



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

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Attitude Defines Our Altitude: Changing the Conversation About Broadband

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Robert Hinton is Chairman of the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council and Executive Director of the Upshur County Development Authority. Prior to joining the Authority, he was a small business coach for the West Virginia Small Business Development Center, assisting business start-up and expansion in north central West Virginia.

Hinton's background as a small business owner led to the development of an entrepreneurial program at West Virginia Wesleyan College and the award of a \$2.3 million grant through the United States Economic Development Administration. The grant allowed for construction of the Innovation and Knowledge Business Center in downtown Buckhannon. He also led the effort to secure a \$3 million grant through the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the expansion of fixed, wireless broadband in Upshur, Barbour and Randolph Counties.

Hinton earned his MBA from West Virginia Wesleyan, a master's in science from California University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor of education from Glenville State College.

He serves as a board member of the West Virginia Economic Development Council, Robert C. Byrd Corridor H Highway Authority, West Virginia Hardwood Alliance Zone, Buckhannon-Upshur Chamber of Commerce and the West Virginia SBDC Advisory Council. He is President of the Central West Virginia Development Association.

Attitude will always define our altitude, both individually and as a state. West Virginia significantly trails the rest of the nation when it comes to access to scalable and reliable broadband level connectivity. However, as West Virginians, we can no longer compare ourselves simply with our neighboring states. We are competing in a global market and must therefore measure connectivity against competitors the world over.

West Virginians have long understood the value of connection, and this value resonates on a personal level through family, business and community interactions. Broadband technology enables us to connect in ways that were once considered science fiction but have now become basic methods of communication. The ability to connect on a broader scale, be it regionally, nationally or globally, removes barriers for advancement and creates a new paradigm to a limitless future.

Broadband changes the game for the state, allowing its businesses to compete in the global marketplace. Recognizing this reality, our elected officials created the West Virginia Broadband Enhancement Council (Council) to lead West



Virginia to a more connected future. The state's approach to broadband development must be all-inclusive and universal. Input is needed from federal, state and local leaders, as well as internet service providers, residents and businesses.

As chairman of the Council, I proudly work alongside other dedicated members who are committed to the bold pursuit of broadband. Our objective is to empower communities by providing leadership and access to critical resources needed to facilitate broadband expansion at the local level. Following this model, the Council has launched numerous initiatives designed to:

- Encourage the development of broadband infrastructure in the state.
- Evaluate and map broadband infrastructure and service systems through an Interactive Mapping Program and other data collection methods.
- Eliminate barriers to broadband infrastructure development within the state.
- Engage and mobilize the expertise, funding and partners to facilitate the creation of reliable and affordable broadband service.
- Expand economic development and represent the state in matters related to broadband infrastructure development.

Broadband connectivity is crucial to the economic, educational and social future of West Virginia. The level of connectivity that West Virginia deserves exists, and we must pursue it



with an innovatively tenacious attitude. The Council is forging partnerships between state and federal agencies, communities, businesses and internet service providers to work cohesively on infrastructure projects.

Similarly, the Council stands ready to assist communities with the technical details associated with broadband development projects. The following is a brief recap of action taken in 2017. Through collaborative projects, and with numerous partners, the Council has:

- Launched the West Virginia Internet Speed Test Portal found at broadband.wv.gov. Through this platform, West Virginia can provide accurate internet speeds experienced by the end user.
- Created West Virginia's First Interactive Statewide Broadband Coverage Map.
- Conducted broadband development training for local government leaders, planners and project managers. This training generated nine planning projects and three infrastructure projects.
- Designed and launched broadband

development grant programs with the West Virginia Development Office.

- Represented West Virginia's interests in matters of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).
- Initiated the development of a Broadband Cooperative Toolkit with the WVU Entrepreneurship and Innovation Law Clinic and Generation West Virginia.
- Partnered with the West Virginia Department of Transportation and the West Virginia Department of Commerce to develop policies for the installation of fiber infrastructure within state road rights-of-way.

Aiming Higher through Capacity Development

To date, West Virginia has not aggressively pursued funding for broadband expansion projects. The state has long executed water and sewer infrastructure projects with great precision; the same expertise is needed in broadband development. The Council has partnered with the West Virginia Development Office in order to provide the state's first allocation of Community Development Block Grant funding solely

for broadband. More than half of the state's 55 counties are represented in the 12 projects funded in the first year of this new initiative, with a total investment of \$1.5 million announced by Governor Justice on February 1, 2018.

Building the foundation and capacity within the state for broadband development, we will also encourage and support the pursuit of funding through federal programs, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Connect, U.S. Economic Development Administration and other agencies.

Accurate Data is Key

Accurate data is the cornerstone of solid planning. Among the Council's goals is the collection of data needed to accurately assess West Virginia's current broadband services, assets and infrastructure.

In 2017, the Council developed an Interactive Broadband Mapping System to include two main components – the West Virginia Speed Test Portal and the Statewide Broadband Coverage Map.

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West Virginia Simulated Workplace

Kathy D'Antoni, EdD
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in West Virginia. The lessons, skills and attitudes acquired by the emerging workforce gives hope and direction to our youth. Reaching these students as they begin making decisions regarding their future exposes and engages them with industries relevant to West Virginia's economic growth.

It is important that West Virginia's emerging workforce – its youth – have the opportunity to reach their individual potential and to have a voice in creating their future. Therefore, it is critical in growing the economy of West Virginia that education focuses on nurturing, training and retaining our state's emerging workforce. ▽

¹Crotty, James. *How to Solve America's Low-Skills Crisis*, Forbes, 2015.



Coalfield Development and the Need for Economic Diversification

Brandon Dennison
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Much of the employment potential in renewable energy and energy efficiency is in “middle-skill jobs,” which require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree. Surprisingly to many, our West Virginia hills have favorable solar resources. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory estimates 4,200 MW of technical capacity for solar power in West Virginia. Former coal mines and other types of degraded lands are highly suitable for this use. And demand for solar power in West Virginia is growing, as evidenced by the number of solar cooperatives that have recently formed around the state.

It's time to finally diversify our economy, especially in southern West Virginia. Sustainable construction, reclamation, arts-based entrepreneurship, local agriculture and renewable energy are five viable strategies to achieve this long sought-after goal. ▽



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These two components form the basis of West Virginia's Interactive Broadband Mapping System. This integrated system will generate the information needed to strategically address the digital divide in West Virginia.

The West Virginia Speed Test Portal was launched in October 2017. The speed test is available at: **broadband.wv.gov**. To date, more than 25,000 speed tests have been collected, and speed tests have been conducted in each of West Virginia's 55 counties.

West Virginia can no longer settle for service that does not meet the needs of our residents and businesses. The Council has long maintained that the FCC reports lack the user data needed to precisely measure service. The West Virginia Speed Test Portal will enable the Council to identify unserved and underserved communities and, in turn, assist them in moving forward with broadband development projects.

State and Federal Policy

With the 2017 enactment of House Bill 3093, our state leaders

signaled the willingness to develop policies that encourage broadband development. Following this lead, we are identifying areas for improvement, including the utilization of road rights-of-way and fiber installation in conjunction with road construction projects.

At the federal level, the Council submitted comments to the FCC in 2017 concerning the requirements of the Connect America Fund II. The Council requested that the FCC give special consideration to the identification of eligible areas. The Council also requested that the FCC grant maximum flexibility to provide the greatest level of competition possible.

The Council is committed to the bold pursuit of broadband on behalf of residents and businesses throughout West Virginia. Join us in this endeavor by learning more about broadband's importance to West Virginia and getting involved in community efforts to establish or enhance broadband. It is time for West Virginia to get connected. ▽