



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Whatcom County Council  
**CC:** Executive Satpal Sidhu  
**FROM:** Councilmember Kaylee Galloway  
**RE:** Expanding Whatcom County Broadband Internet Access  
**DATE:** March 1, 2022

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Whatcom County is a supportive partner with the Port of Bellingham and Whatcom PUD in the effort to expand broadband internet access throughout the county, recognizing a dire need to invest in this critical infrastructure. While the Port and PUD have taken the lead on broadband internet projects, it is important that County Council continue to support and enhance effort, including through the following:

### **Data Collection Projects**

1. Realtime Response Under Load (RRUL) tests determine gaps in service when, for example, an entire household is using one connection at the same time. Currently, the City of Bellingham, Port of Bellingham, and Whatcom PUD do not use RRUL testing. Data from these tests can help us better serve our rural, disadvantaged, and vulnerable communities.
  - o **Council to consider approval for funding approximately 1,000 RRUL tests to identify gaps in internet service when declines occur under the stress of high demand. (Cost to be determined.)**
2. Wireless Access Points (WAPs) can be easily installed anywhere, turning fiber connected buildings like libraries, community centers, and schools into public internet access points. WAPs help increase access to high speed, low cost internet and address digital equity issues especially in rural and underserved communities. During the pandemic and emergency disasters, and moving forward, we have seen more people rely upon stable internet for meeting basic needs whether they are working, schooling, receiving healthcare, or purchasing goods and services remotely.
  - o **Council to consider approval of funding to install approximately 20-25 Wireless Access Points (WAPs) at various community buildings across the county. (Cost is to be determined.)**

### **Dig Once Policy for Broadband**

3. Establishing a Dig Once policy for all road construction and utility installation projects in Whatcom County right-of-way to ensure that any time a road construction or utility installation project occurs in Whatcom County right-of-way, conduit is installed and the Port and/or PUD are consulted and provided an opportunity to lay fiber. A dig once policy helps increase efficiency and can reduce the cost of installing conduit and fiber by up to 90% as excavation is often the highest cost.<sup>1</sup>
  - o **Ordinance amending Whatcom County Code to require notification to broadband partners when roadway projects are planned and require County to install conduit that would be publicly owned and accessible for others to lease and lay fiber.**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/otps/policy\\_brief\\_dig\\_once.pdf](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/policy/otps/policy_brief_dig_once.pdf)