

## State survey is a road map to needs in broadband reach

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Oddly enough, one of the greatest assets of a program addressing broadband Internet access in the state is in identifying where the access is lacking, not just where the reach can be celebrated.

Connected Tennessee, a nonprofit organization, established last year to look at the status of broadband technology in the state, has issued a progress report on how Tennessee is faring. Many breakthroughs exist that the state should feel good about.

Broadband is growing. But one of the primary focuses of Connected Tennessee is to determine where in the state people are frustrated about the lack of broadband capability compared to dial-up service.

People in urban areas, where access tends to be more plentiful, may look upon broadband as an option to consider based on their demand and their budget. But for still too many Tennesseans, broadband access is out of reach. The state should not sit still until broadband is available in every community.

Broadband technology is a key element for progress in almost every field, from business and health care to education and personal home use. For certain, the most recent survey by Connected Tennessee shows many encouraging numbers. The gains in percentages in small business and in rural areas show great hope. But some of the more expected gains are no less important.

The survey showed that half of all Tennesseans have broadband access at home, which is up from 43 percent last July. That's a growth rate of more than 16 percent in six months. It found that 64 percent of businesses in the state have the service, up from 55 percent in July. Further, the state is moving into broadband at a pace that exceeds the rate nationally, which is 8 percent.

Rates of increase are encouraging, and they reflect a pace of their own that says a lot about broadband potential. It is telling that the gains found are in a relatively short amount of time — significant increases in the past six months, not just up from a year ago or two years ago. Connected Tennessee has put an emphasis on development in rural areas, and it would appear those efforts are already paying off.

One of the goals of the broadband effort is to establish leadership teams in every county. The technology has proved that it can bridge the gap for households and businesses in remarkable ways. It can make every household feel connected and can be a business generator, as well.

As broadband technology first emerged on the telecommunications landscape, it was likened to the spread of the telephone decades ago. Young people may find it hard to believe that there was once a time when having your own household telephone — in landline form, at that — was a big deal.

In time, it will be nice to consider broadband access in the same vein. But there are too many people now still going without broadband to fully celebrate its usefulness. The effort must continue.