



## Governor signs bills to expand broadband in California

By [Rachelle Chong](#) posted on October 4, 2013

Broadband advocates are celebrating after Gov. Jerry Brown yesterday signed two bills — Senate Bill (SB) 740 (Padilla-D, Pacoima) and Assembly Bill (AB) 1299 (Bradford-D, Gardena) — that will bring more broadband access to rural Californians and disadvantaged communities. SB 740 overcame opposition from the California Cable & Telecommunications Association, but ultimately, cable reached agreement with the author on amendments and withdrew its opposition when the bill was pending in the Assembly.

SB 740 will modify the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) eligibility requirements to let the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) award funding to entities such as the Wireless Internet Service providers or other advanced technologies, and add \$90 million in funds from telecom ratepayer intrastate surcharges in 2015-2020 to the CASF program for additional broadband projects in areas with no broadband service or slow broadband service (below 6 megabits per second download speed and 1.5 Mbps upload speed). AB 1299 authorizes the CPUC to award up to \$25 million in CASF grants for deployment and adoption of broadband services in publicly-supported housing communities and to promote broadband development in disadvantaged communities. The CASF was established by the CPUC in 2006, and codified law by the State Legislature the next year, to bring broadband access to all of California.

“This new law continues the state’s critical investment in our digital infrastructure so that every Californian has access to broadband,” said Senator Alex Padilla, the author of SB 740, praising the governor’s signature in a written statement. “High-speed Internet service is a vital aspect of modern life – everything from communicating with friends and family to access to jobs, education, health care, public safety, government services, and commerce are facilitated by broadband connections. . . [B]roadband is a key component for economic opportunity for both individuals and communities.”

“As the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy moves online, our society is increasingly defined by those who have access to the technology and services that define modern life, and those who don’t,” said Assembly member Steven Bradford in a written statement. “The future of our economy rests on broadband and other technology infrastructure. We cannot let certain unserved and underserved

communities fall behind the rest when it comes to this critical resource. I am pleased that the Governor understands the value of helping our citizens climb out of the digital shadows.”

The CPUC, who had made the initial recommendation to Senator Padilla’s office for the main program changes contained in SB740, praised the Governor’s support of the bills.

“We are pleased at the signing of these bills, as they extend broadband infrastructure where it’s needed the most to increase economic growth, employment, jobs and social benefits,” commented Ryan Dulin, the CPUC’s Communications Division director. He said it is the goal of the CPUC to promote “ubiquitous availability of advanced communications services to all Californians and not just in urban areas. “

“We are thrilled that California leaders understand how critical it is to close the Digital Divide in California to keep our state globally competitive and offer all residents access to educational and employment opportunities by being connected to the Internet,” said President and CEO Sunne Wright McPeak, of the California Emerging Technology Fund. “We now will have the resources to continue to get more Californians connected to affordable, reliable broadband, and be able to expand the Smart Housing Initiative statewide to connect more of California’s 200,000 public housing units to the Internet.”

Rural broadband community leaders were also effusive in praise for SB740, which stands to benefit rural areas in particular. While disappointed that the additional CASF funding from 2015-2020 was reduced from \$125 million in the original version of SB 740 to \$90 million during the bill’s passage through the state Senate and Assembly, they were pleased to have the bill pass given the early opposition by entrenched broadband interests.

“Mendocino Coast Broadband Alliance is thrilled and greatly relieved that these two bills were signed into law,” said Shirley Freriks, a leader of MCBA. “Those on dial-up [access] in Mendocino rural areas cannot even access a web site these days without waiting 30 minutes or more. . . These bills will allow all students to work from home on their computers and have equal rights with other students who have internet access. Connectivity is *assumed* in the educational system but most rural kids cannot participate.”

Freriks added that with broadband, small businesses, entrepreneurs, medical applications, and the tourist businesses will be able to flourish in places like Mendocino, where 80% of the businesses are small, and in Fort Bragg where local resource-based industries have disappeared. She added that Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County has a grant request in to the CPUC now that would bring fast Internet to unserved and underserved areas in 16 counties.

A 2012 Akamai report on broadband speeds shows California ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in the nation.