



Horizon Telecom adds partners in broadband project

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Written by
Jona Ison

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CHILLICOTHE -- Horizon Telcom's multi-million dollar broadband project has moved another step forward with the selection of project partners.

The company will begin constructing its new fiber optic broadband network across 34 of Ohio's counties this summer. Technology from Fujitsu Network Communications Inc., a leading provider of business, information technology and communications solutions, and Fujitsu's partners, Juniper Networks Inc. and Calix Inc., will help Horizon complete what it describes as a "state-of-the-art" broadband network that can continue to be updated in the future.

"The choice was very clear based on their industry-leading collaboration and joint delivery of best-of-breed network products which will enable a network architecture servicing Horizon customers with premier levels of broadband service well into the future," Horizon Vice President of Operations Joe Corbin said in a press release.

By employing technologies from its partners, Horizon will be able to increase network capacity while reducing costs and speeding up delivery of advanced broadband services. The network also will contain the technology that will be able to support new and emerging bandwidth-intensive applications in the future.

In July 2010, Horizon received a \$66.4 million Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program stimulus grant to help fund the \$94.9 million project. Horizon is partnered with the Ohio Middle Mile Consortium, which is focused on expanding broadband infrastructure to the underserved and unserved areas of the state. Other partners also were funded for projects so that by time the projects are complete, almost every Ohio county will have a level of broadband.

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The announcement comes just weeks after a Scholar's Roundtable report on broadband expansion in rural areas was released by the Center for Rural Strategies. The forum of four experts was spurred by the 2009 commitments of \$7 billion in stimulus funds to fund projects such as Horizon's.

"One major conclusion of this discussion is that while broadband will not bring immediate economic transformation to rural America, regions that lack broadband will be crippled (without it)," Sharon Stover wrote in the report's executive summary.

The feeling among the experts was broadband will not necessarily lead to the addition of new jobs in rural areas but is expected to help maintain current jobs by keeping up with technology. The regions that can profit most from broadband are metro areas that already have the high-speed capacity.

"Our forum suggests that we consider looking for something beyond new jobs as the marker of what broadband means for rural regions," Stover wrote. "Institutions such as libraries, schools, and health clinics and hospitals have unique roles in developing rural populations' familiarity with technology and its applications and benefits. ... E-health, distance education and e-government services are poised to explode in the next decade, and rural communities need to be ready to exploit their value for their environment and livelihood if they are to stay vital and connected."

Horizon's plan for expansion follows the idea from the report. The project will create a "backbone" of broadband lines by connecting 600 anchor tenants --health care facilities, community colleges, schools, public safety answering points, industrial parks and safety services communication towers.