, and sustainability of our region; The Equity Category highlights projects or programs from the region that up lift and improve outcomes for traditionally marginalized, vulnerable, and/or underrepresented communities
- Nominations are due January 10, 2023
- Award Guidelines and Application Form available here: https://scag.ca.gov/pod/2023-nomination-form

If you have questions about this meeting, please feel free to reach out to Anita Au (au@scag.ca.gov) or Annaleigh Ekman (ekman@scag.ca.gov). SCAG also encourages participants to reach out if you have a topic, project, program, tool, or resource that you think should be highlighted in a future meeting. The next Equity Working Group meeting will be held in March 2023.