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## Strickland launches 'Connect Ohio'

By [William Hershey](#)

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COLUMBUS — With key leaders from the telecommunications and cable industries standing behind him, Gov. Ted Strickland on Monday launched Connect Ohio, a multi-million dollar public private partnership aimed at bridging what Strickland called Ohio's "digital divide."

The first phase will be working with local communities and service providers to map in detail what parts of the state have broadband Internet access that provides high-speed service and what parts don't, Strickland said.

The state will put in \$2.9 million in this budget period, which ends June 30, 2009 and expects to put in another \$3.9 million in the next two-year budget period, he said.

The \$2.9 million represents an estimated 80 percent of the initial costs and plans calls for the remaining 20 percent — about \$750,000 — to come from cable and telecommunications companies and other private businesses, said Terra Goodnight, Strickland's executive assistant for transportation, taxation, lottery and broadband.

Strickland said he believes federal dollars also will be available.

The digital divide takes several forms, resulting in lack of access to computers, high-speed Internet access and high skill jobs, Strickland said.

"What we hope to do is bridge the digital divide in ways that will be good for all Ohio communities and all Ohioans," Strickland said.

The goal is to create support for local communities to meet their technological needs while expanding broadband service to all residents and businesses, he said.

Strickland said he didn't know what percentage of the state lacks high-speed Internet access, but Jonathon McGee, executive director of the Ohio Cable Telecommunications Association, said cable service is offered in all 88 Ohio counties and that high-speed cable mobile service is offered in 95 percent of "cable's Ohio

footprint."

He said cable officials plan to discuss with state officials possible financial commitment to the project.

Charles Moses, president of the Ohio Telecom Association, said his group is prepared to "contribute significant financial resources" to the project.


The state has hired Connected Nation, a Washington, D.C. based, company to create a subsidiary, Connect Ohio Initiatives LLC, to carry out the project.

Brian Mefford, Connected National president and CEO, said a \$7 million investment by Kentucky in a similar project resulted in \$700 million in private investment.

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