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Scioto County part of broadband initiative

by Frank Lewis

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Scioto is one of 34 counties in southeast Ohio that will receive expanded broadband access.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, cheered Monday's groundbreaking of a project that will expand access to broadband for 34 counties in Appalachia. The project would deploy more than 1,900 miles of fiber optic network to more than 705,000 households and connect nearly 600 community anchors. The funds were awarded to the Ohio Middle Mile Consortium, which Brown helped to facilitate after he fought to devote \$2.5 billion worth of Recovery Act broadband funding for rural broadband projects. Brown said he has fought to secure additional funding for broadband investments. During Senate consideration of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), Brown authored an amendment to increase USDA funding by \$2.5 billion to target rural and underserved communities.

Lauren Kulik of Brown's office said the company is based in Chillicothe, and in addition to Scioto, the counties benefiting from the CAOMMC include: Adams, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Carroll, Clermont, Columbiana, Coshocton, Fairfield, Fayette, Gallia, Guemsey, Harrison, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Jackson, Jefferson, Knox, Lawrence, Licking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Ross, Tuscarawas, Vinton and Washington.

"If we want to promote economic development throughout Ohio, we need to ensure that businesses and households have broadband access," Brown said. "Ohio's rural communities have been overlooked for too long, but today's groundbreaking is great news for southeastern Ohio. Ohio Middle Mile and Horizon's cooperation will help promote economic growth and improve the competitiveness of Ohio communities in underserved areas. This is an investment in the future of our state."

Brown also said broadband bridges the digital gap that too often disadvantages rural Ohio — undermining business development and compromising timely access to basic public services such as fire, police and health care. In August 2010, the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Commerce announced that Ohio's Middle Mile Consortium (OMMC), a public-private statewide partnership, would receive more than \$141 million in total funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for broadband expansion. Horizon Telcom's Connecting Appalachian Ohio proposal was awarded \$66.5 million in funds to expand broadband access for 34 counties in southeastern Ohio.

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According to an analysis released by the National Economic Council last year, overall Recovery Act investments in broadband are expected to create tens of thousands of jobs in the near term and expand economic development and job opportunities in communities that would otherwise be left behind in the new knowledge-based economy. Upon passage of the Recovery Act in 2009, Brown convened a day-long workshop among potential broadband applicants and brought U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Undersecretary Dallas Tonsager to Ohio to discuss the application process and encourage local collaboration and partnerships.

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