



BROADBAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Two common barriers cited by rural residents during the 2019 ORP Listening Tour were unreliable broadband and insufficient roads and bridges. Rural communities continued to discuss these and other infrastructure concerns with ORP during 2020. In a digital economy, access to the information superhighway is a critical part of connecting communities, as are highways, roads, and bridges. Through a blend of legislative and administrative actions, ORP pushed to address rural infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the state.

“ The pandemic has highlighted that broadband is not a luxury but a utility - it is the rural electrification of our generation and a critical piece of any community's infrastructure. We must have broadband throughout Kansas so all can access it for work, education, and healthcare. ”

- Lieutenant Governor Lynn Rogers



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IKE: MODERNIZED TRANSPORTATION

Throughout its work, the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) aims for safer roads, economic growth, and more options and resources for Kansas communities, including

access to education, healthcare, and other public services by way of a modern transportation system. Over the next 10 years, the [Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Plan](#), or “IKE,” will preserve Kansas’ existing infrastructure system while increasing flexibility to address current and future opportunities and enhance transparency and accountability.

IKE has implemented a two-year rolling program approach, allowing Kansas to keep investments from becoming obsolete or diminished by

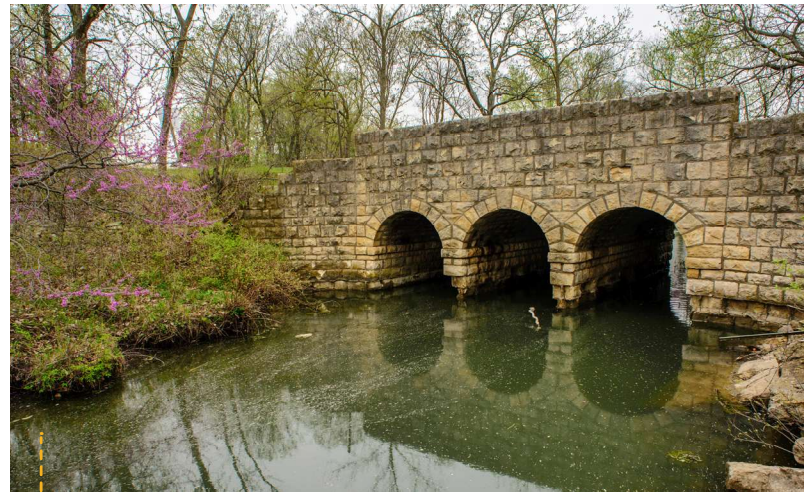
lack of maintenance and modernization. Additionally, the program will leverage investments by matching local funds, inviting input on practical improvements, and using project phasing to stretch dollars further. Together, with the help of the Kelly administration, Kansas Legislature, and stakeholders, KDOT is working to improve programs in IKE, incorporate new programs, and make programs more dynamic to provide greater access and flexibility to Kansas communities.

Local Bridges

The renewed local bridge improvement program under the Bureau of Local Projects is now in its second year after being brought back by the Kelly administration. With 20% of the state’s 19,000 bridges now rated in “poor” condition, this program helps repair and replace bridges that are insufficient for today’s weight requirements. This is important to residents and ag producers by ensuring bridges are safe to transport school busses, tractors, grain trucks, and livestock.

Short-Line Rail

IKE’s short-line rail program is another good example of how investments important to rural industries such as agriculture help all residents. In this case, short-line rail not only helps ag producers reduce costs to transport their grain, it also relieves traffic on rural roads and highways, improving



*Photo provided by
Kansas Tourism*

safety, increasing efficiency, and reducing wear and tear. In its first year, 13 projects were awarded grants totaling \$5 million, with a 30% matching requirement. Across all of its rail projects, KDOT is partnering to deliver \$102 million in 36 counties.

Cost Share

Cost Share encourages local partners to think of creative solutions to challenges in their communities and work with KDOT to make improvements. Cost Share provides funding for construction projects that improve safety, leverage state funds, and help rural and urban areas throughout the state. In its first

year, Cost Share was able to empower communities large and small to take plans off the shelf and make investments earlier than they could have without the state's partnership, resulting in \$59 million of investment in 46 local projects.

FALL 2019 AND SPRING 2020 COST SHARE AWARDEES



Preservation+

This new program adds funding to preservation projects where safety improvements and broadband connectivity can be enhanced. Building on recent federal approval of KDOT's "dig once" policy, this program will help to ensure Kansas maintains high-quality broadband along the state's freight corridors by working with local partners to update

the state's connectivity and highway infrastructure simultaneously.

In addition to these opportunities, KDOT will work on solutions for multi-modal transportation, public transit, aviation, innovative technologies, bike and pedestrian paths, and more.



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BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY

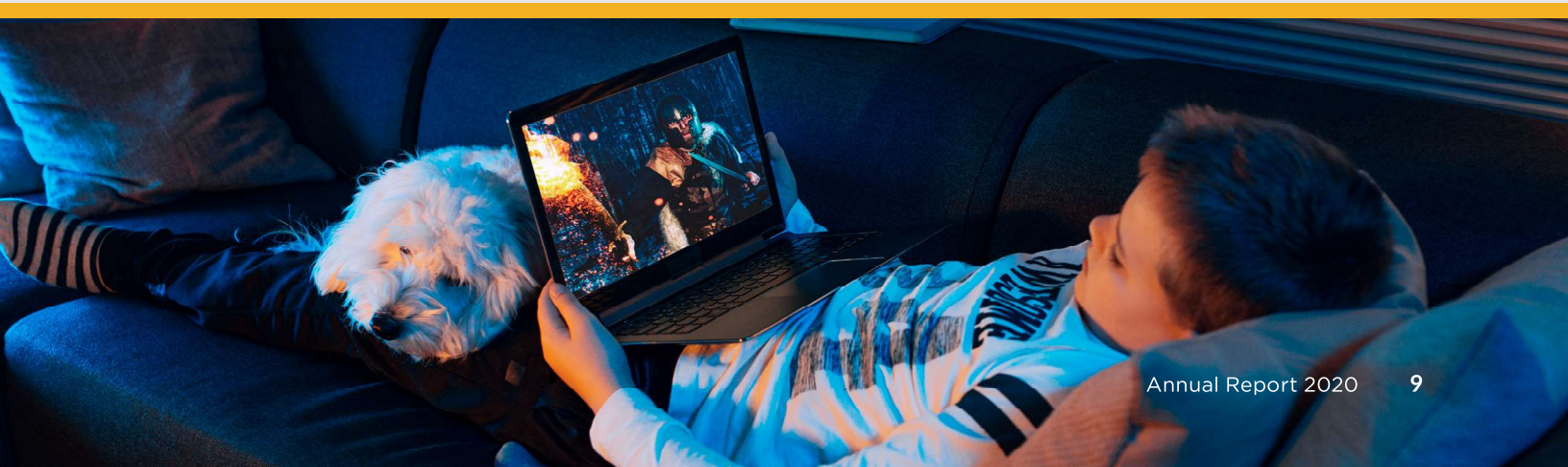
If there was ever any doubt about the need for accessible and reliable internet connections for rural residents, the pandemic has proven that high-speed internet access is a necessity. Communities without adequate access are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to accessing healthcare, improving distance learning, and enhancing quality of life. The Kelly administration is committed to ensuring broadband is no longer seen as a luxury but essential to the future of Kansas.

Broadband has been discussed for 20 years in Kansas by various administrations, but the state of Kansas had never invested in broadband infrastructure until Governor Kelly included an initial investment of \$85 million for a broadband grant program in the 10-year IKE transportation plan. With a 50% match requirement, this funding represents \$170 million in broadband investment in state, local, and private dollars on top of \$50 million dedicated to broadband infrastructure by the SPARK Taskforce.

By identifying long-term funding and requiring a local match, Governor Kelly affirmed the consensus of the legislative broadband task force and listened to rural Kansans who brought the issue forward during the Office of Rural Prosperity's 2019 Listening Tour. Together with the Kansas Legislature, the Kelly administration has made broadband a priority for the state of Kansas, even before the pandemic highlighted its critical role in ensuring access to telehealth, distance learning, and remote work.

The Kelly administration also affirmed the legislature's recommendation to have the Office of Broadband Development in the Kansas Department of Commerce administer the grant program. Recognizing the need for continued engagement, Governor Kelly issued an executive order establishing the lead office for broadband to work with stakeholders, consumers, policymakers, and other state agencies to support expansion of broadband throughout the state.

Interagency and public support is especially important as the state strives to serve Kansas residents more effectively. Whether it's collaborating on a school project, renewing a driver's license, or talking to a doctor out in the field, broadband is essential for so many services that individuals, businesses, and local governments use daily.



THE CASE FOR BROADBAND

With the pandemic continuing to necessitate increased use of virtual platforms, ORP wanted to bring together a group of rural leaders from across the state who have experience with broadband connectivity — either providing it for their consumers or requiring it for their own work.

To lead this conversation, ORP reached out to Catherine Moyer of Pioneer Communications in Ulysses. Moyer, like many local internet service providers, knew exactly what parts of her service area would need increased access, and Pioneer started to build out additional infrastructure soon after a pandemic was declared.

While much of Southwest Kansas does have impressive internet service, not all Kansans in the region have access. Kearny County Hospital CEO David Hofmeister and IT Director Tony Salcido described that while the internet connection was strong at the hospital, it still was difficult to serve all of their patients when some lacked internet access and compatible technology at home.

Not far from Kearny County, Minneola Healthcare CEO Debbie Bruner reported similar issues delivering telemedicine to people's homes, as well as problems uploading and downloading large images. Bruner's problems illustrate a larger issue that has been identified by the pandemic — the necessity of having not only high download speeds, but also improved upload speeds or symmetrical service.

On the other side of the state, Emergency Management official Wes Lanter described how adequate services are needed throughout

his county to provide effective emergency response, especially during a pandemic. In Wabaunsee County, Randy Wild reported that despite being located within commuting distance of Manhattan and Topeka, his community only gained broadband access within the past two years. As a result of strong community engagement, Maple Hill was able to work with WTC of Kansas to achieve access at over 99% of its homes. Not only did this happen in time to offset problems related to the pandemic, it also should continue to enhance the town's marketability for years to come.

Jackie Mundt, a Young Farmer and Rancher with Kansas Farm Bureau who works for the local Kanza Cooperative Association, described some of the practical effects of not having adequate internet access on the farm — not only the inconvenience, but more importantly, the lost opportunities. Many new tractors, center pivots, and other farm machinery and equipment include precision ag technology that can reduce input costs, save water and energy, and increase yields. But much of the new technology doesn't work if a farmer can't easily upload and download data where the crops are located.

To accommodate precision ag, telemedicine, emergency response, and other essential services, the Kelly Administration will continue to push for broadband access for all Kansans to connect communities in the state and ensure that all Kansans have the tools they need to succeed and participate in the modern economy.



TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE ·-----

Infrastructure is important throughout the state, but it is particularly vital in rural areas where accessing healthcare, transporting grain and cattle, or safely commuting to a job or school in the next county is critical for the local economy and quality of life. ORP joined the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) and other stakeholders in a discussion around its efforts to improve communication, work in partnership with local communities to address their infrastructure needs, and effectively deliver the new 10-year Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program, or “IKE.”

Even before IKE was passed, KDOT worked to implement a “dig once” policy in an effort to better serve communities and work with providers. “Dig once” refers to an approach that allows internet service providers to update the local broadband infrastructure when a highway project is coming through an area. By having more of this work done simultaneously, it not only updates a local network, it also provides cost savings that can be reinvested in the community. From Garden City to the Flint Hills, providers shared how this kind of approach has helped improve access and promote efficiency.

Detailed earlier in the infrastructure section of the report, two local officials described the Cost

Share program as a “game changer.” As one official explained, “We’re a mid-sized city trying to do a lot with a few people and a few dollars.” The program’s flexibility allows communities large and small to move forward on projects that were just beyond the community’s reach without the state’s partnership.

Along with traditional highway projects, Cost Share enabled KDOT to partner with local communities wanting to increase biking and pedestrian opportunities. Not only have communities seen outdoor recreation increase during the pandemic but they see it as a way to connect more people to the local economy, such as out-of-state college students.

An issue that was raised in multiple breakout sessions this year was improved rail access. Rail is particularly important for ag communities that need to transport large quantities of grain. One local co-op operator described how a bridge fire increased costs \$600,000 one year with trucks able to haul significantly fewer bushels than rail cars. With the first year of IKE’s short-line rail projects announced in October, KDOT is hopeful this program will not only decrease costs for Kansas businesses, but also reduce traffic and improve safety on highways.