

COMMITTEE OF ORIGIN: Standing Committee on Utilities

This bill establishes the "Broadband Development Council" consisting of 21 members including members from certain state agencies, members of the general public representing certain classifications of broadband users, and three members each from the Senate and the House of Representatives, with two from each chamber appointed by the President Pro Tem and the Speaker and one appointed by the Minority Floor Leader of each chamber. The public members of the Council will be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and serve terms as specified in the bill.

The responsibilities of the Council are specified in the bill and include exploring ways to expand access to broadband services; the potential for increased use of broadband for education, career readiness, workforce preparation, and alternative career training; ways to encourage state and municipal agencies to expand service to better serve the public through the use of streaming, voice over Internet protocol, teleconferencing, and wireless networking. The Council shall make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding strategies to make broadband available to certain communities and statutory changes needed to enhance broadband access in the state. The Council must submit a report to the General Assembly and the Governor on or before January 1 of each year summarizing the actions of the Council the previous year. The bill specifies the powers of the Council.

The Council must also establish a university-based research organization, or contract with an organization, that will annually survey each county and school district in the state to assess available Internet speed and identify areas with challenges to high-speed Internet access.

The bill also establishes the "Department of Transportation Fiber Network Expansion Act", which provides that the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission may enter into public-private partnerships with private broadband Internet service providers to expand and develop the Department of Transportation's fiber network. The Commission will prioritize expansion and development under the bill in unserved areas and underserved areas, as defined by law.

The Commission must use a competitive procurement process to form the public-private partnerships, including publishing notice as specified in the bill. The Commission must ensure that at least 25% of the workforce fulfilling the contracts awarded under the bill belongs to a racial minority group. As part of a contract

award under the bill, the private partnering entity may use the excess fiber capacity to provide Internet services, as long as the services provided meet the state minimum standard for broadband.

This bill is similar to HB 1037 (2023) and HB 2638 (2022).