Utah Launches Commercial Broadband Map

Broadband is a crucial asset for most businesses, and states like Utah are advertising through new tools just what kind of pipes they have on offer.

BY COLIN WOOD / JUNE 3, 2015

LOCATE.UTAH.GOV

Technology's role in government continues to evolve, having changed from liability to asset over the past decade. Officials realized that IT wasn't something they had to babysit, but a rich suite of tools that could enrich everyone's operations. Such uses of technology by economic development offices represent one of the fastest growing trends in government. The Utah's Governor's Office of Economic Development, for instance, launched an interactive map on May 18 that shows commercial

availability of broadband Internet, encouraging new investment in the state.

The Web-based tool, found at locate.utah.gov, enables users to view a map of the city layered with translucent infrastructure markers. The map's purpose is to show businesses and planners where fiber and other non-mobile Internet availability exists in the city, and then compare that data with several other data sets, including the locations of utilities, transportation infrastructure, schools, hospitals and parks.

The state already had a map showcasing residential broadbandavailability, but officials realized that businesses needed their own tool, said Kelleigh Cole, director of the State of Utah Broadband Project within the Utah's Governor's Office of Economic Development.

"I think broadband is becoming increasingly important as companies make decisions about where they will locate," Cole said. "I think a lot of companies expect to be able to have high-speed services when they get to a location. A lot of companies are starting to automate more and more services and put more services online, which increases their need for bandwidth, and this tool helps us to direct them to areas where they can have those services readily available to them."

Cole explained that the tool is intended to be used by incoming and existing Utah businesses, but also by economic developers, city planners and anyone else who has questions about broadband availability in Utah. The state will soon add a new layer to the map that allows users to view the location of Utah's enterprise zones, regions that enable certain companies to attain tax credits. Already home to the offices of Delta, eBay, Twitter, Oracle, Ikea, and Goldman Sachs, this tool will enable

more investment and clarity around the state's broadband offerings, Cole explained.

The tool was developed by the Utah Broadband Outreach Center and the Automated Geographic Reference Center (AGRC). To collect the data needed for the map, Cole said the state build a back-end editing tool that enabled Internet providers to map the location of their services. The Economic Development Corporation of Utah provided guidance on what kinds of additional data sets would be useful to users, and the developers worked with partnering agencies to unlock those data sets, which can now be found in the tool.

The state reports that the Broadband Outreach Center's Economic Development Map was developed by a team of two programmers and one designer who worked part time for six months to complete the project. Technologies used in development included JavaScript, HTML5 and GIS data layers taken from the state's Geographic Information Database.

Both the state's residential and commercial broadband maps can be found at broadband.utah.gov, along with other information about the state's ongoing broadband efforts.

 Colin Wood | Staff Writer

Colin has been writing for Government Technology since 2010. He lives in Seattle with his wife and their dog. He can be reached at cwood@govtech.com and on Google+.