



**House Technology Communications and Energy Committee
Broad Band Work Session January 15, 2008
Testimony of Marcus Courtney
President WashTech/CWA**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today before the committee on the need to expand broadband internet access in Washington. My name is Marcus Courtney and I am president of WashTech/CWA which is a local union that represents 1,300 technology workers in Washington State. I am also speaking on behalf of the CWA State Council which represents more than 4,000 communications workers in the state.

We must lay the groundwork to implement a comprehensive, statewide high speed internet deployment and adoption strategy so we can stay competitive and benefit from the opportunities high speed access offers residents, businesses and communities. HB 2559 designates the framework for researching and developing that strategy.

High speed Internet is not just about downloading music or surfing the web faster. A true high-speed Internet system across Washington will:

- 1) Fuel the state's economy, create jobs and keep Washington competitive
- 2) Bridge the digital divide and create opportunity in rural and underserved communities
- 3) Improve health, safety and educational opportunities for Washington residents.

Economic Growth and Jobs

Washington risks falling behind our trading partners and other states who are taking the initiative to expand broadband in order to keep up with basic telecommunications needs for businesses and trade. Building a high-speed Internet network NOW is critical to maintain our economic competitiveness internationally, to foster continued economic growth at home, and to create good paying jobs statewide.

Japan, one of Washington's most important trading partners, is well ahead of the US and Washington in internet capacity, and their citizens and businesses regularly operate with a better level of communications ability. Most households in Japan can purchase an Internet connection of 100 megabits (mbps), whereas in the U.S. the average connection is somewhere between 1.5 and 6mbps. Yet the price in Japan is about what we pay here, which means the typical Japanese family gets 16 times the speed at about the same price.

In Korea, another trading partner, before 1998, there was little broadband infrastructure. Yet, by 2002, a quarter of the country's population subscribed to broadband. In two years, subscription rates went from 114,000 to 4.2 million. Why? Because Korea has adopted a national broadband policy.

Bridge the Digital Divide: Opportunity for rural and underserved communities

Right now, too many Washingtonians are not equipped to succeed in our 21st century economy. Technology can break down the barriers of distance and income allowing residents for more rural and economically disadvantaged communities to participate fully in economic and civic life.

According to recent FCC data from 2006, only 50% of residents in Washington have access to the internet with speeds over 200 kbps. Washington is one of the world's technology innovation hubs with companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Amazon helping drive our economy. Here more than most places it's important to keep up with broadband capacity to service this industry and to ensure every resident in Washington can gain access to the opportunities of the internet.

Improve the health, safety and educational opportunities for all Washington residents.

Broadband access encourages innovations, collaboration and communications between doctors and patients, public safety officials and students and educators.

- Better communications and coordination for Public Safety and First Responders means increased public safety.
- Telemedicine augments medical care and makes health care more accessible, cost effective, and flexible.
- High speed internet statewide enhances educational opportunities through distance learning.

Government Policy based on a systematic approach working in partnership with all stakeholders is key to success

Washington needs a systematic comprehensive broadband policy. Almost every other industrialized country and several states around the country have already established a cohesive and comprehensive strategy to stimulate the deployment of high speed broadband. CWA strongly supports the adoption of the highly successful Connect Kentucky model here in Washington. HB 2559 is legislation that is modeled on Connect Kentucky. It brings together all of the key stake holders -- state, local and municipal governments, public safety, telecommunications providers, unions, schools, universities, health care providers, and community organizations -- in a public-private partnership that will use research to measure broad band access and engage the community on how to expand access.

The Connect Kentucky model uses detailed mapping of broadband infrastructure, surveys, and other research to analyze both supply and demand-side barriers to broadband adoption. Is the problem lack of infrastructure? No computer in the home? Access rates that are beyond the family budget? In the Connect Kentucky model, state and local community teams analyze the data and then craft practical solutions to address the barriers. In particular, by demonstrating community demand for broadband, Connect Kentucky's makes the business case, prompting carriers to accelerate infrastructure deployment.

The Connect Kentucky model has produced concrete results in just 3 years and is a national model.

- Detailed broadband inventory maps for the entire state are available online and are updated several times a year, promoting coverage and allowing providers to better target under served areas;
- Grassroots Community Leadership Teams were established in every Kentucky county, creating local technology growth plans across nine sectors.
- Broadband availability increased from 60% to 94% since 2001. Approximately 500,000 additional Kentucky residents can now access broadband internet.

Washington deserves the same job creation, economic benefits, and health, education and public safety opportunities.