



Network project to extend Internet

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

LOGAN, Ohio - The Hocking Hills region has great scenery but slow and spotty service when it comes to the Internet.

That is about to change.

Last week, Chillicothe-based Horizon Telecom began construction in Logan on a project that eventually will result in a fiber-optic broadband network through 34 counties in southern and eastern Ohio.

Cleveland-based nonprofit OneCommunity and Com Net Inc., of Wapakoneta, also started construction recently on projects to extend broadband capacity to underserved areas around Ohio.

Existing broadband

Points of presence:



Future broadband

Points of presence after Federal stimulus funding:



Source: Ohio Middle Mile Consortium
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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Federal stimulus money awarded last year is helping to fund the broadband projects statewide.

"It's going to open us up to the rest of the world," said Bill Rinehart, executive director of the Logan-Hocking Chamber of Commerce and the Hocking County Community Improvement Corporation.

The corporation, a nonprofit economic-development agency, is trying to recruit more businesses to the local Commerce Park, and Rinehart said broadband will help.

"We like being a small community," he said. "But the way the world runs is high-speed broadband."

In making decisions about where to locate, businesses demand high-speed, high-capacity Internet as much as they require water and sewer service.

Smaller businesses, such as the painters, glass blowers, furniture makers and others that dot the region, will benefit because they will be better able to advertise and sell their work online, Rinehart said.

The tourism industry on which the Hocking Hills region depends also will benefit because lodging establishments will be able to offer more services, such as teleconferencing for corporate retreats.

Like other parts of Appalachian Ohio, Hocking County has limited high-speed Internet service now.

The hills and forests that make the region so beautiful have made it challenging and expensive to deliver reliable high-speed service everywhere. Many households have only slow, dial-up service; others have satellite service that can be unreliable depending on the weather, Rinehart said.

"We need it," said Carol Mackey, who owns the CMC Real Estate Group in Logan. She has high-speed service at her office but only dial-up at her rural home. "Having 21st-century technology countywide would be my goal as a business person."

The three broadband-expansion projects will connect to the statewide OARnet, the Ohio Academic Resources Network that already provides high-speed Internet to state colleges and universities and some school districts and government agencies.

City and suburban residents take high-speed Internet for granted. In Athens County, said Wendy Jakmas, president of the Athens Area Chamber of Commerce, "It's hard to believe we are in 2011, and there are big pockets where we have no connectivity. It's hard for metropolitan people to fathom."

Plans call for Horizon to string 1,960 miles of new fiber-optic line from pole to pole alongside existing electric-power lines.

The lines will connect 592 community institutions, including schools, hospitals, industrial parks and public-safety agencies, throughout the 34-county area.

Currently, more than 80percent of those 592 institutions lack fiber-based, broadband access or the minimum speeds to match their Internet needs, said Randy Davies, Horizon spokesman.

Eventually, this new backbone of capacity, called the "middle mile," will allow other Internet service providers to negotiate with Horizon to connect and build "last mile" connections, and then sell high-speed service to households and businesses.



HORIZON TELCOM

A Horizon Telecom work starts stringing fiber-optic lines in Logan in Hocking County. The company is adding fiber optic to 34 counties in southern and eastern Ohio.

The nearly \$95 million project received \$66.4 million in federal stimulus funds, and Horizon is paying the rest.

Elsewhere, the \$43 million Com Net project in western Ohio includes \$30 million in stimulus money, and the nearly \$70 million OneCommunity project in northeastern Ohio includes \$44.8million.

The three projects are scheduled to be completed in 2013.

Collectively, the projects will add more than 3,500 new miles of optical fiber statewide, a capacity projected to reach 3.6 million households and more than 534,000 businesses, according to OARnet estimates.

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