

**ConnectME Authority**

**DRAFT**

**Detailed Triennial Strategic Plan for Broadband Service**

November 12, 2015

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# Broadband Vision for Maine

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*Broadband represents opportunity for Maine.*

*It is the opportunity for a high school student in Patten to take an advanced placement course in physics from a professor in California;*

*It is the opportunity for a sick elderly person in Deer Isle to live out her days in her home and community, connected 24/7 with her doctor and family and friends and caregivers;*

*It is the opportunity for a web designer in Bethel to work with a client in Bulgaria;*

*It is the opportunity for a start-up candy-maker to market and sell to customers around the world;*

*It is the opportunity for a family restaurant in Augusta to reinvent itself and grow through the use of social media;*

*It is the opportunity for a laid-off mill worker in Guilford to get an MBA while living at home;*

*It is the opportunity for elected public officials to reduce expenses while improving customer service through online permits and registrations.*

*Broadband is the great equalizer for a state that has always suffered from being “at the end of the line.”  
Broadband brings the world to Maine’s door every minute.*

*To realize this opportunity, Maine must:*

- Ensure that every student, parent, worker, patient, and employer has access to affordable, reliable, capable broadband;*
- Foster an ecosystem of broadband innovators, funders, providers, and technicians that enable Maine consumers to benefit from the latest technological innovations;*
- Sustain a network of state-of-the-art broadband connections among hospitals, libraries, universities, schools, state and local governments, research laboratories, and technology businesses, so that Maine can be on the cutting edge of progress in health, education, the arts, and business;*

*Broadband is opportunity for Maine. We must reach for it.*

# Introduction

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What is broadband? The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) says:

*The term "broadband" refers to advanced communications systems capable of providing high-speed transmission of services such as data, voice, and video over the Internet and other networks. Transmission is provided by a wide range of technologies, including digital subscriber line and fiber optic cable, coaxial cable, wireless technology, and satellite. Broadband platforms make possible the convergence of voice, video, and data services onto a single network.<sup>1</sup>*

To make the most of this revolutionary new technology, a report<sup>2</sup> to the ConnectME Authority in 2013 recommended that:

- 45,000 Maine businesses upgrade their web presence;
- MaineCare shift 4,000 elderly in institutional care to in-home care, using telehealth technologies;
- The University of Maine provide 25% of courses online;
- Every elementary and high school student have an internet-connected device and digital textbooks;
- Local and state government move more services online.

The ConnectME Authority was established as an independent state agency in 2006. The funding mechanism for the ConnectME Authority is a 0.25% surcharge on all communications, video and internet service bills which generates approximately \$1.1 million per year.

The report found that taking these steps would, within ten years, create 11,400 new jobs in Maine earning \$485 million in annual income, and reduce annual state and local government expenses by \$72 million.

The Maine Legislature in 2015 set ambitious goals with respect to broadband:<sup>3</sup>

*The goals of the State related to broadband service are that:*

- A. Broadband service be universally available in this State, including to all residential and business locations and community anchor institutions;*
- B. There be secure, reliable, competitive and sustainable forward-looking infrastructure that can meet future broadband needs; and*
- C. All residents, businesses and institutions in the State be able to take full advantage of the economic opportunities available through broadband service.*

Goal A, "universally available," means that the location of every house and business in Maine must have some kind of broadband access. Goal B, "forward-looking infrastructure," means that whatever network is installed today must be capable of being upgraded so as to serve the needs of tomorrow. Goal C, that Maine residents and businesses "be able to take full advantage

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/strategic-plan-fcc>. There is no one definition of broadband. It is a continuously evolving technology used in ever-changing ways.

<sup>2</sup> The Maine Broadband Capacity Building Task Force Report is available online at <http://maine.gov/connectme/about/docs/taskforce/broadbandfullreport.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Sec. 3. 35-A MRSA §9202-A, State broadband policy.

of the economic opportunities available” means that new economic opportunities created by advances in broadband technology must be identified on a regular basis and integrated into the capital investment plans that enable network expansions and improvements.

Fulfilling these goals will require close cooperation between the private and public sector, capital investment expenditures of hundreds of millions of dollars, and radical changes in the habits of Maine consumers and businesses with regard to knowledge and use of broadband-enabled technologies.

In addition to stating these overarching goals, the Legislature’s mandate directs the ConnectME Authority to prepare “a detailed, triennial strategic plan for broadband service ... to further the goals and policies in section 9202-A.” It directs the ConnectME Authority to serve as the chief monitor of the state’s progress in meeting these goals and to set “objectives, targets, measures of performance, implementation strategies, timelines.”

The ConnectME Authority must serve as the state’s leader in defining the roles of the various private and public entities that build and operate its broadband system. That system is not a traditional regulated monopoly public utility, like electricity. Rather, it is a complex *ecosystem*, where multiple providers compete, technology changes rapidly, and there is a mix of federal, state, and local oversight but no price regulation. Maine’s ambitious broadband goals can only be met if that ecosystem is defined by the following characteristics:

1. A *steadily growing and competitive market* for broadband services characterized by:
  - a. a stable or growing number of private sector providers;
  - b. a growing range of choices for customers:
    - among providers;
    - among levels of service;
    - among delivery technologies;
    - among costs for access and use;
    - across all regions of the state.
2. An *informed, connected, and growing number of customers* – educators and students, medical providers and patients, businesses , employees and customers, artists and patrons citizens and public servants – throughout the state.
3. An *informed group of elected officials and policy makers* who have complete and timely information on cost, availability, and quality of broadband service throughout the state, and who are using best practices in their implementation of regulatory and assistance programs.
4. A dynamic *cluster of innovators* seeking to expand ways to deliver broadband services and use them to improve the lives of Maine citizens in the areas of health care,

education, transportation, the administration of government and economic development; and

5. A widely accepted and effective *system of public subsidies* designed to expand broadband infrastructure and use beyond what would be achieved by private investment alone including;
  - a. capital investment assistance designed to leverage other funds to accelerate progress toward the goals of universal access and economic opportunity across the state;
  - b. planning assistance designed to encourage innovative local, regional and statewide partnerships to expand broadband access and use;
  - c. effective identification and use of federal and private funds to expand broadband access and use in Maine.

Maine's broadband goals are ambitious. This three-year strategic plan sets the state on a path to achieve them. The next section provides recommendations designed to foster the broadband ecosystem described above, and create the conditions necessary to achieve the stated goals.

Appendix A describes where Maine stands today.

# Maine Broadband Strategies

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The adopted policies<sup>4</sup> of the State related to broadband service include:

- *Maximize sustainable investment in broadband infrastructure in the State;*
- *Maximize federal and private resources to support the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the State;*
- *Leverage existing infrastructure to extend broadband service*
- *Prioritize the use of state resources to assist deployment of infrastructure to provide broadband service in unserved and underserved areas of the State;*
- *Promote adoption of broadband service by residents, businesses and institutions.*

The following strategies are intended to strengthen Maine's broadband ecosystem, expand its broadband network, drive public demand, and measure progress so that Maine can realize the full potential of broadband. They are aimed at maximizing private investment, consistent with the policies above.

## Roles for the Public and Private Sectors

Because this is a plan addressed to the Maine Legislature, it focuses on the activities that can be taken by the public sector to incent private investments. It should be clear that the vision cannot be achieved without robust leadership, investment, and participation from Maine's private sector. In short, a partnership is paramount. The recommendations below represent some initial steps in creating the new partnership.

## **Implementation Strategy 1: Create information and accountability to evaluate and guide public and private investment .**

**Objective 1A. Issue an annual *Maine Broadband Indicators Report***, modeled on the Maine Economic Growth Council *Measures of Growth* report, which benchmarks where the state stands with regard to broadband access, affordability, and quality. The report should use information available from the FCC, the American Community Survey, private service providers, grant recipients, and Maine broadband mapping projects (both public and private).

***Measures of performance:*** Production of two annual reports by the ConnectME Authority.

***Target:*** A report that is useful to policy-makers and citizens.

***Timeline:*** First report issued in January of 2017, second in January of 2018.

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<sup>4</sup> Sec. 3. 35-A MRSA §9202-A, State broadband policy

**Objective 1B. Determine the effectiveness and impacts of broadband infrastructure grants.** Find out the success of individual grants in meeting grant requirements. Develop meaningful criteria for evaluation of future grants.

*Measures of performance:* Production of two annual reports by the ConnectME Authority.

*Target:* A report that helps ConnectME Authority board members to fine tune programs.

*Timelines:* First report issued in January of 2017, second in January of 2018.

**Objective 1C. Establish a secure and confidential repository within the ConnectME Authority for all middle-mile and last-mile broadband service provider network infrastructure information.** Current local and state broadband planning efforts are hampered by a lack of knowledge of existing infrastructure on the ground. This repository would provide a way to consolidate such information without compromising the competitive advantages of any individual provider. The information should be updated regularly.

*Measures of performance:* Percent of middle-mile and last-mile broadband service providers contributing network infrastructure information.

*Target:* A repository with sufficient information to enable coordinated broadband expansion planning and implementation.

*Timelines:* Repository established in 2016, operative in 2017.

## **Implementation Strategy 2: Promote local broadband initiatives to provide high-speed broadband service.**

**Objective 2A. Implement a local planning grant program.** Allocate 20% of the ConnectME Authority's annual grants budget for planning projects. Applicants must complete the precertification process. Applicants should first approach the local provider(s) ("provider of first resort") to explore broadband expansion, prior to applying for planning grant funds. Local grants should not exceed \$25,000.

*Measures of performance:* Initiation of at least 20 local efforts.

*Target:* 5 planning grants in process.

*Timelines:* Planning grant program in operation in 2016.

**Objective 2B. Create a local technical assistance capability at the ConnectME Authority.** The ConnectME Authority should become the resource for local communities for guidance on how to initiate a local planning process, a list of qualified broadband planning vendors, the availability of data, the range of models available for

broadband expansion (such as cooperatives), the range of financing sources available, and contact information for community assistance personnel at private providers.

*Measures of performance:* Technical assistance staff, guidance documents, resource library.

*Target:* 5 projects in implementation as a result of planning grants.

*Timelines:* Capability set up and fully operational in 2016.

### **Implementation Strategy 3: Use existing assets to promote broadband access and use.**

**Objective 3A. Create the Maine Broadband Council.** Create a council for the State of Maine to identify ways to leverage the state's assets—roads and towers, , job training programs, community development programs, and existing networks—to increase private investment and geographic coverage in Maine. The Council should be led by the ConnectME Authority, and include appropriate state agencies and business and financing community representation. The Council should develop a strategy for using all assets to promote broadband, and assist in its implementation.

*Measures of performance:* Council established and meeting, plan produced, implementation activities underway.

*Target:* Implementation of one Council initiative.

*Timelines:* Council established in 2016, plan by 2017, at least one project implemented by January of 2018.

**Objective 3B. Leverage school and library broadband capacity to serve rural Maine.** High-speed broadband fiber has been extended to every school and local library in Maine. However, federal regulations (“E-Rate<sup>5</sup> rules”) limit the schools and libraries from allowing unused capacity to be made available to unserved nearby businesses, houses, and government buildings. NetworkMaine is working with libraries and schools to come up with creative ways to allow the unused broadband to be used locally, without diminishing the quality of service at those locations. The solution may also require asking the Congressional delegation to obtain changes to federal E-Rate rules.

*Measures of performance:* A model for making use of unused broadband capacity to assist area businesses and households is developed.

*Target:* At least ten rural libraries and schools implement rural access efforts.

*Timelines:* Model created in 2016, projects underway by 2017.

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<sup>5</sup> The federal E-Rate program helps schools and libraries to obtain affordable broadband <https://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/e-rate-schools-libraries-usf-program>

**Objective 3C. Formalize a Dig Once<sup>6</sup> practice among the ConnectME Authority, the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT), and other local utility services.** Informal coordination efforts now exist between MDOT and the ConnectME Authority in planning large road and bridge projects; this would formalize the effort, and expand it to include other infrastructure providers that participate in the Dig Once system.

*Measures of performance:* The holding of annual meetings.

*Target:* At least annual review of MDOT work plan with Maine Municipal Association representatives to identify potential projects for inclusion of broadband conduit.

*Timelines:* Develop and sign memoranda of understanding in 2016, hold first coordinating meeting in 2017.

#### **Implementation Strategy 4: Expand Broadband Investment in Maine.**

**Objective 4A. Seek public, administrative, and legislative support to repeal the statutory exemption for any facilities-based provider of wireless voice or data retail service that voluntarily chooses to be assessed by the ConnectME Authority pursuant to section 92511.** The ConnectME Authority fund is declining due to the shift of consumers from land line telephone service to cellular service. This change would stabilize the fund for the near future by broadening the base of the assessment.

*Measures of performance:* Passage and implementation of legislation.

*Target:* Stabilization of annual revenues in the ConnectME Authority fund.

*Timelines:* Legislative change in 2016, additional revenues in 2017.

**Objective 4B. Shift the current ConnectME Authority broadband infrastructure grant program to a “need-based” approach, targeting areas where no broadband service currently exists.** Establish a clear priority for helping those currently not served.

*Measures of performance:* Change program criteria for infrastructure grants

*Target:* Service to 500 homes or businesses per year currently not being served.

*Timelines:* Change of policy in 2016, implementation in 2016.

**Objective 4C. Create a 5-year Broadband Capital Improvements Program for Maine.** State funds should be the financier of last resort of broadband expansion, when

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<sup>6</sup> Coordinating broadband deployment with road projects can reduce the costs of broadband expansion

private investors will not provide needed service. State funds should be designed to incentivize and leverage private, federal and municipal funds to the greatest extent possible. It is generally agreed that current state funds available in Maine to stimulate broadband expansion are inadequate for these purposes. Many ideas for expanding assistance have been proposed: state bonds, revenue bonds, redirecting universal service funds. What is needed is a comprehensive look at projected overall broadband investment needs over the next five years, a projected role for state financing help, a recommendation for sources of funding for the effort, and recommendations for how to structure the assistance (grants, loans, auctions for serving uncovered areas, etc.). The Capital Improvements Plan should be prepared jointly by the ConnectME Authority and Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) staff.

*Measures of performance:* Production of a Capital Investment Plan.

*Target:* State broadband finance tools in place and funding assistance made available.

*Timelines:* Plan produced by July of 2016, finance tools and funding assistance in place by January of 2018.

**Objective 4D. Create a working partnership with Fairpoint for the implementation of its \$80 million “CAF-2” program<sup>77</sup> in Maine.**

Fairpoint is committed to assisting thousands of households in rural Maine to obtain broadband assistance in Maine in the next four years. The ConnectME Authority needs to closely coordinate with Fairpoint so that local communities can link in to the effort whenever possible. The ConnectME Authority will serve as the conduit to local officials in targeted geographies when there are upcoming projects and opportunities related to CAF-2.

*Measures of performance:* Quarterly coordination meetings between ConnectME Authority staff and Fairpoint staff.

*Target:* Through the coordination between Fairpoint and the ConnectME Authority, local community officials gain a voice in Fairpoint expansion plans.

*Timelines:* Coordination meetings start in January of 2016.

**Implementation Strategy 5: Raise broadband awareness and skills so that Maine residents and businesses recognize the value and benefits of broadband.**

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<sup>77</sup> Fairpoint has accepted federal Connect America Phase II funds for broadband expansion into FCC defined rural areas. A map of the 35,500 eligible locations in Maine, those colored dark green, is available on the Federal Communication Commission’s website, <https://www.fcc.gov/maps/fcc-connect-america-fund-phase-ii-initial-eligible-areas-map>

**Objective 5A. Continue and expand successful programs to promote digital literacy among consumers and businesses.** In recent years, federal grants have been available in Maine to promote computer literacy for low-income residents and social media marketing training for small businesses. The ConnectME Authority, the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development and others should work together to continue and broaden these efforts, for example with programs targeting seniors and providers around telehealth.

*Measures of performance:* Provision of training to 1,000 individuals and 50 businesses.

*Target:* Individuals access online services; businesses improve outcomes.

*Timelines:* Funding identified in 2016, put in place in 2017, training underway in 2018.

**Objective 5B. Create public-private advertising campaigns encouraging broadband use.** Surveys conducted by the ConnectME Authority in 2013 indicate that many Maine households do not see the value of having broadband, and many businesses do not see the value of an on-line presence. These attitudes contribute to lower-than-needed take rates of available broadband facilities, which in turn discourage private companies from expanding service coverage and quality. A joint advertising campaign, funded for the most part by private companies (who would be the financial beneficiaries of increased use), but led by ConnectME Authority staff, would contribute to changing the attitudes of Maine people. Efforts targeting Maine businesses, for example highlighting success stories, would encourage them to invest in websites and social and social media.

*Measures of performance:* ad campaigns in 2017 and 2018.

*Target:* Increased broadband adoption rates among Maine households; increased investment in digital communications among Maine businesses.

*Timelines:* Creation of public private planning committee in 2016, funds raised and production in 2017, ads in 2017 and 2018.

## **Implementation Strategy 6: Improve consumer broadband assistance.**

**Objective 6A. Provide consumer advice and assistance relative to broadband service in the Office of Public Advocate.** The Office of Public Advocate has dedicated staff and experience in handling consumer inquiries and complaints regarding utility services. Therefore, the Maine Office of Public Advocate should be designated as the state's broadband consumer assistance source, and the OPA should

report to the ConnectME Authority Board annually on emerging consumer broadband issues.

*Measures of performance:* Service to 100 consumers per year on broadband issues.

*Target:* Increased access and service quality for consumers.

*Timelines:* Implementation in 2015.

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## Appendix: Current Status of Broadband in Maine

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Given Maine’s ambitious broadband goals, how are we doing? Not as badly as some think, but not as well as we need to do.

### 1. Maine’s rate of connection to the internet is above the national average.

There has been a continuous growth in internet use over the last five years in Maine and in the nation (Figure 1). Maine’s use rate was 2% higher than the national average in 2009, and was 5% higher in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Most of this use is at least at the level of DSL broadband; only 1.1% of Maine households had dial-up internet as of 2014.<sup>9</sup> That’s the good news.

### 2. On the other hand, when it comes to access to critical higher speeds, Maine lags behind the nation.

Higher speed broadband is needed for telemedicine, for video production and editing, and for research and applications in the growing “big data” sector. Maine lags when it comes to this capacity. As of June 2014 in measurements reported by NTIA,<sup>10</sup> Maine’s access to broadband services with download speeds greater than 100 Mbps and upload speeds greater than 6 Mbps falls far below the national average.

#### *A note on broadband speed*

Broadband is available in different capabilities. The capability of a given service is defined, in part, by its speed in downloading information from the internet, as well as its speed in uploading information to send to others.

Speed is measured in kilobytes of data per second (Kbps), megabytes per second (Mbps), and gigabytes per second (Gbps). The download figure is given first, the upload figure second. The higher the speed, the greater the capability. Basic email functions can be served by 1 Mbps/1 Mbps. Streaming music may take 3 Mbps/1 Mbps. Sending x-rays to a hospital may take 100 Mbps/100 Mbps.

Different broadband technologies deliver different speeds. DSL, which transmits over telephone lines, can deliver speeds ranging from several hundred Kbps to millions of bits per second (Mbps). Cable typically provides speeds of 1.5 Mbps or more. Fiber transmits data at speeds far exceeding current DSL or cable modem speeds.

Because the uses of the internet are constantly changing and growing, the definition of what is considered sufficient broadband speed is constantly increasing. This year the FCC increased its benchmark for measuring broadband adequacy from 4 mbps/1 mbps to 25 mbps/3 mbps, and the ConnectME Authority has increased the minimum speed for infrastructure grants from 500 kbps/500 kbps to 10 mbps/10 mbps.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reports on Internet Access Services, 2009 through 2013. For purposes of these reports, internet is defined as 200 kbps either way.

<sup>9</sup> American Community Survey, 2014, one-year

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.broadbandmap.gov/summarize/state/maine>.

Figure 1: Household Use of Internet, 2009-2013, Maine and Nation

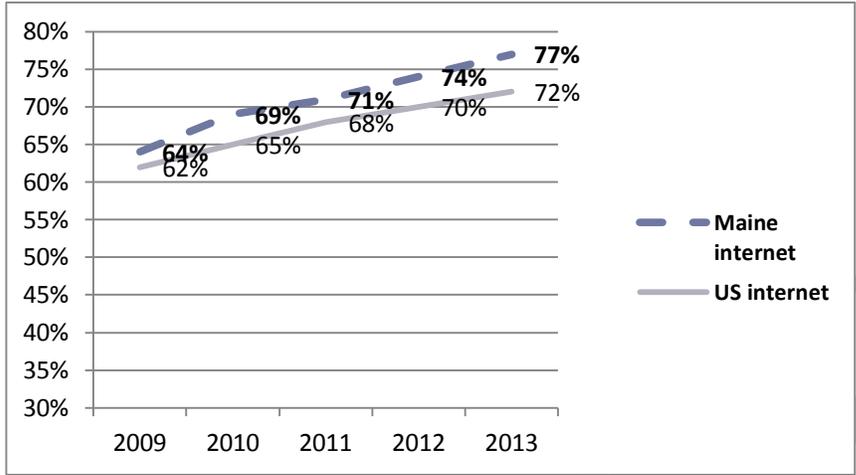
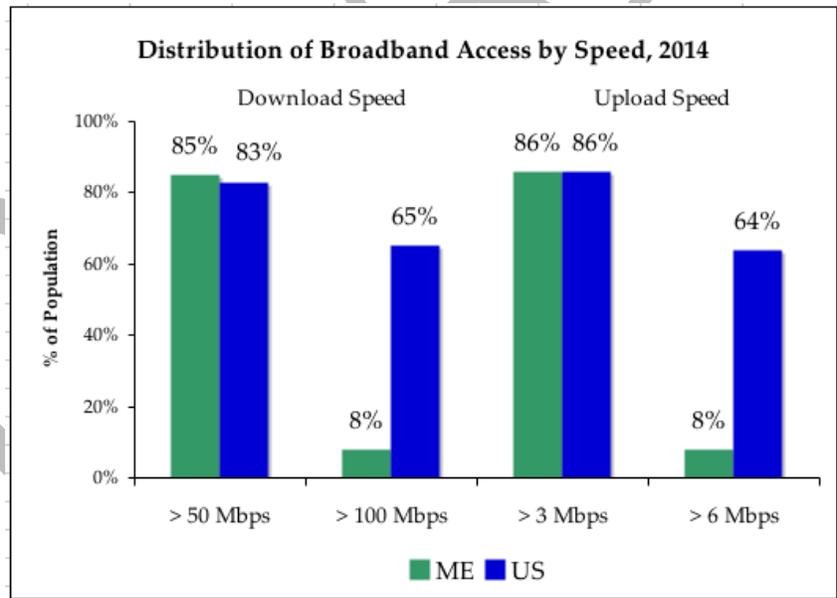


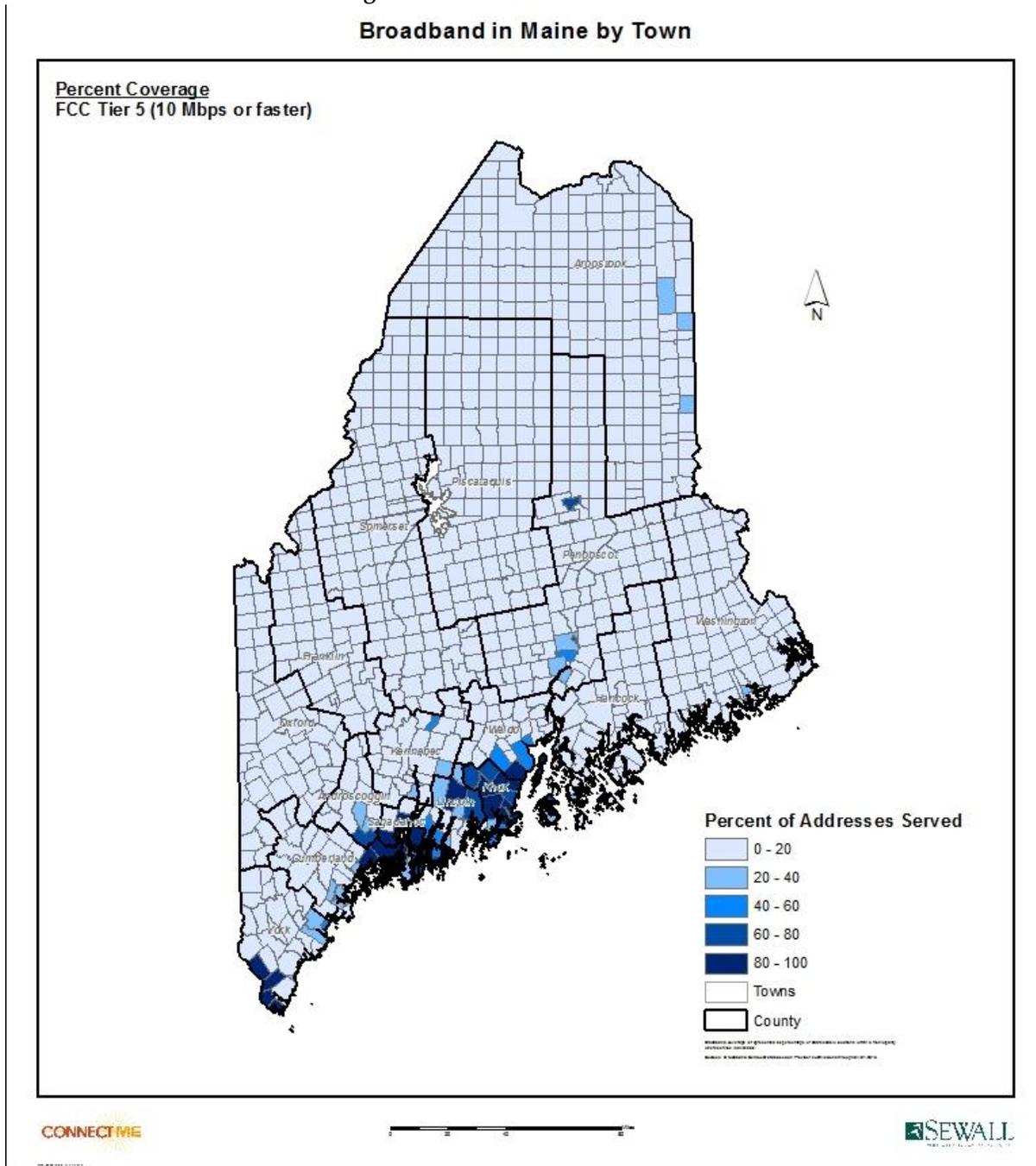
Figure 2: Broadband speed availability, Maine and the Nation



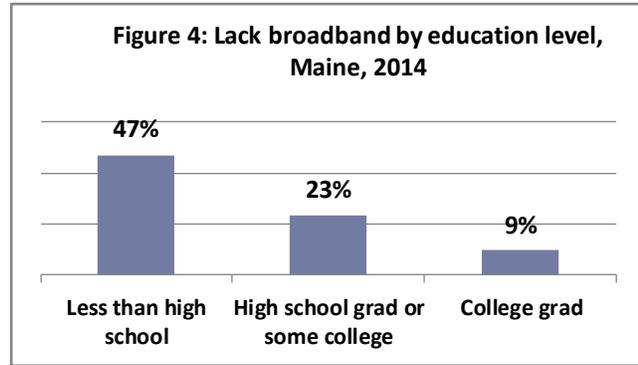
3. Rural Maine still has significant areas that are unserved or underserved.

The map below shows the areas of Maine unserved and underserved by broadband at 10 Mbps/10 Mbps. 10/10 is the current standard which applications must meet to qualify for ConnectME Authority infrastructure grants.

Figure 3: Underserved Areas of Maine  
Broadband in Maine by Town



The digital divide is not just geographic. It is also social. Maine citizens who are older, lower income, and unemployed, are less likely to have access to broadband. Lifelong learning is a major goal of our workforce system. But those who would have the most to benefit from online learning – those with less than a high school degree (see Figure 4) – are least likely to have a broadband connection.



#### **4. Maine has a growing business sector contributing directly to economic growth.**

Over the past three years, the number of businesses in the broadband sector in Maine has increased by 4.5% and their employment has increased by 18.3%, both rates far exceeding the national averages of 1.1% for businesses and 8.0% for employment<sup>11</sup>. The number of firms in the telecommunications sector increased from 243 to 254 between 2011 and 2014, outpacing national averages.

This has translated into benefits for Maine consumers. As of June 2014, Maine broadband consumers<sup>12</sup> had significantly more choices among broadband providers than the national average. 55% of Maine broadband users have access to 4 or more providers, compared to 19% nationally.

#### **5. Maine households and businesses are not taking full advantage of available broadband service.**

Provider data submitted to the FCC suggests that while many Maine broadband customers have access to higher speed download service, actual use in Maine is much lower than the national average. For example, among Maine households with access to 10 Mbps down, actual median use is only 5.3 Mbps. For 3 Mbps up, actual median use is only .5 Mbps.

The lower use rates are an obstacle to broadband infrastructure investment. A recent study<sup>13</sup> for an upgraded service in Rockport found 65% to 70% of customers along the line needed to sign up in order for the investment to break even, but that the initial indication is that only 14% would sign up for a \$75+/month service that provided 10 to 100 times faster service than they currently had.

<sup>11</sup> The telecommunications sector is defined as NAICS Codes 517, Telecommunications, 518, Data processing, hosting and related services, and 519130, Internet publishing and web search portals.

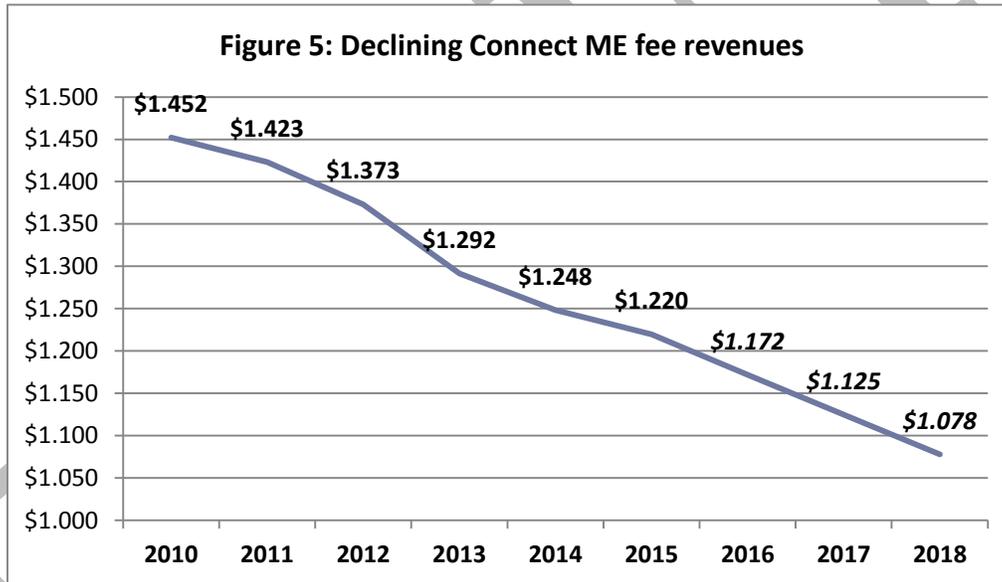
<sup>12</sup> FCC <http://www.broadbandmap.gov/summarize/state/maine>.

<sup>13</sup> Rockland, Rockport and Owl's Head Broadband Plan and Network Designs, Tilson, September 2015

## 6. Available funds for Maine public broadband investment are declining

Over the past nine years, the ConnectME Authority has made 122 grants totaling \$9.8 million. Including accompanying provider investments, this public investment has translated into \$18.4 million in total broadband investment, making broadband available to 37,600 unserved or underserved Maine households.

But the funds for these investments are drying up. The federal stimulus funding, which helped build the 3-ring binder, is finished. The Maine Broadband Sustainability Fee<sup>14</sup> ended on October 15, 2015; it had provided up to \$20,000 a month for private providers to expand broadband. Finally, the ConnectME fee, the bread and butter support for the organization, which depends in part on landline telephone use, has been declining and will continue to decline steadily as more and more Maine consumers drop land-line service. That fee must support ConnectME Authority staff, infrastructure grants, and as of this year, planning grants.



Source: Connect ME (note: 2016-2019 are projections and are in italics)

## 7. Maine people are frustrated that progress is not fast enough.

In the fall of 2015, the Connect ME Authority held public meetings as part of the strategic planning process. Here are some of the themes that emerged.

Many people commented on the difficulty they experienced in operating a home-based business, or in telecommuting, and the loss of income and jobs that a lack of broadband causes.

*I am a documentary editor who works from home in the town of Liberty, in Waldo County. I'm losing jobs. More and more people I want to work with are telling me that*

<sup>14</sup> A state surcharge on the federally funded 3 Ring Binder

*my internet upload speed isn't fast enough. They won't even consider me. I am not the only business or person who works in town and needs a faster internet.*

Others talked about how the lack of broadband put their children behind others in their classes, because they couldn't do homework in their homes; or hurt their ability to get higher education degrees.

*In order to pursue higher education, I have to move closer to my university or I need a better Internet connection for online classes. In order for me to effectively work in my field, I need internet connection or I need to move. If I move, all the education and experience I've gained, move with me. It is hard enough keeping people in rural Maine. I want to stay but find I am being forced to leave for education and work.*

Some testified that they couldn't sell their houses because of a lack of broadband. Finally, one person made an eloquent statement about the importance of broadband to rural Maine:

*People living in rural coastal and island communities across Maine hope to have the same opportunities as the rest of the country: to make a living, to raise a family, to access healthcare, to educate their children and themselves, and to share their experiences with others. If we expect to sustain the quality of life in Maine, then we need to connect the state with the rest of the country and provide innovative ways for Mainers to make a living, access healthcare and education, and reach businesses and customers. Slow or unreliable internet connection is no longer an option if we want to sustain Maine's rural communities. It's imperative that rural Maine can access and afford broadband. Think about where blueberries, broccoli, potatoes, timber, mussels, clams and lobster come from. Adding to that tourism, our rural communities significantly contribute to the economic wellbeing of this state. Most of Maine's island and remote coastal communities have incredibly slow and unreliable internet access. They cannot rely on only their neighbors as their customers or as their second employers. Broadband opens up so many possibilities for a second household income, for 21st century education and healthcare, and to reach markets beyond individual communities or states.*

This is the challenge.