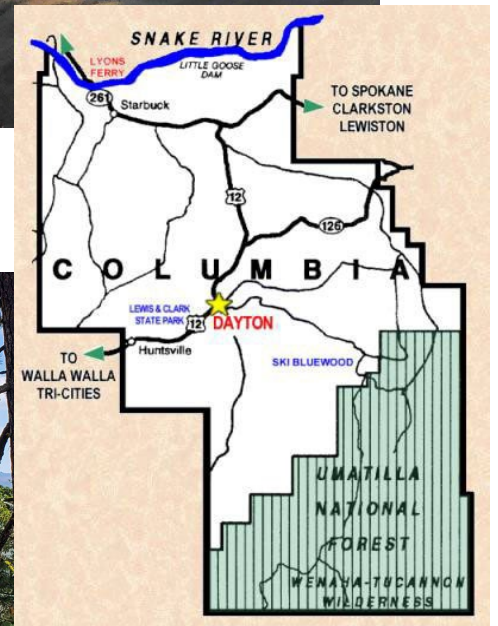


Broadband & Digital Equity Local Action Plan

Columbia County

June 14, 2023



Introduction/State of the County

Columbia County is located in the southeast corner of Washington State 30 miles northeast of Walla Walla. The county covers only 868.63 square miles of land, ranking 31st in size among Washington's 39 counties.¹ Columbia County's total population is estimated at 4,026 for 2022, which is just over 4 people per square mile.² The county seat is Dayton with a population of 2,448, and the only other town in the county is Starbuck, population 119³.

Columbia County's primary industry is agriculture thanks to our rich, fertile soil. The county is geographically diverse, with Oregon Butte at 6,500 feet elevation in the Blue Mountains to the south, and 500 feet elevation at our northern border, the Snake River. What lies between are undulating hills and deep valleys, great for farming but not so great for the deployment of broadband.

Households (HH):	2,244	Population:	4,026
People under 18	17.9%	Populations per square mile:	4.5
People 65 and older:	28.6%	White alone:	89.8%
Female residents	50.6%	Hispanic:	8.5%
HH with a computer:	94.0%	Veterans:	408
HH with internet service:	75.0%	Foreign born:	3.6%
Median HH income:	\$64,688	HH with language other than English:	5.2%
Persons in poverty:	13.2%	People under 65 with disability:	14.4%

Source: Census.gov

Columbia County's farmers have shown great capacity for adaptation to combat erosion, reduce field burning, and increase yields to try to stay ahead of rising input costs. An emerging practice

¹ Columbia County Profile (updated June 2022), WA Employment Security Dept.

² Census.gov

³ Ofm.wa.gov

that requires adequate internet service is called Precision Ag, or Precision Farming. This is defined as a farming management concept based on observing, measuring, and responding to inter- and intra-field variability in crops⁴. Precision Ag uses information technology to ensure that crops and soil receive exactly what they need, in the right quantity (like fertilizer) to optimize crop health and productivity. This practice can reduce the use of chemicals while creating higher yields, and more revenue, for farmers. Real-time data needs to be accessed to employ these practices, making broadband access across the rolling wheat fields of our county imperative.

While agriculture is still Columbia County's primary economic driver, changes to the industry over the past 50 years have negatively affected Columbia County's population and economy. The mechanization of agriculture reduced the number of jobs available, causing youth to leave the community for jobs elsewhere. The consolidation of agribusinesses into regional population centers put Dayton's Main Street in severe decline and drastically reduced revenues (sales tax) collected by city and county governments. Now we face the trend of absentee landowners, whose income is not spent in the county from which it was derived. Dayton was once home to the largest asparagus cannery in the world, which was moved to Peru in 2005. The community has worked hard to overcome these challenges and diversify its economy through historic preservation, tourism and new business development, and has identified broadband as a critical part of that diversification strategy. We simply must be attractive enough for businesses to locate here and people to want to live here in order to survive, and broadband is a very important part of making that happen.

Columbia County residents aged 65 and over was measured at 28.6% at the 2020 census.⁵ Health insurance companies continue to seek ways to keep costs down by keeping older residents in their own homes longer, which makes the ability to provide telehealth service, and home monitoring services, more and more important. This cannot happen with adequate internet service.

The Columbia County Broadband Action Team's (BAT) vision is to ensure all residents, businesses, and community facilities in Columbia County have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband infrastructure and support digital literacy to meet current and future economic development, agricultural, public welfare, health care, educational, digital equity, and quality of life needs. A good cross section of governments, nonprofits, internet service providers, anchor institutions, and businesses participate in our BAT and have provided input for this action plan. Additional information from a Rapid Design Study completed in April of 2023, input from Petrichor, a consortium of Port Districts assisting with state-wide deployment, and on-the-ground

⁴ Techtargget.com

⁵ Census.gov

information from fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) projects currently under construction here, have informed this plan.

We have made great progress on broadband in the last 2 years due to the leadership of the Port of Columbia. The Dayton Community Broadband FTTH project is currently under construction in the City of Dayton and its adjacent areas, and the Touchet Valley Broadband Project that will serve premises from the edge of Dayton to the west along the Highway 12 corridor is in the design phase. Both of these projects are fully funded, thanks in part to COVID fiscal recovery funds that we were able to use as match. What's left to serve in our county is extremely challenging due to our topography, line of sight issues, the vast distances between premises, limited number of customers, lack of return on investment for private sector development, and the lack of local funds to provide match for grants funds or take on debt.

Number of premises that will be served with two current fiber projects: 1,341

Number of households remaining: 719

Results of the Rapid Design Study show the physical and financial difficulty in reaching the remaining 719 household in our county with fiber to the premise. In fact, the last 83 premises are estimated to cost between \$200,000 and \$300,000 each to reach with fiber. This sentence from the recommendations section of the study sums it up pretty well:

“Unlike some communities, the options for Columbia boil down to one option. Get as much fiber installed which can be funded by grants. Essentially with less than 1 household per square mile, coupled with hostile terrain, there are no inexpensive options.”

Abstract

Broadband

- **Areas of greatest need**
 - Town of Starbuck
 - Sparsely populated rural areas outside of Dayton (which is the majority of the county land area)
- **Unserved/underserved locations and/or areas**
 - Lack of middle-mile infrastructure through much of the county, including the Starbuck area
 - Difficult and spotty public safety communication throughout the county - topographical challenges which cause communication tower and cell coverage issues
- **Previous successes or existing work that can be built on**
 - Dayton Community Broadband Project - Port-owned open-access FTTH project currently under construction in and around Dayton

- Touchet Valley Broadband Project - Port-owned open-access FTTH project currently in the design phase that will take fiber 6 miles to the west of Dayton along the Highway 12 corridor
- Potential extension of fiber infrastructure by Port of Walla Walla to Prescott area (adjacent county), which would enable a portion of northwestern Columbia County to be served
- **Key partners**
 - Port of Columbia, Columbia County, City of Dayton, Dayton School District, Starbuck School District, Columbia iConnect, Inland Cellular, PocketiNet
- **Optional: Project areas, cost estimates/funding needed, ranking if needed**
 - Middle mile connections from the Tucannon area past Starbuck to Washtucna (located in an adjacent county)
 - Extension of Dayton Community Broadband south to more dense, rural areas along North and South Touchet Roads
 - Fiber to the Home, hybrid solutions, and possibly satellite service subsidies, to serve the remainder of the rural areas of the county
- **Most prominent obstacles that have impeded broadband deployment to unserved areas**
 - Topography - steep hills and valleys throughout the county, trees
 - Cost to reach sparsely populated areas
 - Cost of satellite (Starlink)
 - Lack of market case for private sector deployment
 - Lack of local funds for match or debt service
- **Next steps: Sustainability plan, needs to maintain momentum**
 - Cross check premises on map with those that have electric service
 - The Columbia County BAT will work with the Port of Columbia and the ISPs serving the county to refine the results of the Rapid Design Study and develop project areas for funding application submissions to BEAD and other programs.
 - The Port will consider contracting with Petrichor for assistance defining project areas and funding sources.

Digital Equity

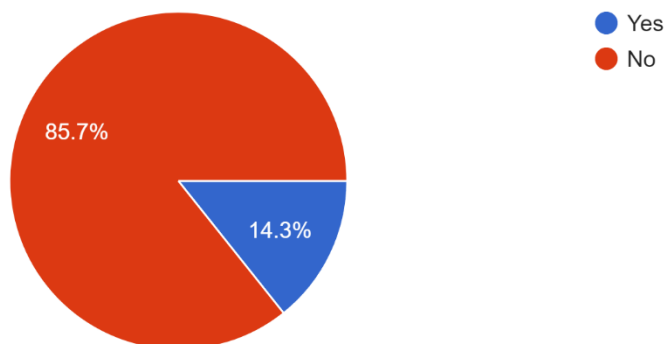
- **Areas of greatest need including geographic areas, sectors and populations**
 - Rural residents, disabled populations, aging individuals, veterans, children in foster care
 - No specific geographic area - scattered throughout the county
- **Most prominent barriers to digital equity among the covered populations**
 - Lack of knowledge of services that are available, difficulty in communicating with those in need
 - Lack of workforce to provide one-on-one training
- **Most prominent barriers to the successful provision of digital inclusion services**
 - Lack of one-on-one Digital Navigation services within the community
 - Lack of internet access to participate in online assistance
- **Previous successes or existing work that can be leveraged**
 - Digital Literacy courses at the library.

- Digital Navigation services provided by the Washington Dept of Veterans Affairs
- Computer equipment provided by the Dayton School District
- **Key partners**
 - Columbia County Rural Library District, Dayton School District, Starbuck School District, Blue Mountain Action Council, YWCA, Community Council, Walla Walla Community College, Columbia County Health System, Washington Dept of Veterans Affairs, WorkSource Walla Walla
- **Potential projects or programs to address the needs and barriers**
 - Prepare resource guide in many formats to provide to the public
 - Address lack of one-on-one digital navigation services being offered here by both Goodwill and WA Dept of Veterans Affairs
 - Engage high school students to help as digital navigators
- **Next steps: Sustainability plan, needs to maintain momentum**
 - Continue monthly BAT meetings to put our plan into action.
 - Identify Digital Equity lead agency.
 - Work with organizations that are serving covered populations create digital equity plans and priorities.

From Digital Equity Assets Survey:

Does your organization have a digital equity plan or formally identified digital equity priorities?

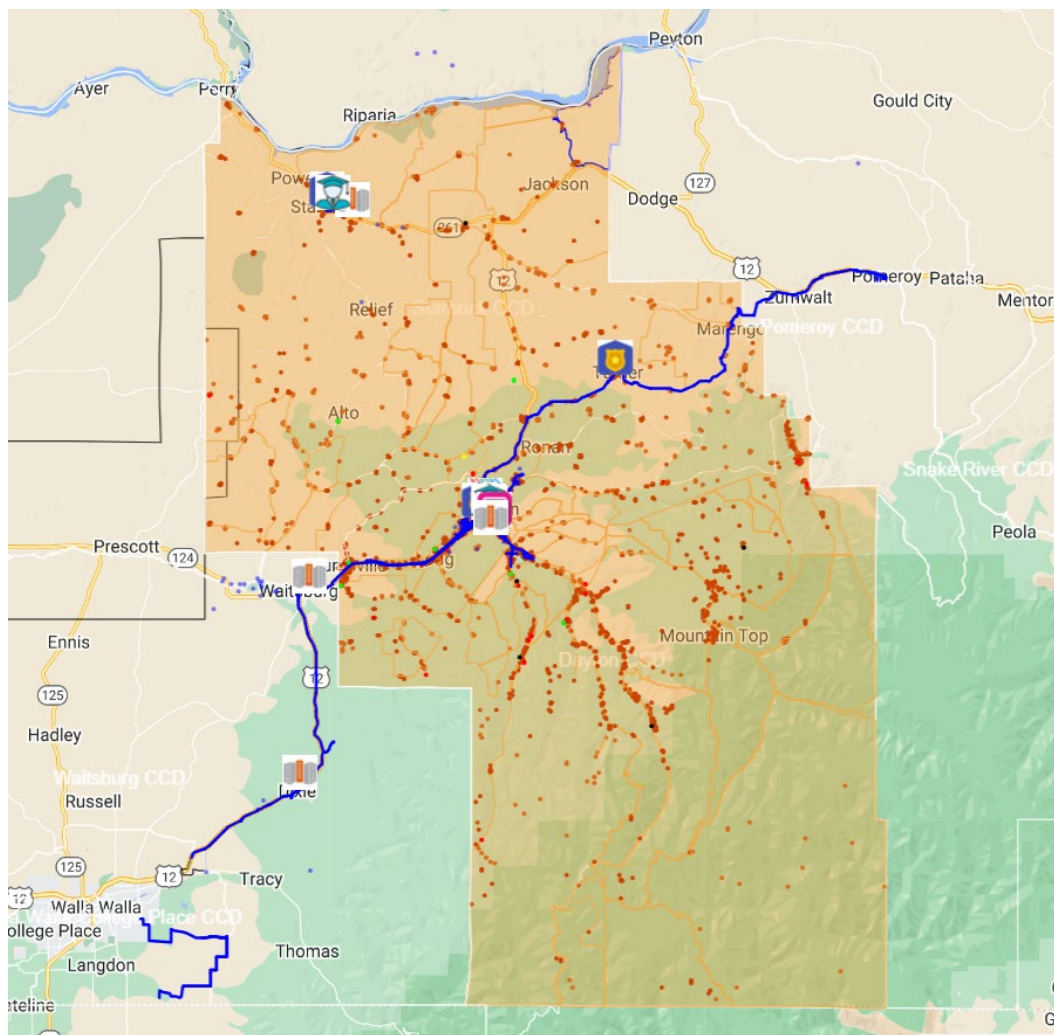
14 responses



Broadband Infrastructure Summary

I. Broadband Base Map Review

The map below for Columbia County shows the “scattershot” locations of rural homes, clearly reflecting the sparsely populated rural areas and the great distances that must be bridged to reach our rural residents. Outside of the Port FTTH project areas around Dayton and to the west along Highway 12, our county is completely un- or under-served.



While the information on our map clearly shows the need for broadband in 100% of the rural areas, none of the demographic layers (such as income levels) provide useful geographic area information because the entire county is only one census tract.

II. Local Broadband Asset Inventory

Many of the local broadband assets in our area have already been identified and are being used

by Columbia iConnect, a local ISP that has attempted to deliver fixed wireless service to as much of the rural area as possible. Unfortunately, the hills and valleys of the county have made this very difficult and are a barrier to Columbia iConnect providing faster service. Grant funds to extend fiber to the home as well as fiber nodes and some sort of hybrid solution are needed.

Organizations currently serving our community with broadband assets

Organization	Assets
Dayton School District	School
Starbuck School	School
Columbia County Rural Library District	Library Building in Dayton
Port of Columbia	Dark Fiber System with Colocation Center
	Railroad Right-of-Way for Fiber Placement
Puget Sound Energy/Portland General Electric	Wind Towers
Columbia County Public Hospital District #1	Data Center with Rack Space
Northwest Grain Growers	Grain Elevators
Columbia County	Communications Towers at Thorn, Delany, Starbuck and Weinhard Hill
Noanet	Middle Mile Through Portions of County
Lumen	Middle Mile Through Portions of County
Lewis & Clark Trail and Camp Wooten State Parks	Potential Tower Location Partners
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation	Rainwater Wildlife Area in Blue Mountains Forested Area to the South
US Army Corps of Engineers	Little Goose Dame (Potential Snake River Crossing)

Upcoming projects that may allow for Conduit/Fiber/Infrastructure Placement

There are no known projects at this time that would allow for conduit or fiber placement. Columbia County is a good partner that will make sure we are aware of any potential road or other projects that we could coordinate with.

Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) being well served

Please note that the following institutions self-reported satisfaction with service, even though some of them do not receive speeds that meet state or federal standards. This is an example of “you don’t know what you don’t know,” meaning they may not know the opportunities they are

missing with higher internet speeds.

- Columbia County
- Dayton School District
- Northwest Grain Growers
- Columbia County Rural Library District
- Columbia County Public Hospital District #1
- Tucannon Fish Hatchery
- City of Dayton

ISPs currently serving our community (potential partners for upcoming work)

CenturyLink	Copper
Charter Communications	Cable
Columbia iConnect	Licensed- & Unlicensed-Fixed-Wireless
HughesNet	GSO-Satellite
Inland Cellular	Not on official FCC list, but provide wireless service here.
Inland Telephone Company	Copper
NoaNet	Fiber-to-the-Premises
PocketiNet	Licensed-Fixed-Wireless (Some FTTx in downtown Dayton)
Starlink	NGSO-Satellite
StarTouch	Unlicensed-Fixed-Wireless
T-Mobile US	Licensed-Fixed-Wireless
Viasat, Inc.	GSO-Satellite

List of ISPs that responded to the survey and their answers to the question “Are you interested in working with our Broadband Team to address broadband needs in the community? If yes, how? (Participate in meetings, help with projects, sponsor events, etc.)?”

- PocketiNet – “Yes, we are interested in helping and possibly sponsoring events to promote our Internet services through the Port of Columbia”
- Lumen – “meetings”
- Inland Power – “yes for participating in a BAT”
- Columbia iConnect – “we are already on the BAT”
- Inland Cellular – “Yes. We can have someone try and attend the current BAT meetings to help with current information and ideas to help the communities.”
- Charter/Spectrum – “Yes. Charter Communications is interested in participating in your Broadband Team as it deploys its project in Dayton and assess other opportunities in the

county. Charter is proud to be recognized by Newsweek as one of America’s Most Trusted Companies 2023 and proud that its Spectrum Internet has been consecutively ranked as one of the best internet providers by US News & World Report – earning the highest rating among the Best Internet Service Providers for Rural Areas. We welcome opportunities to engage and connect additional unserved homes and businesses and Columbia County.”

Organizations providing data for our community broadband map and details on current speeds/pricing

Organization	Notes on Internet Speeds/Pricing Options
Port of Columbia	Local Asset
Puget Sound Energy	Local Asset
Starbuck School District	Local Asset
Dayton School District	Local Asset
Columbia County Rural Library District	Local Asset
Columbia County Public Hospital District #1	Local Asset
Northwest Grain Growers	Local Asset
Emerge by Inland Cellular	ISP
Lumen	ISP
Columbia iConnect	ISP
Inland Power	ISP
PocketiNet	ISP
Charter	ISP

III. Broadband Infrastructure Needs Assessment

Community Anchor Institutions that need improved services or where cost of services is too high

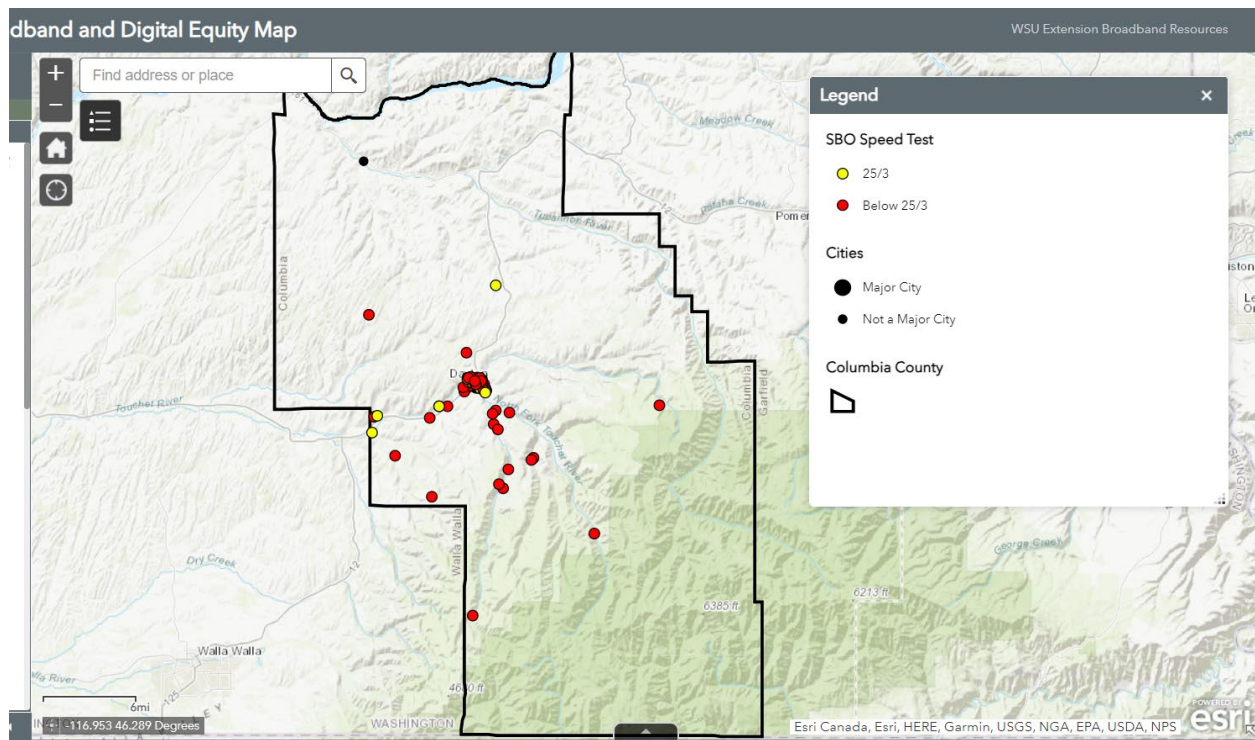
When NoaNet came through Dayton with their middle mile project in 2010, they provided broadband service to most of the anchor institutions, but not all of them. It is unclear why this happened.

- The Port of Columbia reports inadequate speed, but will be served by the Dayton Community Broadband Project.
- Puget Sound Energy, the owner of two large wind farms, reports inadequate service. Their Maintenance & Operations Center is located in the hard-to-reach rural area of the county.
- Starbuck School District reported inadequate service, which is in the town of Starbuck where no accessible middle mile fiber exists. Columbia iConnect currently serves Starbuck with fixed wireless service, but struggles with backhaul and line-of-sight issues.
- Columbia County Public Safety - communications are difficult throughout the county for fire, police, ambulance, and emergency services in general, which affects their ability to serve the public.

Areas lacking broadband

All rural areas outside of the City of Dayton and the Highway 12 corridor west of Dayton, which are both in the Port of Columbia FTTH project areas, lack broadband service and are very difficult to reach.

Speed tests are hard to gather in the rural areas, but this sample of State Broadband Office Speed Test Results shows how inadequate service is county-wide. It also shows how difficult it is to conduct speed tests in the rural, un- and under-served areas!



Areas where the cost of services may be too high for the average household

Affordability is an issue throughout the county. Because the entirety of Columbia County is only one census tract, we don't have geographic-specific income information. Our Rapid Design Study shows that taking fiber to every home that is currently unserved is prohibitively expensive for at least 83 premises in the remote areas. That might make Starlink the best option, yet it is too expensive for most households and therefore not an option without some sort of subsidy. The speed of Starlink also diminishes as the number of users increases. They have increased their price in areas of heavy use in our county to try to reduce oversubscription. This is not an acceptable way to provide broadband to our residents.

IV. Obstacles And Barriers To Broadband Infrastructure Deployment

Challenges to broadband deployment

- Challenging hilly terrain, steep canyons, and lots of trees
- Missing middle-mile infrastructure in Tucannon River Valley, near Starbuck, most of the northern end of the county, south into the Blue Mountains.

Financial gaps preventing infrastructure investment

- Cost of extending fiber long distances to rural, remote areas
- Cost of navigating hilly terrain
- Inflation causing cost of materials to skyrocket
- Material shortages
- Lack of local match
- Make-ready and ongoing pole attachment costs
- Inability to service debt
- Cost of insurance
- Cost to complete federal grant applications and manage federal projects, costs of federal audits
- Small number of customers makes private investment unattractive

Workforce gaps

- Lack of workforce in general can be a barrier to project development. If multiple projects are being built at the same time, there may be a skilled worker shortage. This could affect pole attachment work, permitting, etc. When the Port put our Dayton Community Broadband Project out to bid, we got 3 bids ranging from \$2,039,871 to \$4,200,000. These companies do not exist locally. We rely on regional contractors from outside the

county to perform this work. Additionally, all of the poles are owned by PacifiCorp. They have been responsive, but they are struggling with adequate workforce as well. Staff has had to reach out repeatedly to accomplish this work. Local, positive relationships helped accomplish this. Some of our really remote builds may not have enough revenue to maintain the system, particularly for middle-mile infrastructure and for emergency repairs such as those caused by a wildfire.

- The Port of Columbia has been fortunate to build relationships with existing design, construction, and material supply companies through their two current FTTH projects. These relationships will help with future projects.

Policy barriers

- The southern portion of Columbia County is heavily forested with much of it in the Umatilla National Forest. This may create challenges for deployment up the North and South Touchet Roads as they enter US Forest Service-owned land. It is also unclear how many premises in the forest have electricity. Permitting and environmental requirements may be onerous and have inhibited prior non-fiber utility projects in this area.
- State SEPA requirements do not appear to be consistent across the state related to telecommunications construction. The RCW states that telecommunications wire extensions are exempt from SEPA, yet state agencies continue to require SEPA for state-funded projects. We need a consistent system across the state.
- Tower zoning restrictions could cause difficulty

Community awareness issues

- There are segments of our population that do not value broadband and have at times been vocally opposed to projects. This can affect providing service to others that do value broadband. This can also affect the future of our community. If we do not have broadband service, young people and families will be less likely to live and work here.

Geographic and environmental issues

- Topography - our rolling hills, deep valleys, and trees inhibit wireless service due to line of sight issues. We have an ISP that has covered a large portion of the county with wireless service, but it does not meet minimum standards due to the physical limitation of a wireless system. The sparse rural populations and distance between premises makes fiber to the home very expensive. We also have waterways that can affect construction or cut us off from connecting with adjacent counties.

Other barriers

- Elected officials play a key role in the deployment of broadband. In order to build public, open access projects, coordination among local governments for the use of either grant

funds or local funds is needed, especially to meet matching fund requirements. We have encountered citizens and elected officials that believe private sector investment is the answer to our broadband issues, when our own history and the Rapid Design financial analysis shows that has not been, and likely won't be, the answer in a community with such a limited number of customers and such a challenging topography.

V. Potential Paths Forward

Planned expansion areas

Our goal is to provide broadband to all residents in the county.

- Extend Port-owned fiber south on the North and South Touchet Roads. Potential expansion of middle-mile infrastructure in that area first.
- Construct middle-mile infrastructure from the Tucannon Valley, past Starbuck to Washtucna. Extend last-mile service to Tucannon Valley residents and the Town of Starbuck.
- Refine the information from the Rapid Design Study to determine a strategy for serving the sparsely populated areas of the county.
- Explore the idea of subsidizing Starlink for residences that are extremely difficult to reach.

Possible funding sources

- CERB
- Public Works Board
- State Broadband Office
- NTIA
- USDA
- BEAD

Petrichor has been a wonderful partner in helping the Port of Columbia determine viable project areas and identify funding sources for fiber projects. With the information provided in our Rapid Design Study, we may use some of our WSU planning funds to contract with Petrichor to help us lay out a funding plan, and potentially even help with grant writing and management.

Local leadership

- The Port of Columbia is willing to continue taking the lead on broadband planning and deployment along with Columbia County and our other community partners.
- Partners include Columbia County, Dayton and Starbuck School Districts, Columbia iConnect, Inland Cellular, PocketiNet, Northwest Grain Growers, Blue Mountain Action Council, Columbia County Hospital District #1.

- The BAT will continue to meet monthly and refine the information from the Rapid Design Study and make recommendations on infrastructure improvements.

Workforce solutions

- Explore partnerships with schools in the region, including Walla Walla Community College, to encourage technical skills training needed for broadband work..
- Support workforce housing and childcare organizations in order to make Columbia County an attractive place to work.

Policy solutions

- Accountability and financial consequences (and enforcement) for the ISP challenge process.
- Creations of a state insurance fund to help counties that do not have the tax base to fund maintenance and repair on BEAD funds are spent, especially recovery related to wind storm or wildfire damage.
- Create consistent broadband permitting requirements statewide.
- Create a fund for matching funds for rural counties that do not have adequate local resources.
- Explore the idea of the creation of a fund and policy for subsidies for satellite broadband service to remote locations.
- Encourage cross-county partnerships to address middle-mile gaps.

Upcoming municipal projects & conduit placement

- None known at this time.

Digital Equity Summary

I. Demographic Base Map Review

Public data does/does not accurately reflect our local population characteristics

- The map is accurate in the fact that it shows the high percentage of rural population in our county and homes that are great distances from each other.
- The map is inaccurate regarding demographic information because the county consists of only one census block. We cannot determine other covered population centers or areas of financial need geographically and would need more information to do so.

Areas that appear to lack digital equity resources

- Rural areas (outside Dayton City limits) and the Town of Starbuck. There may be pockets inside the City of Dayton, but the map does not show them.

Covered populations that are prevalent in our community

- The map does not provide very much information. Other sources of data and surveys show the following:
 - Individuals with disabilities
 - Aging populations
 - Individuals who primarily reside in a rural area
 - Populations whose income is under 150% of the federal poverty level
 - Children and youth in foster care (not a high number, but an important population)
 - Veterans

Local layers added to the Basemap more accurately reflect our community

- Locations with public computer access
- Locations with free meeting space
- Cell towers
- Grain elevator locations
- County communications towers

Due to our single census block, our basemap is lacking in important information. Direct outreach has helped as we gather information, and we must continue to seek out populations that are hard to reach. We are missing the voice of veterans at our BAT and need to continue to seek representation.

II. Digital Equity Asset Inventory

Organizations currently serving our community with digital equity services, and what the services are

Organization	Highlighted Services
Columbia County Rural Library District	Digital literacy classes, basic computer classes, free hotspots, free meeting space, free public computers with broadband speeds, free public WiFi, weekly newsletter

YWCA	Digital literacy classes, cybersecurity and privacy programs, free meeting space, newsletters.
Columbia County Health System	Spanish language translation, free meeting space, several communication channels including social media.
Dayton Schools	Free hotspots, free computers, free meeting space, newsletter and social media communications channels.
GWhiz Computing	Refurbished devices provided to those in need.
Port of Columbia	Free meeting space, newsletters and social media communications channels
Blue Mountain Action Council	Free public computers, one-on-one assistance with internet income assistance programs.
WorkSource/Goodwill/TechConnect	Provide digital navigation via internet. One-on-one assistance may be offered outside of our county, but we're not sure.
Washington Dept of Veterans Admin	One-on-one assistance in our neighboring county. Digital kits are provided to the library district and at social service agency offices in Columbia County for distribution to veterans. Assistance with signing up for the ACP programs is available by phone.

Upcoming events or projects that could support digital equity efforts

- Food Pantry distributions each Tuesday
- Senior Center lunches twice per week
- Ongoing school events
- Ongoing YWCA events
- Ongoing community events
- Columbia County Fair, September 8 - 10, 2023
- BMAC and Project Timothy ongoing interactions with clients
- Community Council studies and programs

Organizations currently supporting covered populations but not engaged in DE efforts

Please note that many of these organizations really do provide digital equity programs and activities. They answered “no” to the specific question “Do you have a digital equity plan or formally identified digital equity priorities.”

- Columbia County Health System
- Columbia County Public Health
- Small Business Development Center
- YWCA - Dayton office
- Columbia County Rural Library District
- The Club
- Dayton School District
- BMAC
- Columbia County Prosecutor’s Office
- Blue Mountain Counseling
- Community Council
- Walla Walla Community College

Community engagement resources & spaces for classes, trainings, or meetings

- There are many communications channels, free meeting spaces, training, and programs already being offered in Dayton that can be leveraged for better success. See list in Digital Equity Asset Chart above.

III. Digital Equity Needs Assessment

Regions that face barriers to access or lack available digital equity services

- The entire county faces barriers to services.
- Goodwill is listed as the Digital Navigator for Columbia County, yet they do not provide that service here. We’ve been told this is due to workforce shortages.
- WA Dept of Veterans Affairs provides materials locally, but one-on-one assistance is only available in our neighboring county or over the phone.

Demographics/populations that face barriers or lack access to digital equity services

- Residents whose income is under 150% of the federal poverty level
- Individuals with disabilities
- Aging individuals
- Individuals who primary reside in a rural area
- Children in foster care

- Veterans

Sectors (gov't, community, cultural services) that face barriers to access or lack available digital equity services

- Residents in the Town of Starbuck are not included in the Columbia County Rural Library District service area.
- The library district is currently facing a citizen-led effort to dissolve the district. If successful, this would eliminate our primary digital equity partner and all of the programs and free meeting space they offer.
- Very low-income residents are particularly vulnerable to lack of knowledge regarding digital programs and opportunities.
- Property owners that are not interested in extending broadband infrastructure to their multi-unit buildings.

IV. Barriers to Digital Equity

Barriers preventing access, adoption and use of the Internet and devices:

- Landlords of some low-income and workforce multi-family unit buildings aren't interested in bringing broadband service to their properties, even at no cost to them. They don't think their renters know how to use the internet and cannot afford it. These tend to be absentee landlords - people that don't live in the community.
- Lack of money to pay for service.
- Lack of knowledge in how to use computers or connect to the internet.
- Lack of digital navigators providing one-on-one assistance in the community.
- Effort to dissolve the local library district.

Barriers and gaps preventing the provision of digital equity support services throughout our region:

- Lack of locally-offered services.
- Small population seems to make serving Dayton difficult for larger agencies.
- Lack of trained workforce to provide support services.
- Difficulty reaching those in need.

Community awareness issues inhibiting digital equity resources from being utilized:

- Lack of knowledge by residents of what is offered here.
- Citizens that do not value use of the internet

- Policy makers that do not value government programs that may help low-income residents access internet service more affordably.

Needs, gaps, or barriers in ability to assess the digital equity landscape of your community

- Lack of knowledge by residents of what is already offered here.
- Difficulty in reaching residents that need the service.
- Expense of marketing to those without internet service, and marketing in general.
- Mailings are often viewed as junk mail and thrown away instead of read! Need to be creative in finding ways to make them eye-catching. Below is an example of a mailer the Port sent to every household in the county. Over 100 people showed up for the meeting to learn more about our FTTH project.



V. Potential Paths Forward

Possible funding mechanisms

- The lack of Digital Navigator services being offered here is concerning. This needs to be addressed in some way. Our plan is to work with the entities offering service, particularly the school and library, to see if we can find a way to have them contract directly with Goodwill and/or TechConnect to offer one-on-one service here.
- Focus will also be made on communicating what services are offered here to the audience that needs to hear it. We plan to create a simple resource guide that can be handed out, shared digitally, and mailed to every household. We are a small enough community that we can afford direct mailings, so we need to take advantage of that capability.
- Partnering with students and the school – students are natural digital navigators, and our school administration is very interested in creating partnerships to help this happen.

Entities providing leadership in this area

- Columbia County Rural Library District
- Dayton School District
- Starbuck School District
- Blue Mountain Action Council
- YWCA
- Columbia County BAT
- Walla Walla Community College
- Community Council
- Columbia County Health System
- Wash Dept of Veterans Affairs
- WorkSource Walla Walla

Regions/populations of high significance for outreach in our community

- Low-income residents
- Aging individuals
- Foster children
- Rural residents
- Veterans

Local ISPs interested in DE partnerships

- Columbia iConnect is willing to partner on Digital Equity work.

Upcoming programs or projects that could support DE efforts

- Continuation of Port of Columbia FFiTx projects. They catch the public's attention and give us a chance to communicate what's happening.
- Food Pantry Tuesdays
- Senior Center Lunches
- Ongoing social service agency interactions with clients
- Working with the school on student navigators
- Make sure Goodwill Digital Navigation services are carried out in our community
- Working with Community Council on Internet for All implementation task force
- Ongoing Dept of Veterans Affairs assistance
- Ongoing assistance provided by WorkSource Walla Walla