

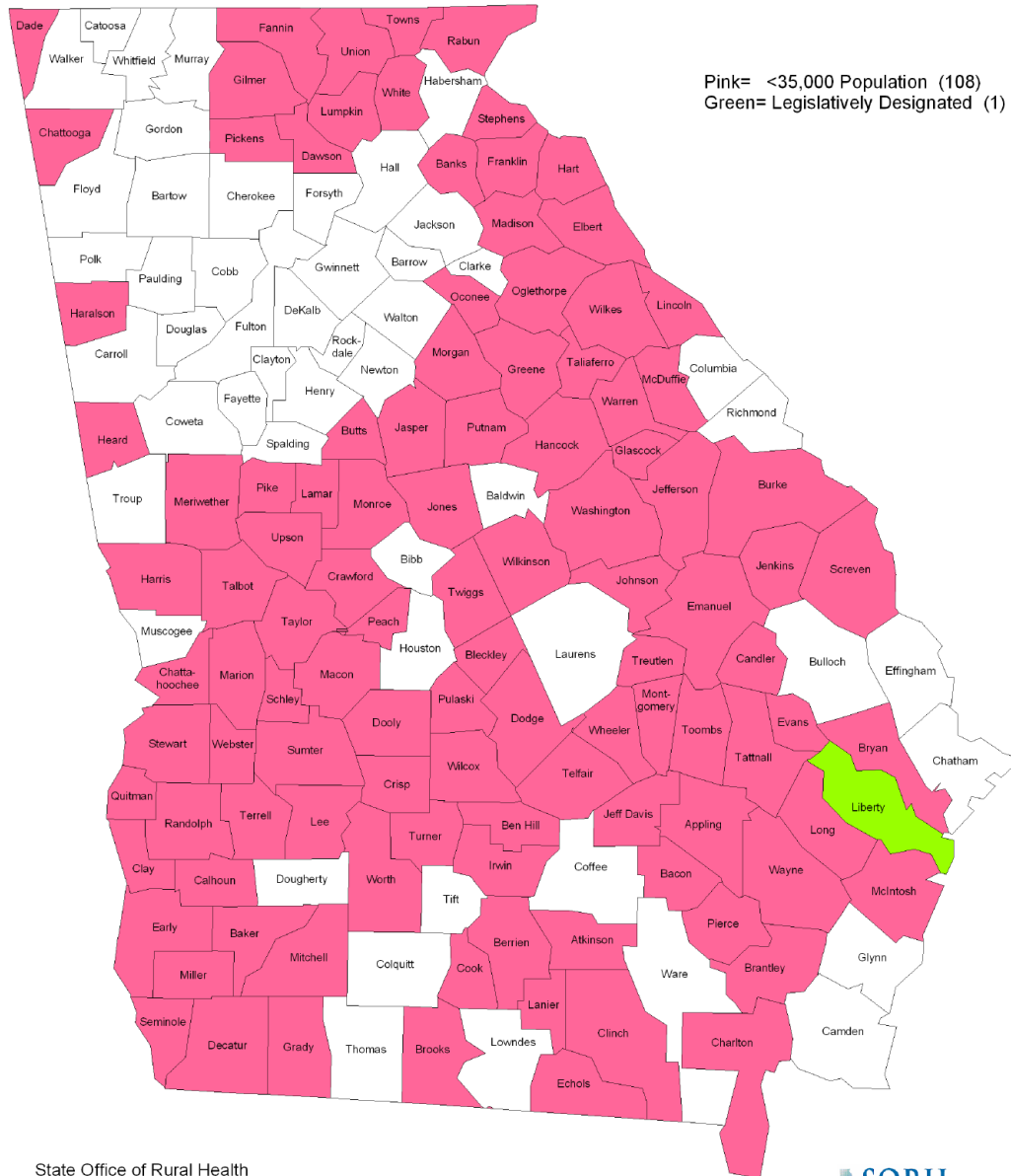
Georgia's Broadband Deployment Initiative

*A Review of Legislation, Program
Implementation, Mapping, and Expansion
Efforts*

SLC Agriculture & Rural Development Committee Session
Presented by Senator Steve Gooch, District 51, Majority Caucus Whip



Georgia's Rural Counties



State Landscape

- The State of Georgia is comprised of 159 counties
- 108 counties are classified as rural with populations of less than 35,000
- Rural challenges include access to health care, public safety, limited transit options, quality of education, lack of broadband and other technological advances, and economic development.

Major Legislation

- 2016 – Joint High-Speed Broadband Communications Access for all Georgians Study Committee (SR 876), Co-chaired by Sen. Steve Gooch and Rep. Don Parsons
 - The study committee traveled the state and found that people in rural areas all over Georgia were experiencing the same problem – the lack of reliable internet
 - Final report issued with findings and recommendations for legislation
- 2018 – Achieving Connectivity Everywhere (ACE) Act (SB 402)
 - The ACE Act established a multi-agency strategy to provide for planning, incentives, and deployment of broadband services to unserved or underserved areas throughout the state
- 2019 – Expanded Authority for EMCs to Provide Broadband (SB 2)
 - Set forth conditions for EMC's authorization to provide broadband, including restrictions on sharing pole attachment data
 - Provided for dispute resolution with the Public Service Commission
 - EMCs are prohibited from cross subsidization between gas, electric, and broadband divisions

Implementing the ACE Act - Georgia Broadband Deployment Initiative (GBDI)

Purpose: coordinate efforts to deploy high-speed broadband connectivity to unserved and underserved areas of the state so that all Georgians have access to healthcare, education, economic growth and expansion, and other quality of life essentials

Broadband service/served area = minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds

Interagency Team:

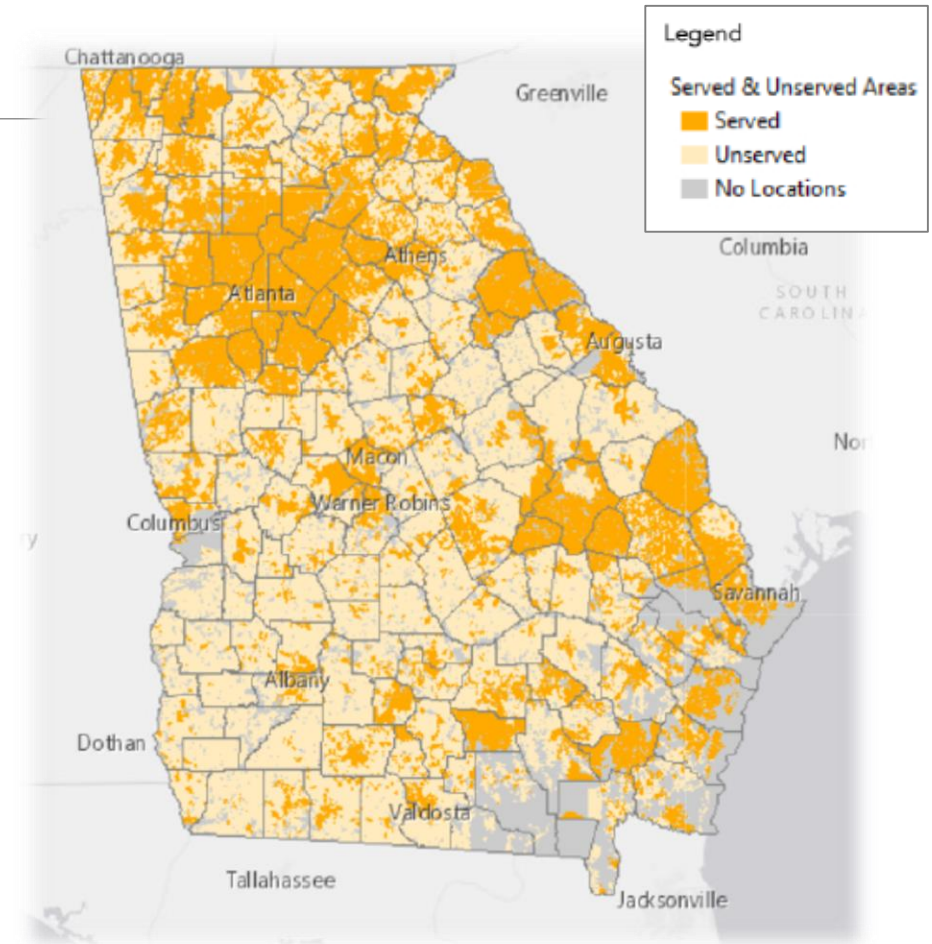
- Department of Community Affairs
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Economic Development
- Georgia Technology Authority
- State Properties Commission

Engagement with broadband offices outside state:

- US Department of Agriculture
- Federal Communications Commission
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration
- US Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Appalachian Regional Commission

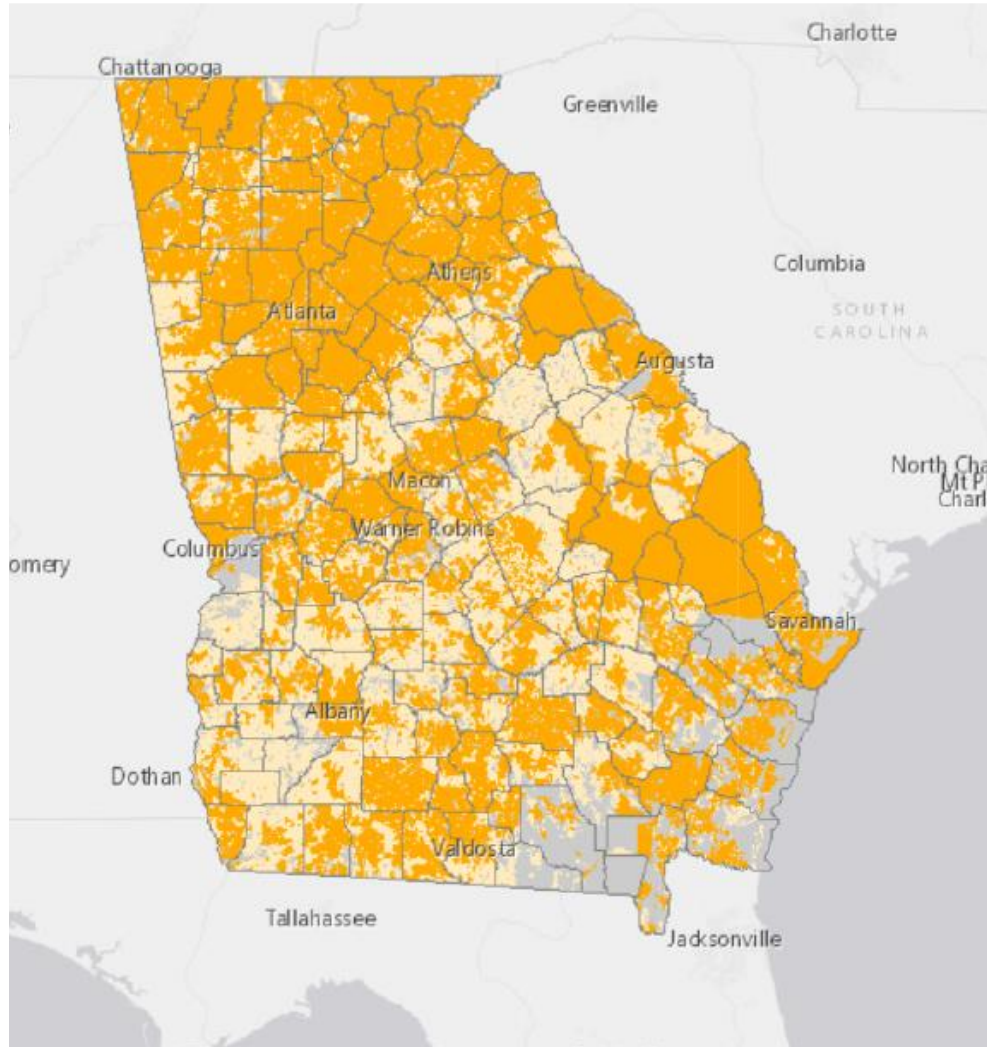
Broadband Mapping

- The ACE Act called on the Department of Community Affairs to develop and publish on its website a map showing the unserved areas in the state
- Georgia's map is created by overlaying:
 - (1) all the locations of homes and businesses in the State of Georgia, and
 - (2) broadband provider service availability for those locations within the State.
- There are over 5 million locations used in the mapping process
- Georgia's map is being used by other states as a model

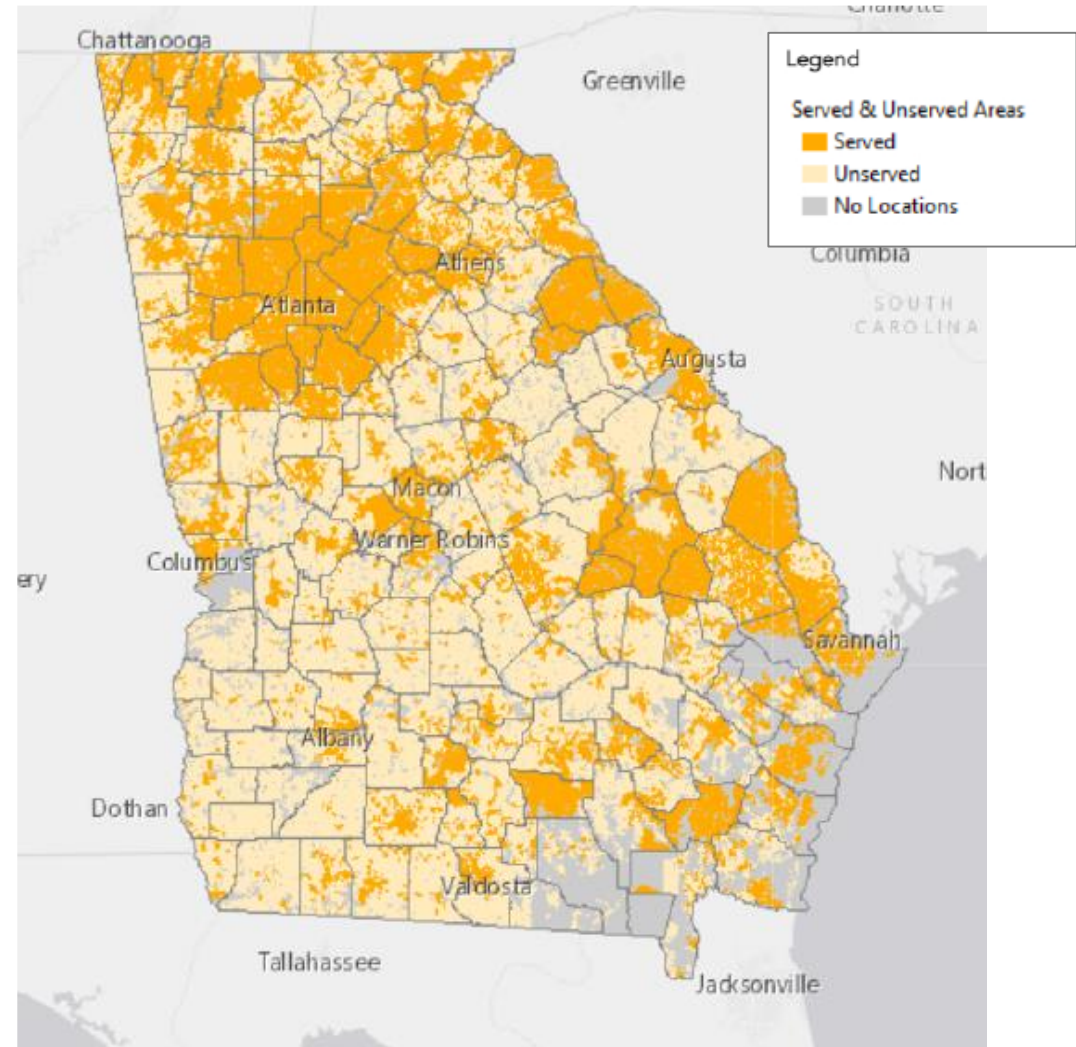


Source: Ga. Dept. of Community Affairs,
<https://broadband.georgia.gov/2021-georgia-broadband-availability-map>.

Broadband Availability Map Comparison



FCC



Georgia

Legislation Addressing Deployment Barriers

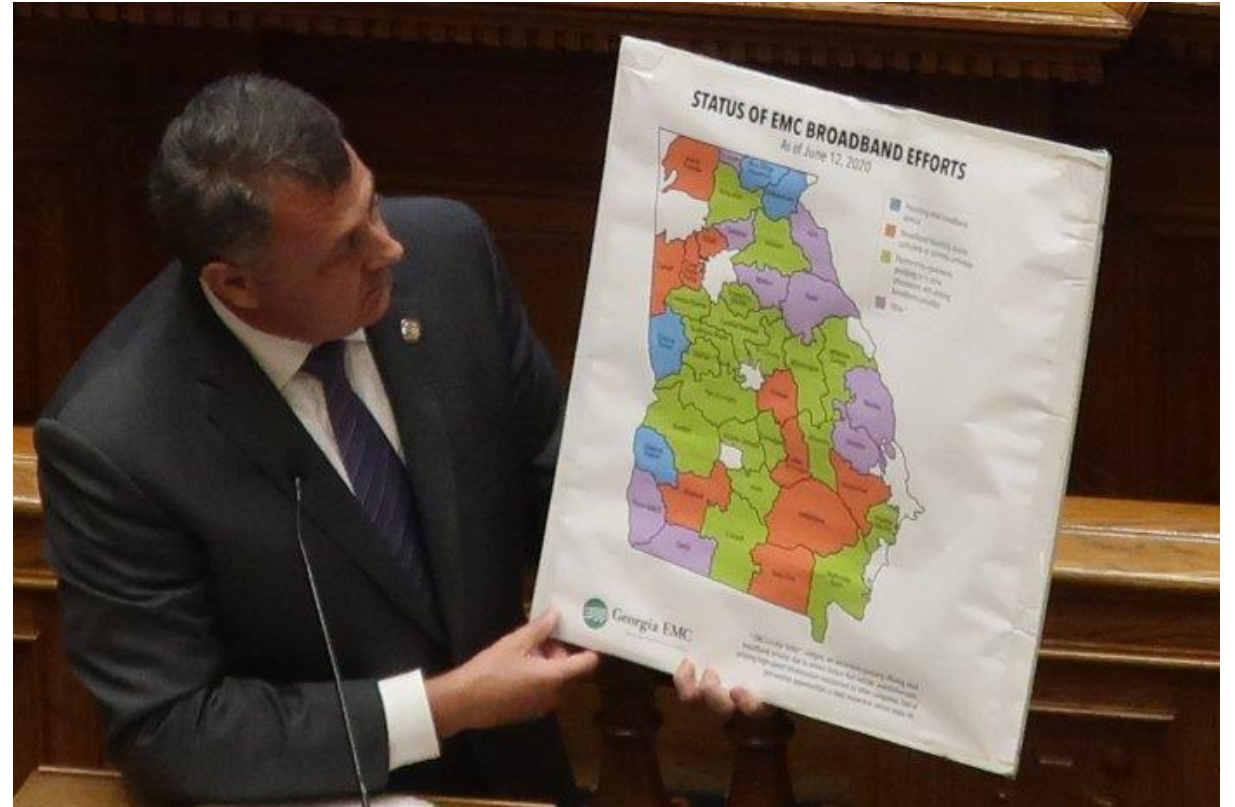
- **Senate Bill 2 (2019)** authorized electric membership cooperatives (EMCs) to provide broadband services. EMCs are newly authorized to apply for loans, grants, and other financing, as well as to enter into contracts and agreements for purposes of planning, provisioning, and maintaining broadband services in Georgia. It also permits the use of electric easements for broadband services.
- **Senate Bill 17 (2019)** authorized telephone cooperatives and affiliates to provide broadband services as well. Similar to Senate Bill 2, this bill newly authorized telephone cooperatives to pursue financing and agreements for the purposes of providing broadband services.
- **Senate Bill 66 (2019)** streamlined broadband deployment in the public right-of-way. This bill was instrumental to allowing USDA ReConnect applicants to receive state activity points in the competitive scoring process.

Georgia Broadband Opportunity Act

HB 244 (2020)

Sponsors: Rep. Stephens of the 164th and Sen. Kennedy of the 18th

- Effective July 1, 2021, the rates, fees, terms, conditions, and specifications in any pole attachment agreement entered into by a telecommunications service provider and an EMC is determined by the Public Service Commission (PSC)
- Since January 1, 2021, the PSC must publish the pole attachment rates, fees, terms, conditions, and specifications
- The PSC has jurisdiction over EMCs to enforce compliance

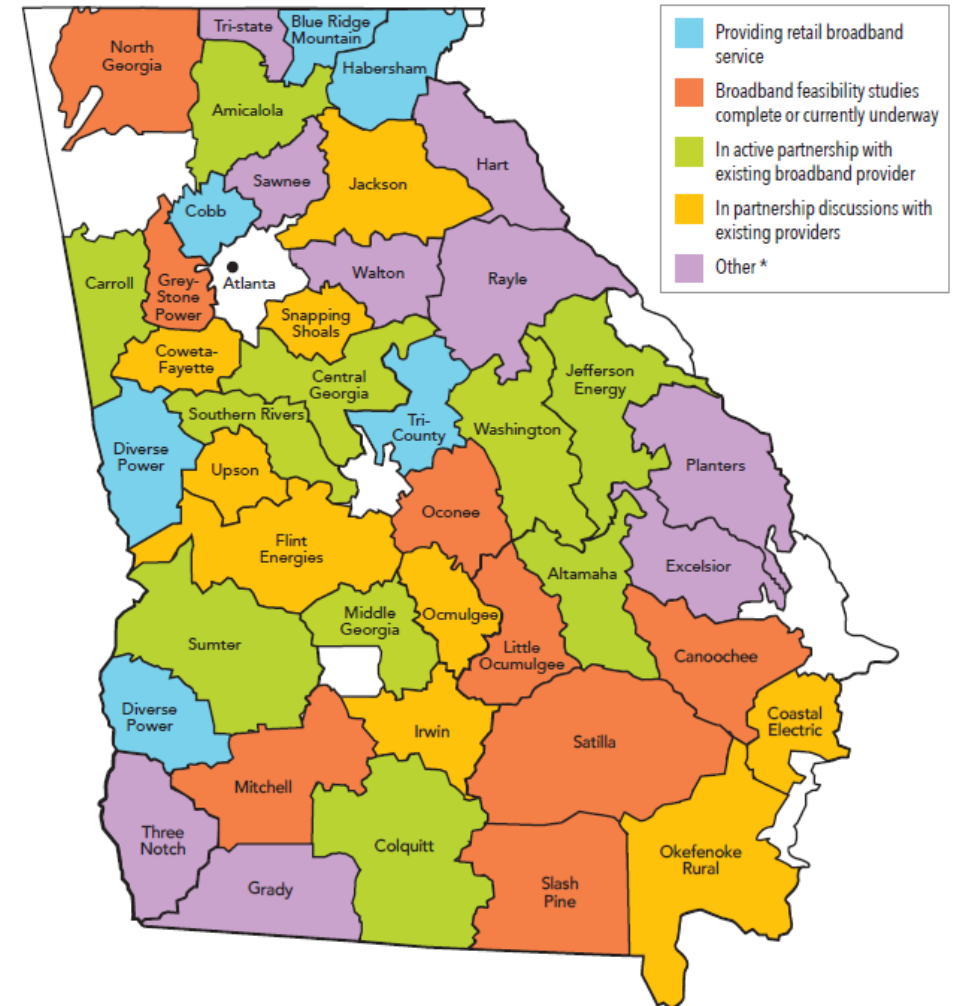


About Georgia's EMCs

- Georgia's not-for-profit, member-owned Electric Membership Cooperatives (EMCs) were founded more than 80 years ago to electrify rural areas.
- Their core mission is to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity.
- In addition to providing electricity, in recent years, EMCs have been intently focused on helping find solutions to another challenge for rural Georgia – expanding reliable, high-speed internet access.

STATUS OF EMC BROADBAND EFFORTS

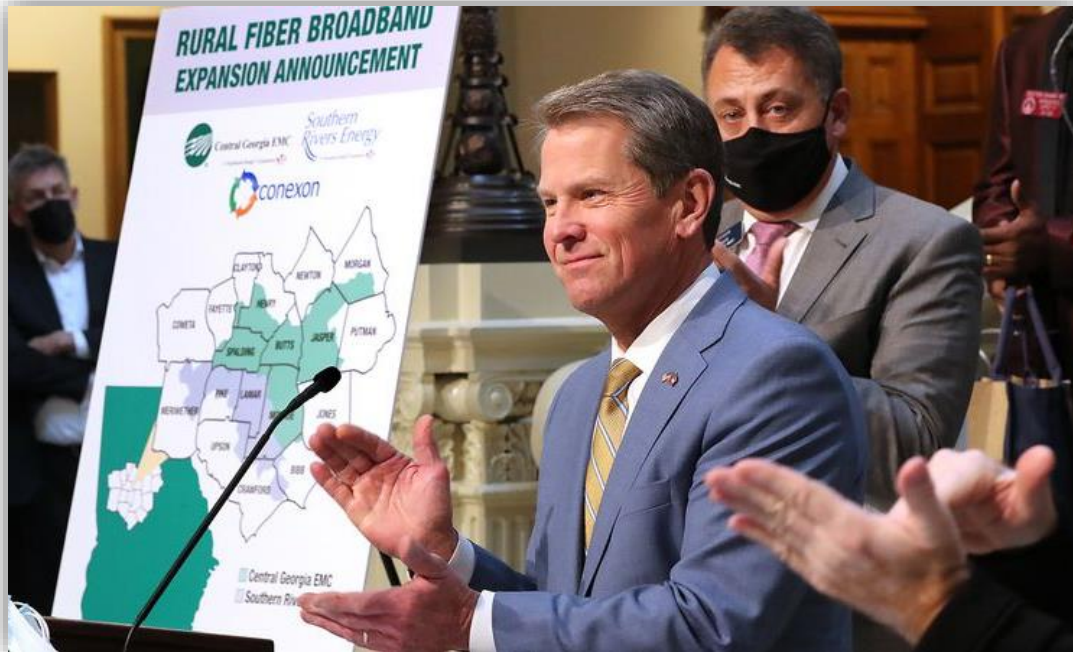
Spring 2021



Georgia's EMCs, continued

- Currently there are **17** EMCs in Georgia that are directly providing or partnering with others to bring broadband to their communities:
 - **4 EMCs** have established broadband affiliates as authorized by Senate Bill 2 (2019) and are currently providing retail broadband services.
 - **13 EMCs** have established partnerships with existing providers to bring broadband services to all or parts of their membership.
 - These projects cover all or parts of **59 counties** and will offer broadband services to over **187,000 EMC members**.
- Since 2019, EMCs in Georgia have committed to invest more than **\$540 million** in broadband to ensure their members have high-speed internet service.
- The FCC's recent Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) auction resulted in \$326M in federal dollars to connect unserved areas of Georgia and \$92M will be going to an entity involving an EMC.

Rural Fiber Broadband Expansion



- In February 2021, Governor Brian Kemp, Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan, and Speaker David Ralston announced an EMC partnership to expand broadband in rural middle Georgia.
- Central Georgia EMC (Jackson, GA) and Southern Rivers Energy (Barnesville, GA) will form a new partnership with Conexon to provide high-speed internet to 80,000 homes and businesses in 18 Middle Georgia counties: Bibb, Butts, Clayton, Coweta, Crawford, Fayette, Henry, Jasper, Jones, Lamar, Meriwether, Monroe, Morgan, Newton, Pike, Putnam, Spalding, and Upson.
- Largest expansion of internet service since SB 2 in 2019.
- Project to be completed over 4 years.

RURAL FIBER BROADBAND EXPANSION ANNOUNCEMENT

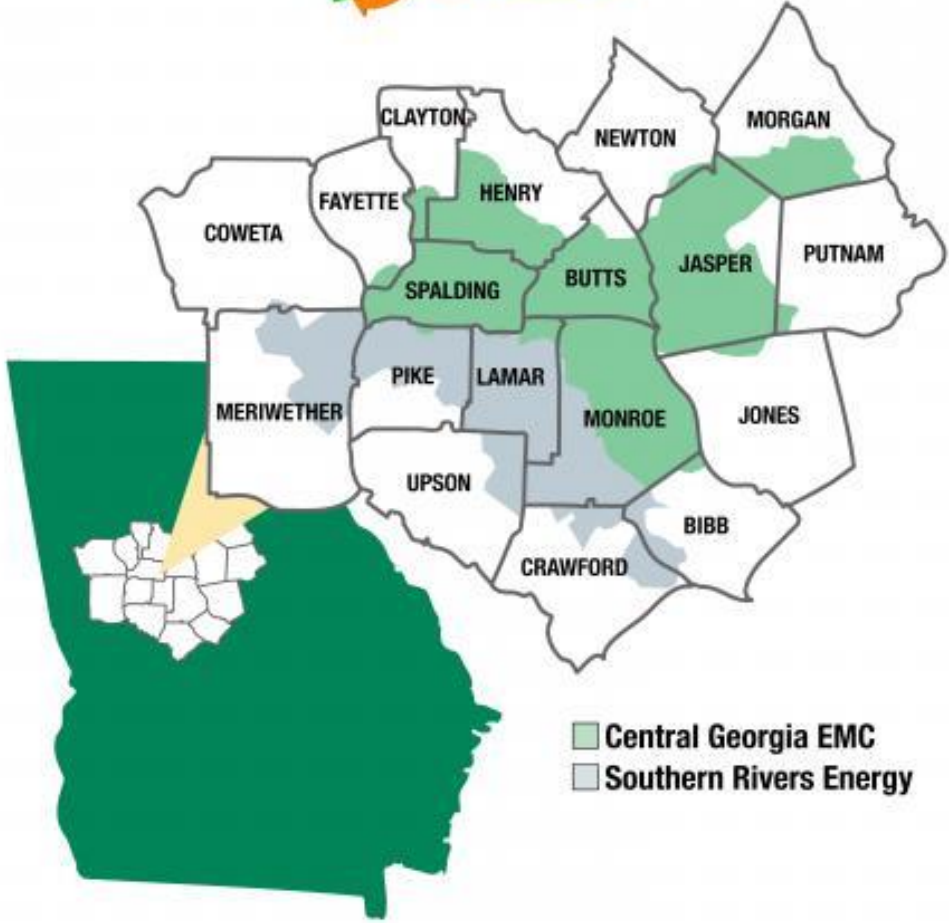


Central Georgia EMC

A Telecommunications Cooperative

Southern Rivers Energy

A Telecommunications Cooperative



Georgia Jobs and Infrastructure Committees

Governor Brian Kemp announced on June 29 the creation of the Georgia Jobs and Infrastructure Committees that will focus on three areas:

- Economic Impact
 - Broadband
 - Water and Sewer
- The Committees will make recommendations to the Governor regarding federal coronavirus relief funds allocated to Georgia through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) following their review of applications from state government entities, units of local government, industries, and nonprofits.

Broadband Infrastructure Committee Members:

Russell McMurry - Commissioner, Georgia Department of Transportation
Jannine Miller - Planning Director, Georgia Department of Transportation
Christopher Nunn - Commissioner, Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Teresa MacCartney - Acting Chancellor, University System of Georgia
Greg Dozier - Commissioner, Technical College System of Georgia
Shawnzia Thomas - Executive Director, Georgia Technology Authority
Richard Woods - State School Superintendent, Georgia Department of Education
Eric Toler - Executive Director, Georgia Cyber Center
Michael Nix - Executive Director, Georgia Emergency Communications Authority
Frank Smith - Deputy Executive Director, State Properties Commission
Sen. Blake Tillery - Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
Rep. Terry England - Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
Rep. Clay Pirkle - Secretary, House State Properties Committee
Rep. Patty Bentley - Secretary, House Higher Education Committee
Rep. Jodi Lott - Governor's Floor Leader
Sen. Bo Hatchett - Governor's Floor Leader
Sen. Harold Jones - Secretary, Senate Ethics Committee
Sen. Steve Gooch - State Senate Majority Whip

Pending Legislation

HB 328 (2021) - Right-of-Way Due Compensation Fees; One-time Permit Application Fee for Companies without Retail End Users; Civil Penalties for Unpaid Due Compensation to Municipal Authorities; Restructuring Due Compensation Fees

Sponsors: Rep. Momtahan of the 17th and Senator Gooch of the 51st

The bill adjusts due compensation calculations when a telephone company has retail end users and adjusts due compensation of a telephone company that does not have retail end users by removing Department of Transportation fees, and establishing a one-time permit application fee, among other changes. The bill provides for due compensation in lieu of other fees, due compensation accrual rates, and due compensation limitations; and provides a civil penalty for unpaid due compensation to municipal authorities.

HB 328 passed the Senate by substitute but did not reach final passage in 2021.

Questions/Comments?

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