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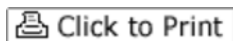
President Barack Obama's home state of Hawaii was ranked 49th in broadband speeds among the country's 50 states by *PC Magazine*. The state's median surf speed is 1.68 megabits per second (mbps), which can't compare to Japanese broadband speeds of about 63.6 mbps — more than 30 times faster than Hawaii.

In addition to its unenviable broadband position, Hawaii's average in mathematics, reading, science and writing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress has been habitually below the national average. Broadband access could enhance outcomes for Hawaii students. The state's decision-makers are realizing that they need to create more opportunities to engage students.

In 2007, the Hawaii Broadband Taskforce was created in order to make broadband Internet service more available and affordable in the state. The 14-member group consists of Senate and House members; federal, state and county entities; and private sector representatives. Its responsibilities include:
removing barriers to broadband access;
identifying opportunities for increased broadband development and adoption; and
enabling the creation and development of new, advanced communication technologies in Hawaii.
At the end of 2008, the taskforce presented a final report to the Legislature. Its recommendations were expected to lay the framework for retooling the state's infrastructure in order to keep pace with a growing demand for high bandwidth.

The proposed legislation calls for the establishment of a Hawaiian communications commission that would be a combination regulatory agency and consumer-industry advocate. The proposal would help drag Hawaii out of the United States' broadband cellar. It would also provide the steps necessary to change Hawaii's economy from a travel- and tourism-based market to a knowledge-based financial market.

"Because we are so far from the rest of the continental United States," said Hawaii Sen. Carol Fukunaga, "high-speed broadband is really one of the things that would really kind of tie us in with the rest of the country as well as promote a lot more economic diversification."

Source: www.speedmatters.org, Information Technology and Innovation Foundation

With the introduction of accelerated broadband, Hawaii could see a total economic stimulus of $578 million a year, including the addition of 10,284 jobs, according to a February 2008 report from Connected Nation, a District of Columbia-based technology advocacy and research group.

In January 2009, two broadband bills based on the taskforce's suggestions were introduced by the State Administration, Senate Majority, House Majority and House Minority. The legislation intended to provide access to broadband communications for all Hawaiians by 2012, at speeds and prices comparable to the top three performing countries in the world. In April, the bills were deferred.

Sen. Fukunaga said that wireless providers, cable companies and local carriers were concerned that they would be adversely affected by the telecom and cable regulations.

"Basically," she said, "they just saw the specter of something more in the future and they kind of just wanted to wait and to ensure that

they wouldn't lose their own competitive advantages."

From this point, Sen. Fukunaga said, the bill can be re-introduced next year, or a new version of the broadband bill could be presented. If passed, she said, Hawaii would be able to build up industries such as life sciences and creative media as well as harness renewable and alternative energies.

"Having high-speed broadband access," she said, "would dramatically increase our ability to grow these sectors of the economy."
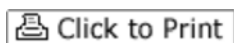
Special thanks to Jeff Piontek, who contributed to this article.

*This story is from *Converge* magazine's Summer 2009 issue.

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http://www.convergemag.com/edtech/Broadband-Hawaii.html

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