



Status Report to the Joint Committee on Information Management and Technology

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### **Introduction and History**

The 2000 Oregon legislature created the Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council as an interim task force by SB 765. The legislative directive to the Council is to

- 1) Study alternative approaches to providing coordinated statewide, regional and local telecommunications services, including providing services to unserved or underserved areas of the state; and
- 2) Study the manner in which telecommunications investments can be coordinated to facilitate partnerships between the public sector and the private sector and between state and local governments.

The Council is directed to report its findings to the Governor and the Joint Legislative Committee on Information Management and Technology. This is the Council's third report to the Joint Committee.

The Council is eager to keep the Joint Committee up to date on its work, and wishes to request that, at a convenient time for the Joint Committee, the Council might have sufficient time to discuss the Council's work. It is, however, the Council's opinion that the present meeting of the Joint Committee is not the best time to have such a meeting. This is based on an acknowledgement of the difficult schedule of the Joint Committee, and the Council's assessment of the nature of the Council's progress.

### **Council Focus Thus Far: Review of Substantive Issues**

While the Council has begun to develop thoughts on several policy recommendations, the Council's focus so far has been on gathering information concerning the many important issues related to telecommunications and telecommunications deployment in Oregon.

As discussed in the last Council report, the Council formed several committees to allow the Council members to more intensely focus on some of the most important issues.

Since the last report the Council has an Education Committee, joining the Council's Telehealth, Legislative Guidelines, Community Outreach, Public-Private Initiatives and Government Services Committees.

These Committees have gathered information and brought that information back to the Council. The Council has had some very helpful discussions concerning, for example, the potential of telecommunications as a means for better health care for rural Oregon. In this area, and in other areas, the Council is discovering that the barriers to improved services through improved telecommunications seems to involve issues of education and non-telecommunications related policy changes as much as the issues concern technical or policy changes in the area of telecommunications. The Council has been encouraged to find that the legislature's foresight in creating a Council to bring together experts and interested parties to solve problems through coordinating telecommunications issues with other concerns is already proving valid.

The Council has also had a continuing discussion with the Oregon Public Utility Commission. At the Council's last meeting PUC Commissioner Joan Smith visited the Council and provided Council members with a great deal of insight and information concerning state and federal regulatory policies related to telecommunications. The Council has scheduled additional meetings with PUC Chair John Hemmingway and PUC Commissioner Lee Beyer.

This discussion has very much been in the information gathering context. The Council has not focused on the PUC as an area where the Council expects to make policy recommendations. The Council sought these discussions in part because the PUC is one area of extensive day-to-day contacts between government and the private telecommunications industry. The Council felt that it could learn a great deal about government relationships with the telecommunications industry from the PUC. Given the Council's mandate to work on finding ways that the public and the private sector can work together on the shared goal of improving telecommunications services, the Council felt that it was appropriate to have these discussion with the PUC.

The Council has begun, on a very preliminary basis to discuss the outline of what policy recommendations it might eventually report to the legislature and the governor. As we indicated at the beginning of this report, the Council hopes that, as it moves toward more specific concepts of these policy recommendations, the Council might be able to return to the Joint Committee, to provide the Committee with a picture of the Council's thoughts, and then receive from the Committee their individual thoughts on the Council's preliminary ideas.

The work of the Council is well underway with significant effort remaining. We are experiencing excellent cooperation from all parties and look forward to continuing our studies toward developing sound, balanced recommendations for the future of Oregon telecommunications policy.