

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

601



**FROM:** Executive Office

**SUBMITTAL DATE:**  
Dec. 30, 2004

**SUBJECT:** Televising Board of Supervisors Meetings

**RECOMMENDED MOTION:** That the Board receive the attached report, decide whether to broadcast Board meetings and direct the Executive Office on how to proceed.

**BACKGROUND:** On Oct. 19, 2004 the Board of Supervisors directed the Executive Office to explore the possibility of televising Board of Supervisors meetings. The attached report outlines several broadcast options, should the Board wish to proceed. Depending on the option, annual costs could range from about \$17,000 to more than \$150,000. At least 34 counties and numerous cities in California now broadcast meetings on the Internet or cable television, either live or via replay. Of those, at least a dozen offer meetings on both cable television and the Internet.

Departmental Concurrence

*Raymond Smith*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Raymond Smith  
Public Information Officer

<b>FINANCIAL DATA</b>	Current F.Y. Total Cost:	N/A	In Current Year Budget:	No
	Current F.Y. Net County Cost:	N/A	Budget Adjustment:	No
	Annual Net County Cost:	N/A	For Fiscal Year:	2004-2005
<b>SOURCE OF FUNDS: General Fund</b>				Positions To Be Deleted Per A-30 <input type="checkbox"/>
				Requires 4/5 Vote <input type="checkbox"/>

**C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION:**  
**APPROVE.**

**County Executive Office Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
*[Signature]*

Dept't Recomm.:  Consent  Policy  
 Per Exec. Ofc.:  Consent  Policy

Prev. Agn. Ref.: 3.2 on 10/19/04 | District: All | Agenda Number:

3.2

# Options for Broadcasting Board of Supervisors Meetings

## Introduction

On Oct. 19, 2004 the Board of Supervisors directed the Executive Office to explore the possibility of televising Board of Supervisors meetings.

At least 34 counties and numerous cities in California now broadcast meetings on the Internet or cable television, either live or via replay. Of those, at least a dozen offer meetings on both cable television and the Internet.

Broadcasts offer an avenue for counties and elected officials to improve communication with residents and increase understanding of county government operations. But live broadcasts via cable television pose a particular problem for counties, especially counties as large in area as Riverside County. While cities typically have a single cable provider, Riverside County has seven.

The Board meeting room already is equipped to send a signal to Charter Communications in Riverside, which provides cable service in the Riverside and Norco areas. But the county cannot independently send a signal to other cable operators, nor are cable companies linked in any way that would allow them to share a signal.

Despite those difficulties, options exist for tape-delayed broadcasts, full-scale or limited live cable broadcasts, and live Internet broadcasts that can reach anyone with access to a computer. Each poses advantages and limitations, including costs that vary from several thousand dollars for the simplest option to millions of dollars for the most complex.

## Cable Replay of Board Meetings

One solution would be to record Board of Supervisors meetings on videotape or DVD discs and deliver them to cable companies. Cable companies could then broadcast videotaped meetings to residents countywide. The replay option could be accomplished relatively easily and inexpensively.

The disadvantage to delayed broadcasts is that residents could not watch meetings live. The significance of that drawback is arguable, given the relatively small audience that broadcasts typically draw and the fact that any broadcast – live or delayed – still enhances public outreach.

Delayed broadcasts represent the least expensive option. There would be little or no charge from cable companies and the videos, eventually, could be archived and retrieved by viewers as cable companies implement emerging video-on-demand archives.

Ongoing costs include \$75 to \$150 a week for videotapes or DVD discs, depending on meeting length. It would cost about \$150 a week in staff time to duplicate the videotape or discs. Delivery to cable companies via Riverside County dispatch couriers during their regular rounds would cost approximately \$50 a week.

One-time costs include an estimated \$2,500 for equipment to prepare the audio-video signal for broadcast and to duplicate videotapes or discs. A video mixer that would improve the video quality and graphics production would cost about \$2,500. If the Board opts to broadcast meetings in any format, some of those one-time costs might be incurred regardless of the broadcast medium.

### **Live Cable Broadcast**

Costs increase dramatically once the discussion turns to live broadcasts via cable television, especially a countywide solution.

Live cable broadcasts present cost/benefit issues, given the relatively small viewing audience. Live cable broadcasts also would not reach satellite TV viewers, who comprise at least a 15 percent share of the TV market nationwide. Many commuters who work outside the county each day – more than 170,000 residents – also would not see a live broadcast, although they could watch cable replays.

Several factors make countywide live broadcasts expensive. First, cable companies are not linked to one another. In order to share a signal, cable companies would have to bury and connect miles of fiber-optic cable. The same lack of connectivity is a problem in Riverside County for individual cable companies with multiple broadcast centers that are not linked to each another. Completing the connections could cost millions of dollars and take years to finish.

With emerging technologies, connectivity among cable companies can be developed via the Internet.

A signal sent through an encoder at the County Administrative Center could be sent to a decoder at the cable companies. Informal discussions with one provider indicate that start-up equipment needed to implement this option could exceed \$250,000. It is not clear whether cable companies might agree to help share the burden of those costs. Additionally, Internet capacity to carry the signal for this option could cost at least \$1,500 a month if handled internally through CORNET.

A less expensive option would be a limited, live cable broadcast that could reach almost 240,000 residents in two Inland counties. Such a broadcast could be developed quickly and inexpensively through Charter cable, which serves the Riverside, Norco and San Bernardino areas.

The Clerk of the Board staff already routes audio and video of Board meetings to screens inside the Board room and in the CAC lobby. Those signals could be transmitted through an existing connection to Charter Cable that was included during the CAC annex construction.

Because of the existing connection, broadcast by Charter Cable might be possible within a month of Board approval. Start-up equipment costs would be approximately \$7,000 or less, with few ongoing costs.

## **Live Internet Broadcast**

Another option is the Internet. About 14 counties in California broadcast board of supervisors meetings, planning commission meetings, etc., on the Internet via a process called audio/video streaming. Some counties maintain indexed archives as part of their websites, allowing residents to view meeting segments or an entire meeting after a live broadcast has been archived. Some older computers might not have the capability to readily access a live Internet broadcast but that limitation likely will change in the near future as technology grows.

On-line broadcasts can be handled by dedicating a portion of the county's computer capacity for the streaming operation. Because of the drain on internal computer systems, many California counties contract with companies that provide bandwidth needed for Internet broadcasts.

The companies offer more than a dozen services to complement the audio/video feed. For example, Los Angeles County's live broadcast includes closed-captioned text that scrolls next to the video screen and is used to develop highly accurate transcripts that can be provided as part of the service contract.

Broadcasts also offer real-time translation from English to Spanish, links to agendas, statements of proceedings and a searchable archive of past meetings. Because archives are indexed by agenda item, residents can view individual items quickly without having to watch an entire meeting. Orange and Los Angeles counties spend about \$280,000 and \$240,000 a year, respectively, for their Internet and cable broadcast services.

The contractor for both counties has estimated that a base-service broadcast for Riverside County would cost in the neighborhood of \$165,000 a year. That price would include equipment and labor to produce a remotely controlled broadcast, instant transcripts and a scrolling agenda that lets viewers know the subject being discussed. Additional options could increase costs significantly.

Video recordings also would be duplicated for distribution to cable systems and delivered for replay by courier the morning after a meeting.

Some counties, such as Ventura County, offer a broadcast with fewer complementary services. An Internet broadcast through the contractor that provides service to Ventura County would cost approximately \$20,000 at start-up for software and setup, plus about \$1,400 a month for Internet bandwidth.

That price would include the Internet broadcast, an indexed archive of previous meetings and unlimited bandwidth, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In addition to broadcasting Board meetings, the system could be used to broadcast promotional videos and marketing information about Riverside County.

Unrelated to costs, representatives from several counties that broadcast public meetings and companies that provide broadcast services offer some observations about their experiences:

If a broadcast is implemented without a budget or vehicle for promoting it, a live Internet broadcast will be little used. Even with a promotional campaign, the public tends to view live meetings far less than the meeting archives.

Finally, other counties report that live broadcasts initially might lengthen Board meetings but appear to have little effect long-term.

### **Conclusion:**

If the Board chooses to broadcast its meetings, a phased approach starting with a pilot program might be the best method to gauge its value to residents and the county. Should the Board wish to proceed, the Executive Office would work with Charter Cable to broadcast meetings live in the Riverside and Norco areas, as well as airing cable replays. The Executive Office would then report back to the Board in three to six months with feedback about the broadcasts, as well as updates on costs and options for expanding the broadcasts. Concurrently, Board meetings could be recorded on videotape or DVDs and delivered to cable companies countywide for delayed broadcast.

Also, given today's rapid changes in technology, it is imperative that the county closely examine its outreach and marketing needs – and the way cable television can help meet those needs – as negotiations on cable television franchise agreements begin in the coming year.

### **Cable Replay of Recorded Board Meetings**

Ongoing costs: Videotapes or DVD discs – \$50 to \$100 a week, depending on meeting length

Staff time to duplicate videotape or discs – \$150 a week

Distribution during rounds by Riverside County dispatch couriers – \$50 a week

One-time costs: Equipment to prepare signal for broadcast, duplicate videotapes or discs – \$2,500

Video mixer to improve video quality and graphics production – \$2,500

### **Limited Live Cable Broadcast (Riverside/Norco/San Bernardino)**

Ongoing costs: Minimal

One-time costs: Start-up equipment – \$7,000 or less

### **Live Internet Broadcast**

Various options, depending on vendor's proposal. Costs range from \$20,000 at startup for software and equipment (plus \$1,400 a month for bandwidth) to more than \$165,000 annually.