

Opinion: AT&T, T-Mobile merger is the right move

By Norma Santiago

I fully support the proposed merger of AT&T and T-Mobile.

It is no secret that I am a zealot about economic development and entrepreneurial and environmental innovation. This merger is in the best interest of residents and visitors to our region and will expand broadband Internet services to rural or otherwise disconnected areas.

According to the California Broadband Task Force's commissioned report, more than 80 percent of California's landmass is considered rural and 13 percent of Californians live in these areas. Of the state's 5 million rural residents, 20 percent do not have access to broadband Internet and the remaining 80 percent suffer from spotty and – at best – insufficient coverage. In comparison, 96 percent of their urban and suburban counterparts have broadband access. Clearly, rural Californians are drastically underserved.



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We live in a technology-driven society. Broadband Internet is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity. High-speed mobile broadband access allows businesses to work efficiently and effectively, to reach a wider range of customers and is critical for economic growth and development in our

communities.

Broadband access improves rural quality of life by giving those previously underserved the ability to do things like, pay bills, monitor healthcare, and take classes online. Web access even makes it easier for residents to keep in touch with friends, family and connect in their community. Broadband access is often taken for granted and accomplishing even the most basic things like sending a letter, downloading a photograph or effectively applying for a job online is a common assumption by those who already have high speed services.

If approved, the proposed merger of AT&T and T-Mobile would effectively, efficiently and cheaply deliver wireless broadband to rural Californians. By combining their assets and infrastructures, merging AT&T and T-Mobile would speed up achieving the goal to give high-speed access to all.

Broadband and mobile broadband Internet access can no longer be viewed as just an option. In today's world, it is a necessity, and one that many rural Californians find themselves without. This is an economic and social problem that we have an obligation to solve before California's rural residents find themselves falling technologically even further behind their urban counterparts. The approved AT&T/T-Mobile merger would provide a fast, cheap, and effective fix that would be a huge step forward for both businesses and residents in our rural areas.

Norma Santiago is the El Dorado County supervisor from Lake Tahoe.