

Obama wants to remove barriers to greater broadband access

January 14 2015, by Jim Kuhnhen



President Barack Obama speaks at the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center in Arlington, Va., Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015. Obama renewed his call for Congress to pass cybersecurity legislation, including a proposal that encourages companies to share threat information with the government and protects them from potential lawsuits if they do. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

The Obama administration wants to provide greater access to fast Internet broadband service in towns and cities across the country by

encouraging the Federal Communications Commission to remove legal barriers to competition by Internet service providers. It also wants to help local communities improve their service with government loans and grants.

The modest proposals do not require congressional approval and are part of a series of measures President Barack Obama is rolling out before his State of the Union address next week.

Obama will detail his [broadband](#) plans Wednesday in Cedar Falls, Iowa, a community that has taken steps to provide high-speed Internet to its residents.

In a White House video before the announcement, Obama says: "You know what it feels like when you don't have a good Internet connection. Everything is buffering, you try to download a video and you've got that little circle thing that goes round and round, it's really aggravating."

"There are real world consequences to this and it makes us less economically competitive," he says.

Jeff Zients, director of Obama's National Economic Council, said Obama wants to use the bully pulpit of the presidency to press the FCC, an independent regulatory agency, to "ensure that all states have a playing field that allows for a vibrant and competitive market for communication services."

The administration's stance would put it at odds with major cable and telephone companies such as AT&T, Comcast and Time Warner Cable Inc. that currently provide Internet service, often with little or no competition. Obama has already angered the industry by calling for new FCC rules that treat Internet service providers as public utilities.

Nineteen states place restrictions on municipal broadband networks.

The FCC is already considering requests for Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Wilson, North Carolina, to prevent state laws from blocking the expansion of their broadband projects. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said in June that communities that want to provide their own [broadband service](#) "shouldn't be stopped by state laws promoted by cable and telephone companies that don't want that competition."

A new White House report says that while 94 percent of Americans living in urban areas can purchase an Internet connection of 25 megabits per second, only 51 percent of Americans in rural areas have access to such Internet speeds.

The report also says that because of lack of competition three out of four Americans lack a choice for such Internet service.

The White House also announced that the Commerce Department would promote greater broadband access by hosting regional workshops and offering technical assistance to communities. The Department of Agriculture also will provide grants and loans of \$40 million to \$50 million to assist rural areas.

A council comprising more than a dozen government agencies will also seek to remove regulatory and policy barriers that hinder broadband competition, the White House said.

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