



Louisiana

PLANK ROAD: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



Technical Assistance Panel Report | OCTOBER 21–22, 2021
Baton Rouge, LA

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Baton Rouge City Planning Commission

Build Baton Rouge

Capital Region Planning Commission (CRPC)

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

ON THE COVER: A rendering of Plank Road from Build Baton Rouge's 2020 report, "Imagine Plank Road."



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About the Urban Land Institute

The Urban Land Institute is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of providing leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region, with members in 80 countries.

More information is available at uli.org. Follow ULI on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

About ULI Louisiana

ULI Louisiana, a District Council of the Urban Land Institute, has 213 members statewide. ULI is a nonprofit research and education organization established in 1936 with more than 30,000 international members. ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and to create and sustain thriving communities worldwide. ULI shares best practices through both practical professional development education programs and ULI's research and publications. The organization sets the standard for high quality information on urban planning, real estate development, growth and land use.

ULI District Council Leadership

Christopher LeBato

District Council Chair, ULI Louisiana

Alejandra Guzman

Chair of Mission Advancement, ULI Louisiana

Laura Woltanski

TAP Committee Chair, ULI Louisiana

Bear Cheezem

TAP Committee Chair, ULI Louisiana

Nicole DePietro

Executive Director, ULI Louisiana

About the ULI Curtis Infrastructure Initiative

The ULI Curtis Infrastructure Initiative aims to build a movement to promote infrastructure solutions that are equitable and resilient and that enhance long-term community value. By creating new global and strategic partnerships, providing technical assistance, building capacity at the local level, and acting as a feedback loop to promote the most innovative and effective best practices, the Curtis Infrastructure Initiative will ensure the success of ULI's mission to positively shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. A thoughtful approach to infrastructure planning and implementation addresses the pressing needs of today and improves diverse communities for the long term.

A building block for communities everywhere, infrastructure encompasses transportation, critical utilities, and the means of communication. But beyond these foundational physical and digital structures and facilities, infrastructure broadly includes the key spaces that build community—anchor institutions, the civic commons, and housing. Because infrastructure provides the means for connection, creative placemaking, and opportunity, smart infrastructure investment is an imperative for our cities now and in the future.

Together we can build the future of equitable and resilient communities. Learn more about the Curtis Infrastructure Initiative at uli.org/infrastructure.

“The purpose of [the Curtis Infrastructure Initiative] is to contribute toward the building of a better future by providing resources of inspiration, discovery, and innovation.”

—James J. Curtis III, ULI Life Trustee

ULI Advisory Services: District Council Programs

The goal of the ULI Advisory Services program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Drawing from its local membership base, ULI Louisiana conducts two-day TAPs offering objective and responsible advice to local decision-makers on a wide variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The TAP program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to specific land use and real estate issues. In fulfillment of ULI's mission, this TAP report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

An additional local offering is the project analysis forum, which offers a shorter format for district councils to employ local member expertise to address regional land use challenges. Panelists are land use professionals uniquely positioned to address the specific challenges at hand, and provide in-depth, project-specific, and pragmatic recommendations. The intimate, conversational format encourages creative thinking and problem solving between the panel and the sponsor.

Learn more at louisiana.uli.org.

Technical Assistance Panel and Project Staff

Panel Chair

Chris Ferrari

President
Ferrari Development, Inc.
Baton Rouge, LA

Panel Members

Eric Bathras

Associate Vice President
AECOM
Baltimore, MD

Lyneisha Jackson

Community Planner
Center for Planning Excellence
Baton Rouge, LA

Emily Bullock

Principal
Spackman Mossop Michaels
New Orleans, LA

Chris Ringswald

Principal
Bernard Capital Partners
Baton Rouge, LA

Mia Ruffin

Economic Development Planner
Capital Region Planning Commission
Baton Rouge, LA

ULI Project Staff

Nicole DePietro

Executive Director, ULI Louisiana

Rebecca Gale

Writer

Kelly Annis

Graphic Designer, Branch Communications

Acknowledgments

ULI Louisiana, Build Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge City Planning Commission, Capital Region Planning Commission (CRPC), and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality thank the following supporters of the Plank Road: Bridging the Digital Divide TAP.

About the 2020-2021 District Council Infrastructure Grant Cohort

The Curtis Infrastructure Initiative has partnered with six ULI district councils across North America to provide technical assistance as part of a cohort to help build capacity to reconnect divided communities—physically, socially, and digitally. This cohort of ULI members and staff, local leaders, and other global experts meets regularly over the course of a year to identify key issues, share best practices, and provide updates on projects to support each other in addressing complex infrastructure challenges.



SURFACE/UNSPLASH

Access to broadband is increasingly becoming more important to modern life.

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The two images are proposed plans identified by Build Baton Rouge in the Imagine Plank Road and the Plank-Nicholson Bus Rapid Transit 2019 Build Grant Application.

INTRODUCTION

The Plank Road Corridor in Baton Rouge, capital city of Louisiana, is one of the most disinvested and economically disadvantaged corridors in the state - with median household incomes and home values about half of statewide averages. Forty percent of households do not have an internet subscription or cellular data plan, and twenty-two percent of adults have never purchased an item through the internet. This disparity in the digital divide must be addressed as an equity issue.

Build Baton Rouge has already begun to address many of these issues with their Imagine Plank Road Project, which identified six catalyst projects. The ambition of the four sponsor groups is to make the Plank Road corridor a hub for free internet access through 5G/broadband

infrastructure. As the world becomes more digitized, those without access to reliable, affordable and fast internet access will be increasingly left behind - and this is already happening along the Plank Road Corridor. As redevelopment of the area continues, internet access remains a top priority.

ASSIGNMENT AND BACKGROUND



: REBECCA GALE/ULI

Panelists discuss recommendations as part of the panel process.

To come up with ways in which broadband internet access could be delivered to Baton Rouge, ULI Louisiana agreed to conduct a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) for Plank Road: Bridging the Digital Divide. A group of six expert panelists held wide ranging discussions on October 21-22, 2021, at the Delmont Gardens Branch Library. The panelists included real estate developers, community developers, landscape architects, and land use specialists. Together, they evaluated all of the available qualitative and quantitative information related to the vision and statement of need.

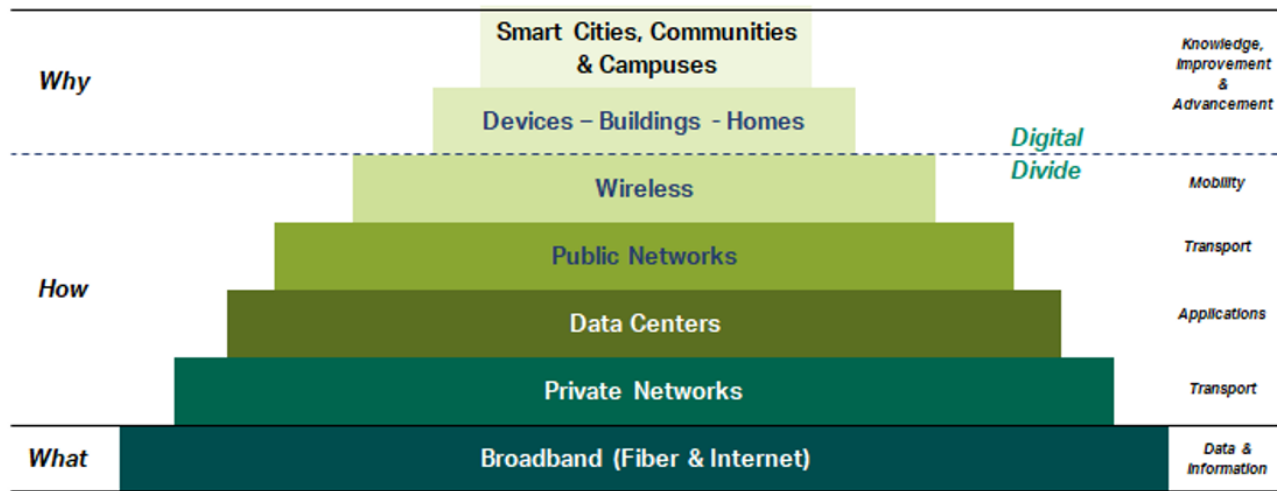
Before the panel met in October, a one-day online symposium was held on May 25, 2021, to come up with ideas on how to mitigate the lack of connectivity surrounding Plank Road and come up with solutions and ideas to improve the situation. More information from symposiums' findings is included in the background section of this report.

The panel was provided with extensive briefing materials consisting of a Broadband Symposium Report, Imagine Plank Road Report, U.S. Housing and Urban Development Housing Analysis - Baton Rouge, MOVEBR Plank Road

Concept Report, and a planning community broadband roadmap. The panelists went on a driving tour of Plank Road to view the six catalyst sites. The panelists held conference discussions and breakout sessions with a range of invited stakeholders, among them community leaders, transportation and broadband experts, and those representing regional institutions, in order to gain insight on the issues at hand.

During the two-day session, the panel brainstormed, planned, and offered objective recommendations to increase broadband access, finance and incentivize the project.

Broadband is the foundation to **bridge the divide**



ERIC BATHRAS/AECOM

Broadband is the combination of physical infrastructure and technologies that public and private sector service providers use to connect to devices, locations, end-users, and communities.

Questions posed to the Plank Road TAP panelists:

The TAP was asked to provide strategic advice on the following.

- Support the growth of broadband access in Plank Road Corridor.
- Encourage public/private engagement and funding with investing for broadband infrastructure.
- Identify how the community can enrich the installation and use of broadband.
- Consider future broadband expansion, capacity, and quality.
- Consider environmental, economic, and social issues in the area.
- Identify relevant case studies.
- Identify best practices for planning, implementation, and education.

Background

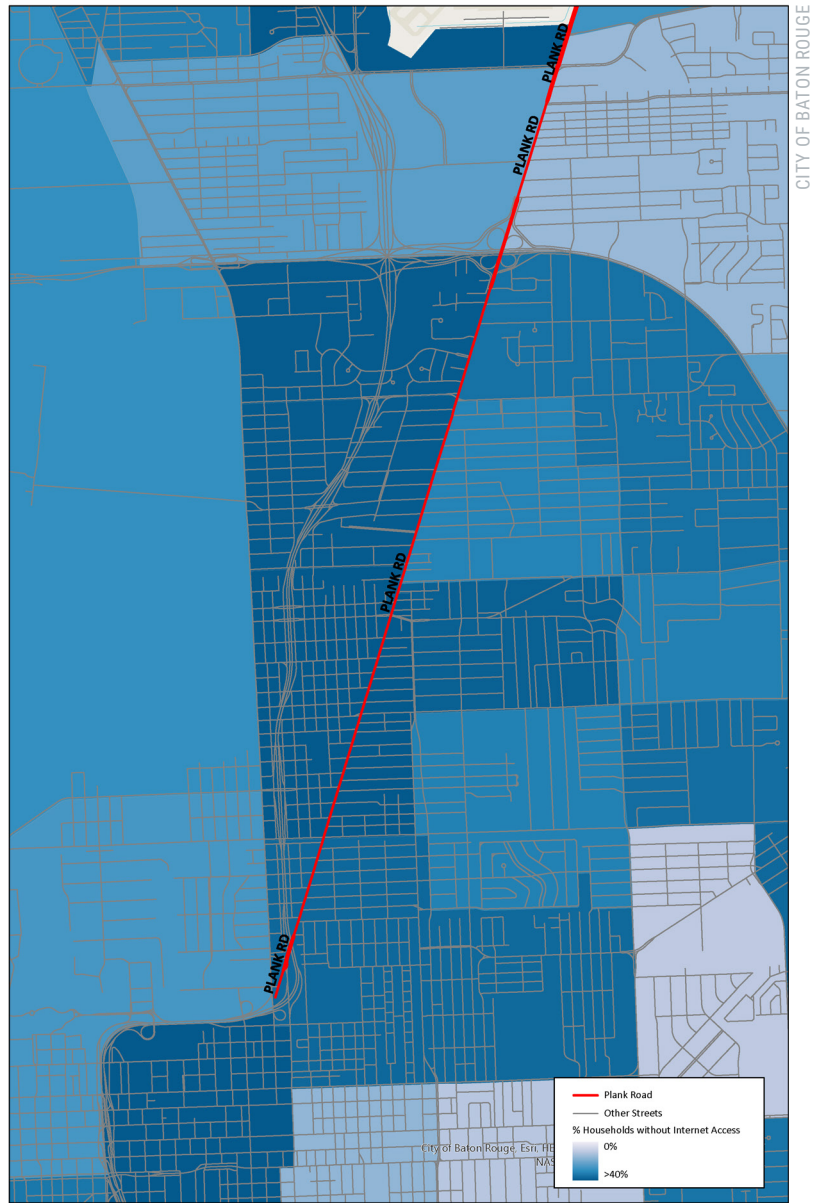
For a 21st century community to thrive, broadband is a necessity rather than a luxury. Evidence shows that access to reliable internet improves communication and connection, and there are significant economic benefits that come with access to high quality internet - for businesses, commerce, academics, and everyday life. For every dollar invested in broadband access, there is a defined economic multiplier. In Baton Rouge, the lack of broadband access in certain portions of the city had been a problem before Covid-19. When the reliance on online communication and virtual learning dramatically increased during the pandemic, the digital divide was exacerbated further.

Consolidation of the broadband industry and the economics of creating a robust fiber network have created barriers to allowing the free market to solve the connectivity issue on its own. Further support from public and private entities is needed.

There are a variety of factors working against expansion of broadband in Black and other communities of color within Baton Rouge, including reliance on a single major carrier, not being able to implement 5G networks, and “digital redlining,” where high speed broadband is available for those who can afford it, while others go without and fall behind in their digital connectivity.

Build Baton Rouge has developed six catalyst sites along Plank Road that are designed to address many of the equity issues that residents of the corridor face. These catalyst projects are designed to bring in needed goods and services and mixed-use space with affordable housing. Among the projects are space for a Class A grocery provider, library, and affordable homes for seniors.

5G alone does not solve the digital divide. Smart investments are still needed for digital literacy and maintaining high quality networks. Fiber is the foundation that allows all of the broadband services, connectivity, and technology to connect with the end users. A strong broadband network needs a robust fiber infrastructure.



BR
CITY OF BATON ROUGE
PARTNER OF GREAT BATON ROUGE

Plank Road Corridor
Census 2019 ACS Census Tracts
Internet Access by Income Variables

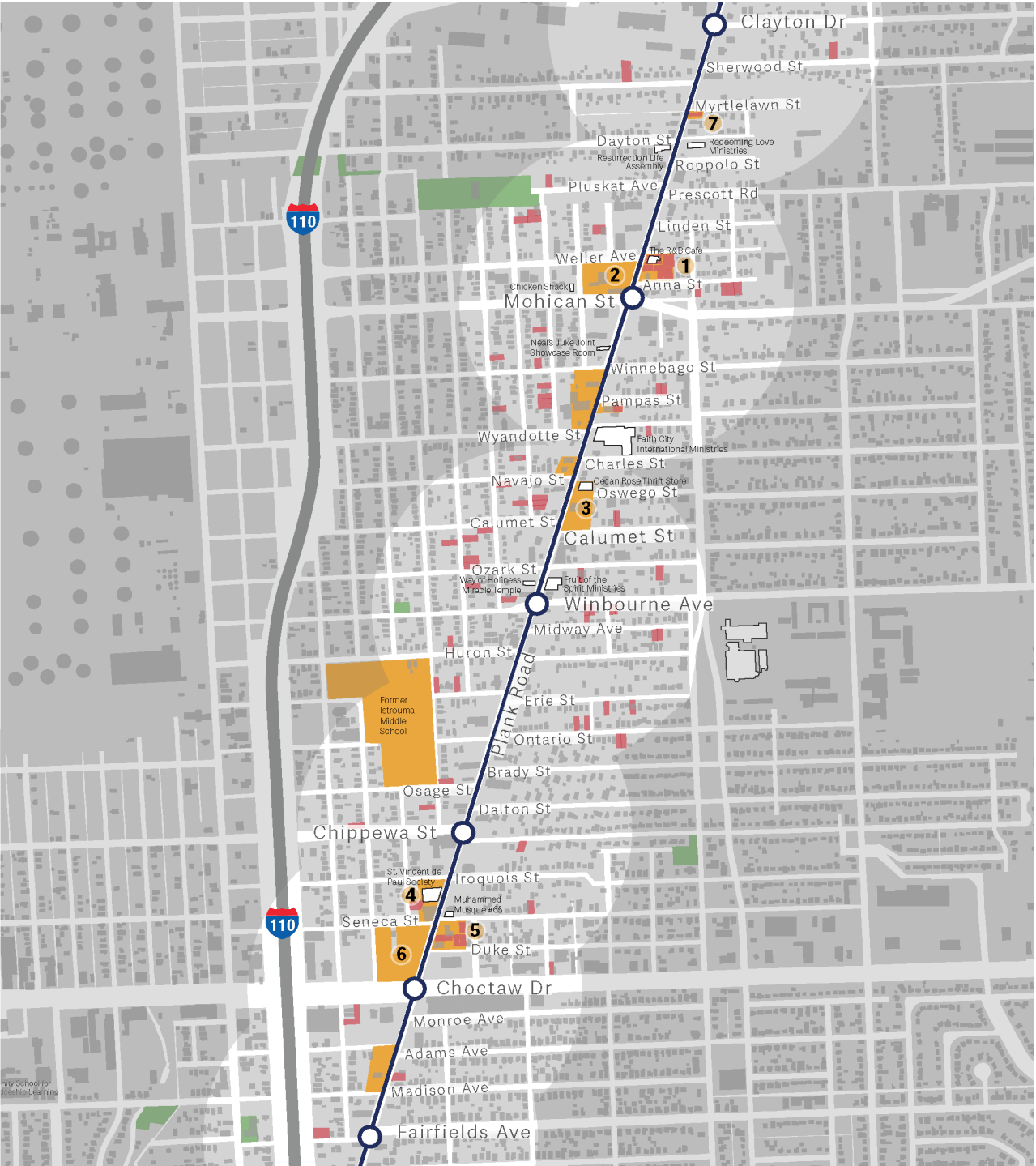
May 20, 2021

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

N

Map showing broadband subscriptions by the seven providers serving the Plank Road Corridor. The primary driver for access is affordability of the services provided.

The Imagine Plank Road Catalyst Sites and bus rapid transit stops served as the TAP study area.



CITY OF BATON ROUGE AND BUILD BATON ROUGE

- 1 Catalyst project
- Catalyst project site
- Land-bank owned

- Community anchor
- Planned BRT stop and route

0.5 Miles N

Source: City of Baton Rouge

RECOMMENDATIONS

The panelists came up with the following four key recommendations, discussed in greater detail in this section.

1. Develop the Plank Road Innovation Corridor
2. Form Plank Road Broadband Working Group
3. Engage the Community
4. Identify and Track Funding Sources

Recommendation: Develop the Plank Road Innovation Corridor

Plank Road should develop an innovation corridor and create a technology experience and vision for the corridor. The timing is ideal to begin now, with the Bus Rapid Transit project coming to Plank Road, and the ability to leverage other planning efforts associated with the area, such as the catalyst projects with Build Baton Rouge, or the smart traffic signals installed by the Department of Transportation.

The vision for the corridor should come from the newly formed working group (see recommendation #2) and include research and use-cases for applicable technologies. The panel recommends investigating the following options for the Plank Road Innovation Corridor: smart parking, smart benches, smart trash cans, kiosks, public Wi-Fi, traffic signals, vehicle/pedestrian safety, autonomous vehicle testing, air quality sensors, and a no cost option for connectivity.

The innovation corridor should also address cybersecurity, as edge devices can be vulnerable for smart community initiatives. For example, the Panel cautioned against hackers being able to change red traffic lights to green ones.

The panel also recommends that the Plank Road innovation corridor build and own fiber assets and

physical infrastructure that can be shared by multiple public and private sector stakeholders. Fiber will produce a more reliable internet connection that will be able to reach more households. It also can withstand adverse weather events and still function during a power loss if it is connected to a generator. In undertaking such an effort, it is imperative to “dig once” and partner with other stakeholders that are involved in projects in the area. Among the ideas for local stakeholders to work with, the panel recommends partnering with higher education, manufacturing, and/or technology innovation organizations as they all stand to benefit from fiber assets and robust broadband infrastructure.

Recommendation: Form Plank Road Broadband Working Group

The panel recommends that stakeholders form a Plank Road Broadband Working Group to create the Plank Road Innovation Corridor.

The group will need a champion, which can be a new dedicated position or an individual promoted from a stakeholder organization. Committee members can include local representatives (community and business stakeholders), government officials (libraries, schools, DOTD, DPW), and representatives from nonprofits.

The panel recommends including a wide swath of community stakeholders as community support will be key for this project's growth and success.

The roles and responsibilities of the Working Group should include:

- Developing a strategic plan for implementation, coming up with metrics to stay on track and on pace. The panel recommends monthly meetings, with specific goals and action items.
- Establishing goals, objectives, and actionable items based on the most pressing needs and gaps in the community.
- Identifying "quick wins" and pilot projects in priority areas within the development corridor. Each "quick win" is an opportunity to grow community support and bring more stakeholders into the conversation.
- Ensuring coordination with regional projects and development. The project's success hinges on being able to leverage existing projects already underway. The Working Group will be responsible for such coordination and capitalizing on available synergies.
- Streamlining the procurement processes. Since this project will largely rely on tax dollars and philanthropic donations, there should be an organized, efficient way to handle procurement.

The panel also recommends that the Working Group hire a third-party technical advisor to oversee installing the fiber infrastructure in the ground. This would be a person whose primary role would be specifying the appropriate equipment to satisfy the actual need, since a project with this scope and magnitude will need someone with technical expertise to oversee this aspect. The Panel recommends reaching out to the local universities, such as LSU and Southern, to see if they have recommendations for a technical advisor who would be familiar with the project and the area.

Recommendation: Engage the Community

To build support for the project and to ensure that the rollout of broadband connectivity is a success, the Panel recommends actively engaging the community. The three priorities identified are digital literacy, access, and community buy-in.

Digital literacy is defined as the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information. The Panel recommends that training and continuing education programs be held, and that the panel could identify community colleges or technical schools to offer some sort of formal training.

Access to available funding is crucial for families to take part in the broadband network and have access to devices. The Panel recommends an education campaign to raise awareness of available funding and help people take advantage of existing programs. Participation in those programs has been historically low, so it will be up to the working group to connect with a wide swath of community leaders to make the program and available funds well known to the community.

The Panel also recommends that in the shift to new technology, there are still options for communication and services that do not depend on internet access so that older people, particularly those sensitive to technological change, can still maintain their quality of life.

Finally, effective community engagement requires **community buy-in**. This effort is going to be transformative for Plank Road, and time must be spent to engage the community to understand the most pressing needs and challenges and infrastructure aesthetics and locations related to digital access. The working group must make sure to address those needs and ensure that this new infrastructure and opportunity is culturally sensitive to the community and is something that the community can use and appreciate for years.

Recommendation: Identify and Track Funding Sources

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 provides significant new funding for the planning, deployment, and adoption of broadband. This includes approximately \$70 million for planning and mapping of the

issue, about \$17 billion for increasing equitable access, and more than \$47 billion for deployment. This builds on federal funding appropriated as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Securities (CARES) Act of 2020 and normal appropriations. This funding is available through formulas transferred directly to the states, metropolitan planning

Select Broadband Funding Sources

Level	Source		Amount	Type	Use
	Agency	Program			
Federal	Commerce	Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment	\$100M	Formula	Close access gap for unserved and underserved areas plus community anchor institutions
Federal	Commerce	Broadband Infrastructure	\$288M	Grant	Provide access to every eligible household within service area
Federal	Commerce	Connecting Minority Communities	\$266M	Grant	Grants to HBCUs/others for access, infrastructure, and economic development
Federal	Commerce	The Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure	\$980M	Grant	Deployment of high-speed internet networks
Federal	Commerce	Economic Development	\$233M	Grant	Broad economic assistance that could include broadband
Federal	Housing and Urban Development	Choice Neighborhoods	\$350M	Grant	Planning and implementation including broadband infrastructure
Federal	Housing and Urban Development	Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	\$3.3B	Formula	State and local funding for economic and community development
Federal	Housing and Urban Development	CDBG Section 108	\$300M	Loan	Available to CDGB recipients to upgrade broadband
Federal	Transportation	Private Activity Bonds	\$30B	Loan	Financing for qualified broadband projects
Federal	Transportation	Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act and Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing	\$100B	Loan	Financing for broadband infrastructure particularly within half-mile of bus rapid transit stations
Federal	Treasury	State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds	\$350B	Grant	Investment in broadband and other infrastructure
Federal	Community Development Financial Institutions Fund	New Markets Tax Credit Program	\$5T	Credit	Financing for broadband infrastructure
Federal	Delta Regional Authority	Community Infrastructure Fund	\$15M	Grant	Broadband deployment and adoption
Federal	Delta Regional Authority	States Economic Development Assistance	\$14.8M	Formula	Broadband deployment and adoption
Private	Federal banking agencies	Community Reinvestment Act	—	Loan	Financing for broadband infrastructure

NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, ULI

organizations, and tribal governments as well as through competitive grants and loans distributed on a rolling basis or as part of a notice for funding period.

The table on the preceding page provides select public and private sources the Panel recommends exploring. Additional opportunities are available and broadband can be paired with many initiatives and community development projects.

Identify a Fiscal Agent and Contractor

The Panel recommends identifying a “fiscal agent” organization to serve as the manager for funding sources. The fiscal agent would assess the funding opportunities in the area, including foundations and institutions, and provide a singular node for money management, including compliance, auditing, and reporting. This fiscal agent would assign responsibility for (1) deployment for use of funds (e.g., contracting) and (2) long-term maintenance.

The fiscal agent will identify and track federal and state funding sources and matrices that are available for infrastructural funding. Whoever is responsible for the funding should be able to identify and secure a long-term commitment to a subsidy program to offset the related cost for the community.

Funding decisions should take into account plans for inevitable emergent tech and disaster/resilience needs, as well as maintenance of broadband infrastructure. The Panel recommends assigning a contractor to be responsible for maintenance of the infrastructure.

Time the improvements with concurrent projects

The timing of any planned broadband infrastructure improvements should be timed to coincide with additional planned projects mentioned elsewhere in the TAP report, including the smart traffic signals and high speed bus routes. The ability to lay down the appropriate infrastructure with the concurrent projects will significantly minimize the incremental cost to put the service in place.

Seek Public Funding Sources

The Panel recommends finding a variety of funding sources, including foundation, philanthropic, and government grants, and seeking alternative funding sources outside of traditional donations. Established existing foundations in the area (e.g., Baton Rouge Area Foundation) are those most likely to want to be part of the project.

For funding opportunities, the Panel recommends identifying and developing subsidy programs to offset related costs pertaining to broadband. One such example is that internet subscription costs could be covered by the Emergency Broadband Benefit (temporary programming as of Fall 2021).

The recent infrastructure bill that passed in Congress has dedicated \$65 billion for improving internet access and \$2.75 billion specifically dedicated for digital equity, literacy, and inclusion programs – which focus specifically on under-served areas, such as Plank Road. These funds also have application to urban areas and specifically mention wi-fi hot spots as a target. These funds will go

Explore a partnership with Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge. Southern University has the option to extend their broadband coverage 15 miles from their campus, which includes the Plank Road Corridor. Instead of relying on a carrier such as Cox or ATT, the Panel recommends the working group explore a possible partnership with Southern University to create a possible low cost, high quality, internet network.

directly to states and be distributed through programs. It will be up to the team behind the Plank Road improvement project to work alongside the state and look into building relationships with programs like ConnectLA, which is state government sponsored and located within the Office of Broadband and Development under the governor’s office.

Possible public funding partners include:



Explore Private Funding Sources

Public funding will be necessary for the project, as the panel feels there is not currently a traditional business case for a private funder to step in. However, private funding sources should still be actively sought and encouraged, in conjunction with other public funds.

There is also existing precedent for internet service providers to be funders or supporters of a local broadband improvement project, as seen in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where the publicly-owned internet provider became the first ISP to give fiber optic connections to an entire community.

Finally, the panel recommends connecting with the large industrial plants in the neighborhood to solicit their input on their willingness to be a potential partner, given the economic growth and development that additional broadband access will bring to the community and workforce.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS

The Panel is confident that there is a confirmed need for improved internet access along Plank Road and installing fiber is the foundation to do so.

This effort must be prioritized to make it a reality, and it requires a champion to act as a driver. Without a strong champion driving this effort, it is at risk of being lost or forgotten.

The effort hinges on cross-collaboration with other entities. In the Panel's interviews, there was an open-mindedness to working together. For example, DOT has shown a willingness to collaborate on fiber construction when they install smart traffic signals. The BRT construction effort will raise the road and install new sidewalks - an ideal opportunity to place conduit for fiber. These are activities that will occur even without the Plank Road Innovation Corridor efforts. It is up to the newly created working group and its champion to find ways to work together, collaborate, and leverage the current projects underway.

The pandemic has ushered in a new understanding of how critical broadband infrastructure is to a thriving community, and reliable access to the internet is an equity issue.

Everyone needs their own connectivity to further their own education and economic opportunities, without being left behind.

The federal government has taken notice, and there are additional opportunities for federal assistance and grants for such projects underway.

Finally, the Panel encourages the working group and its technical advisor to ensure current technologies are being put in place. Funding the project and shoring up community support are key but so is installing technology that approaches implementation with a resilient mindset for long term relevancy. The technical advisor will play a key role in making sure the right equipment is installed. It is not sufficient to have free wi-fi that works intermittently - the goal is to bring fiber and connectivity to households and establish a reliable, fast internet connection that allows communities to thrive.

CONCLUSION

Bringing broadband internet access to Plank Road is a doable task, with the right champion, a productive working group, and a willingness and ability to work with existing projects underway.

Building and owning the fiber infrastructure is the best way to move forward. This allows the Plank Road corridor to have a more sustainable model for broadband access for the future. Fiber is in a better position to maintain internet access in adverse weather conditions, and it is a strong investment in economic development for the long haul. Since there are projects underway that will be constructing the road and bringing in fiber for smart traffic signals, these are ideal partnerships to pursue and the working group should move expeditiously to make this happen.

The community buy-in is crucial, and efforts must be taken to make sure that all voices feel invested in this project. Many residents already understand that access to the internet is an issue of equity – the pandemic highlighted what many residents of the area already knew. As more schools and services went online, many residents were left out. For Plank Road to thrive and be economically competitive, reliable, high-speed internet is a must.

ABOUT THE PANEL

Chris Ferrari

Panel Chair

Baton Rouge, LA

Chris Ferrari is the President of Ferrari Development, Inc. Additionally, he has over thirteen years, managing over \$1.5 billion from projects delivered, or currently in development. He combines his architectural background with his experience in real estate development for proven, and scalable project management capabilities to provide end-to-end consulting, representation, and delivery of commercial, retail, residential, and municipal projects of any size. He began his career in New York designing and developing over one million square feet of commercial and office space for large financial and legal institutions, earning multiple prestigious design awards for his work.

He has established a consistent track record of success that goes beyond the fundamentals of managing scope, change, and risk to ensure on-time, on-budget project delivery. By establishing strong client partnerships with solid communication and an understanding of the client's business, Mr. Ferrari ensures that projects are on-target and aligned with client goals and strategic direction.

His multi-disciplined expertise enables him to provide true start-to-finish oversight of projects of all sizes, from pre-development, financing and site acquisition through completion and occupancy. He has experience in prototype development, project feasibility and viability assessment, architectural design, budgeting and financial coordination, and development of all necessary documentation for bidding, permitting, and construction. His relationship management expertise ensures effective collaboration with consultants, landowners/developers, and governmental agencies. Mr. Ferrari's varied project experience includes new construction of commercial office, administration facilities, municipal community and recreation centers, multi-family, and retail establishments. A few notable clients include; Louisiana State University, Raising Cane's Restaurants, Presonus Audio, Setpoint Global, AIG Global Real Estate, Apollo Management, and Fitzpatrick Cella Harper & Scinto.

Eric Bathras

Baltimore, MD

Eric Bathras has been in the broadband industry for just over 28 years covering public and private service provider networks that include long haul, middle mile and last mile design and construction. He was recently networkMaryland™'s Director of Network Operations where he was responsible for the successful operation of a 24x7x365 wide area network, managed LAN, managed WLAN and Maryland Department of Information Technology's (DoIT) critical data center infrastructure. Eric also led one of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) largest and most successful Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grants nationwide. It was comprised of designing and building +1000 fiber route miles and connecting +1000 community anchor institutions (CAIs), which spanned all twenty-four of Maryland's counties. His technical expertise includes stakeholder consultation, program and project management, master planning and design and implementation of complex public and private sector broadband and smart community projects and programs. He specializes in leading cross-functional teams to bring about sound planning, design and project delivery across a wide range of broadband and smart community initiatives. As broadband networks have influenced the way public and private sector organizations deliver services, applications and data to devices, customers and citizens, Eric focuses on applying a collaborative master plan and design to implement proactive solutions that can achieve operational excellence and a lasting impact to the end users.

Lyneisha Jackson

Baton Rouge, LA

Lyneisha Jackson is an AICP certified Community Planner with the Center for Planning Excellence, a non-profit planning organization in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Her work includes working with Louisiana communities to develop community and strategic plans to improve the quality of life for Louisiana residents. Lyneisha earned a Master of Community Planning from the University of Maryland, College Park, and a GIS certificate from the University of New Orleans.

Emily Bullock

New Orleans, LA

Emily Bullock is a Principal at Spackman Mossop Michaels. Emily's work focuses on planting design, especially the use of native plants, and sustainable landscape design. She has worked on a range of projects that involve comprehensive stormwater management practices and the capture and reuse of water on site.

Emily has experience working with dynamic and diverse communities across New Orleans, as well as in cities such as Detroit, Brownsville, TX, and Springdale, AR among others. She has designed and led community engagement efforts in the Fitzgerald neighborhood in Detroit, a youth-inclusive design process with middle school students at Habans Elementary in New Orleans focused on stormwater management, and a bilingual neighborhood green infrastructure engagement plan in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Chris Ringswald

Baton Rouge, LA

Christopher Ringswald is a Vice President at Bernhard Capital Partners in Baton Rouge, LA where he is a member of the private equity investment team focused on infrastructure, power, and industrial services investments throughout North America. Prior to joining BCP, Mr. Ringswald served as an Associate at Stellus Capital Management, LLC. in Houston, TX. While at Stellus, Mr. Ringswald was a member of the investment team for the middle market energy platform and the middle market direct lending platform. In addition, Mr. Ringswald previously served as an Associate in the Strategic Planning group at Seneca Resources Corporation and as an Analyst in the Global Energy Investment Banking group at RBC Capital Markets. Mr. Ringswald received a B.S. in Finance from Louisiana State University.

Mia Ruffin

Baton Rouge, LA

Mia Ruffin serves as Economic Development Planner and Broadband Expansion Team Lead at the Capital Regional Planning Commission (CRPC) in Baton Rouge, LA. She graduated from the University of New Orleans' Master of Urban and Regional Planning program in May 2020 and became a member of ULI-Louisiana's Diversity Committee in the fall of 2019. Born and raised in Baton Rouge, she aims to use her professional role to support affordable and accessible broadband access across CRPC's 11-parish area. Mia also has a background in GIS and coastal zone management.

State Broadband Programs and Initiatives



Second Investment: HB 648 Proposed State Grant Program

\$180M

Part of the ARP for Remote Access Projects now under consideration by the Louisiana Legislature

If successful, we anticipate launching a grant round by the end of the year.

Money would have to be spent by Dec. 31, 2024

Broadband Regional Assistance

Through the grant received by the Delta Regional Authority, we will work with planning development districts to gather local and regional input, surveys, needs/service gaps, opportunities, usage, concerns and priorities.

Additional Broadband Initiatives

- Proposed legislation
 - HB 465 – Rep. Johnson, 4.9 GHz Legislation
 - Potential grant funding – Louisiana Broadband Grant Program
- Continuing to stress importance of broadband in healthcare, education and agriculture
- Continued conversation with federal agencies and funding sources

To prepare for the TAP, ULI Louisiana hosted a statewide broadband symposium to identify challenges and opportunities for Plank Road. Learn more at <https://knowledge.uli.org/en/videos/2021/uli-louisiana-symposium-on-broadband-and-5g-access>.



Louisiana

ULI Louisiana
900 Camp Street, Suite 332
New Orleans, LA 70130

504.867.9942
louisiana@uli.org

louisiana.uli.org



knowledge.uli.org