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Broadband expansion plans move forward into 2011

With funding approved, work on the CAO-MMC project continues

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Published: Friday, August 20, 2010 6:10 PM EDT

Big steps were announced from the Governor's Office, Zack Space's office and Horizion Telecom on Wednesday to bridge the "digital divide" that has for so long left a quality broadband connection unavailable in southern Ohio.

The digital divide is an expression used to by those involved in the Connecting Appalachian Ohio Middle Mile Consortium projects to represent the lack of available high-speed internet available in the Appalachia region. That lack of availability, however, will diminish drastically thanks to the work of politicians, economic development organizations and other interested parties who would like to make Appalachia (Jackson County included) a more business-friendly environment.

According to a press release from the office of Zack Space, the Connecting Appalachian Ohio Broadband Plan is expected to create 725 jobs during its construction, not to mention making the southeastern and east-central Ohio areas more accessible to businesses who need to stay connected to function. The availability of broadband to existing businesses in the area may also allow those businesses to expand and create more jobs. "Pure and

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simple, this is about jobs. The truth is that many businesses today simply won't go to a place where they don't have the access to both

a good workforce and a broadband network," Space explained on Wednesday.

The project will see \$66.5 million in Recovery Act funding, and will affect 34 counties in the state. The funding will go through Horizon

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Telecom and see nearly \$28.5 in matching funds, according to a press release from the Governor's office.

All told, the entire state will see \$118 million in funding for broadband projects stretched across the most impoverished and under-covered areas of the entire state, with OneCommunity seeing \$44.8 million for 20 more northeast counties, and Connected Nation, Inc., seeing \$6.9 million, with \$3.1 million in matching funds.

Connect Ohio, a name synonymous locally with efforts to establish broadband locally, is a division of Connected Nation, Inc., and will administer the grant. Their mission with this grant money, according to the release issued from the Governor's office, is to establish more interest and knowledge of broadband availability by making 2,000 new public computers available and upgrading 317 computer centers, as well as conducting training sessions to educate users in literacy.

The plan for Horizon, according to their grant proposal executive summary, in short is to run 1,960 new miles of fiber-optic network, and 1,097 miles of high-count backbone fiber, adding 10 rings designed from the ground-up to serve the needs of the region.

According to the summary, the fiber paths were designed to pass as closely as possible to community institutions, business centers, wireless towers to provide backhaul to last-mile providers, and electric company substations for smart-grid applications.

While the main proposed fiber lines only pass through a small portion of the county, primarily through larger cities and along major highways, according to a map in the proposal, it is also noted that several ISPs (Internet Service Providers) have sent letters of intent to Horizon Telecom to use the proposed network for backhaul, meaning essentially that local ISPs who already exist in Jackson County and the surrounding areas will have fiber support, allowing them to speed up the connections, and provide more reliable connections to their customers.

Also, regional carriers such as AT&T, Sprint, Verizon, and Time-Warner and several others have been included in the project, which will make locally provided high-speed internet both more readily available, and of higher quality.

The project is still a long way from completion, but will see beginning construction starting in early 2011, just a few short months away.

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