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Analysts like green light for 'data highway' upgrade

By Tim Feran

Gov. John Kasich's plan to "open the faucet" on the state's broadband access is drawing praise and a little caution — but most analysts agree that Ohio's economy will benefit from the move to higher network speeds for business and research institutions.

The plan, announced Tuesday in the governor's State of the State address, would invest approximately \$10 million in the state's broadband infrastructure through a recent agreement with Cisco Systems and Juniper Network.

Upgrades will target network systems dedicated to research institutions and businesses. This is separate from the Internet access people use in their homes.

The plan aims to raise broadband network speeds from 10 gigabits per second to 100 gigabits per second.

"It's sort of the equivalent of making highways into superhighways," said Dana McDaniel, economic-development director in Dublin, where broadband deployment in recent years has received international recognition and spurred economic development.

McDaniel praised the plan as "a great investment," while adding, "I think it could position Ohio for the kind of global recognition that we've been able to achieve."

Columbus Partnership CEO Alex Fischer also compared the upgrade to the highway system.

"If we're not part of the interstate highway network and don't have an interchange, then we miss out," he said.

"Likewise, if we're not part of the information highway network, we'll miss out. Our technology infrastructure is going to be the driver of central Ohio's economy."

Kasich said the upgrade to the state's "data highway" would directly benefit fields including manufacturing, engineering, medical research and education, leading ultimately to job growth.

In medical research, Kasich said, the upgrade would mean that "researchers no longer have to rely on overnight mail to share their massive files on hard drives but can email them instantly. This allows our research hospitals and universities to compete more successfully for the research grants that create breakthroughs in jobs."

The plan is "a powerful statement," said Michael Marlowe, president and co-founder of Bluemile, a central Ohio-based data-center company. "(Kasich) has great foresight to realize that expandable, high-availability, low-cost bandwidth is vital to business."

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