

## **Why a Fiber Optic Initiative and Why Now?**

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Emmett Mayor**

I am often asked “when” the city will complete its fiber optic initiative, the “build out”. Sometimes, I am asked “why”. Often the Why question comes from those not so familiar with the internet and its importance to commerce.

In March of 2017, the Idaho Statesman ran a comprehensive article covering broadband issues in Idaho entitled, “*No, it really is that slow. Idaho Ranks dead last for internet speed despite some gains.*” Life-long Emmett resident, Lt. Governor Brad Little, a person quite familiar with the internet and broadband, especially their importance for commerce in the 21st century, asked the Idaho Rural Partnership (IRP) to comment on the data presented in the article. For those unfamiliar with IRP, it’s a state statutorily created organization that combines diverse public and private resources for innovative collaborations to improve life in rural Idaho.

Based upon the Lt. Governor’s efforts, the IRP board formed a working group to address several issues, such as,

- What do we know and understand about internet access and speed in Idaho?
- What are other states doing that Idaho is not and what, if anything, have we missed?
- Are similar conversations taking place among other groups in Idaho? If so, what is happening and how can we assist each other?
- What don’t we know?
- How do we fill our knowledge gap?

The working group has done a yeoman-like job of performing its mission and has considerable input for the governor and legislative committees having something to do with municipalities and their “utilities”. Now that the framework is delivered, we anticipate the governor’s office will pick a department, say Commerce, to house the initiative. After the first of the year, the Association of Idaho Cities would do well to initiate a broadband group for legislative considerations.

Rest assured that Emmett has staff decisively engaged in these working groups, making significant contributions to help shape our broadband future. My vision is to become the most connected city in Idaho once we know the parameters. Why? Three words: Jobs! Jobs! Jobs!