



HF 7 (ECKLUND)

RURAL BROADBAND EXPANSION

Broadband is more important today than ever before and will play an increasingly important role in the lives of Minnesotans for decades to come. While significant progress has been made through the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program, we still have work to do to make sure all Minnesotans have access to high-speed connections.

Expanding broadband expands educational opportunities through programs like distance learning, helps our great Minnesota businesses compete in today's global economy, and helps people stay in touch with health care providers to receive care and monitor their health conditions. Future technologies will rely on high-speed connections as well.

OVERVIEW

In this second decade of the 21st century, families, business and communities across Minnesota have increasingly realized how incredibly important it is to have access to high-speed internet. Families need internet access to connect with each other; businesses need it to attract customers and order supplies, and communities have found that high-speed internet (i.e. broadband) is perhaps the most important economic development tool they have.

Recognizing how crucial broadband is to the well-being of Minnesotans, the DFL-led Legislature created the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program in 2014. At that time, nearly 30% of Minnesotans, including wide swaths of Greater MN, did not have access to internet with speeds at least 25 mbs/download and 3 mbs/upload. By October, 2018, over 91% of Minnesotans have broadband with speeds at least 25/3. However, there are still many communities in Greater MN where families and businesses struggle with slow speeds, unreliable service, or no internet connectivity at all.

Since the broadband grant program was created in 2014, the debate over broadband funding has consisted of Republicans seeking less funding and Democrats seeking more. In the end, the two sides usually ended up compromising on this issue, which should be nonpartisan. The worst result, however, was in 2018, when House Republicans stuck broadband funding in the omnibus prime bill (along with everything else). That bill was vetoed by Gov. Dayton for a variety of reasons, meaning that no broadband grants were awarded in 2018.

	Gov. Dayton	House Republicans	Final Amount
2015 session for FY16	\$30 million	\$0	\$10.6 million
2016 session for FY17	\$100 million	\$15 million	\$35 million
2017 session for FY18	\$30 million	\$7 million	\$20 million
2018 session for FY19	\$30 million	\$15 million	\$0

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HF 7 (Ecklund) seeks to get the broadband grant program up-and-running again and to get the state closer to the point where every household and business has access to broadband that meets the state's speed goals (25/3). The bill appropriates \$35 million to the broadband grant program each year in the upcoming FY20-21 biennium.

These amounts track very closely with the recommendations of the Governor's Task Force on Broadband, which includes a wide variety of representatives from community organizations and the telecom industry. They calculated that the total investment necessary to bring broadband to everyone in the state is \$1.4 billion over four years. The state's share is about \$140 million, or \$35 million per year for four years.

This effort to increase broadband funding and to bring high-speed internet to every corner of the state is supported by the Governor's Task Force, which includes the MN High Tech Assn., the MN School Boards Assn., Thomson Reuters, CenturyLink, and AT&T. HF 7 is supported by the Rural Broadband Coalition.