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State board OKs broadband expansion funds

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The Ohio Controlling Board on Monday approved the $3.1 million state investment in the latest broadband enhancement. As a result, Portsmouth and Wooster now have been added to the Phase II deployment to Akron, Athens and Youngstown, planned for completion by the end of 2012. Phase I of the development will connect Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton and Toledo by September 2012.

The expanded broadband network will allow speeds of 100 gigabits per second (Gbps) for Shawnee State University programs, which could also help foster economic development in the area.

Kasich announced Portsmouth's inclusion to the broadband network last week in a visit to Portsmouth.

"This is the new gold standard for technology and information sharing, and we want to ensure that the entire state benefits from its potential," Kasich said. "Portsmouth is a gateway to southeastern Ohio, and Wooster serves as an important agricultural stronghold as home to The Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) and Agricultural Technical Institute (ATI). Both cities are natural selections from a geographic and economic standpoint."

John Conley, chief of P-20 Educational Technology for the Ohio Board of Regents, was in Portsmouth with Kasich last week and explained the benefits of the technology, which will take Shawnee State's broadband capacity from 1 to 100 gigabytes.

"We basically scoped this out and added on what the additional cost would be to come on down to Portsmouth, and what this means to Shawnee State or other research institutions such as Southern Ohio Medical Center is what they are going to be able to transmit," Conley said. "Shawnee State University is fifth in the country in gaming and engineering degrees. They have a fabulous facility over there. Dr. Morris has done a great job at Shawnee State, and they have the lowest tuition in Ohio over there, too. So I really think it's going to be an economic engine where researchers come to campus at Shawnee State and work with business partners in the area to come up with products using this technology and create jobs in Ohio. That's the key."

SSU President Dr. Rita Rice Morris said SSU will work to partner with area educational institutions and health facilities for research, as a result of the expansion.

Kasich said the technology expansion "opens the faucet" for innovation and discovery by dramatically increasing the speed of the statewide fiber-optic network operated by the Ohio Academic Resources Network (OARnet), a member of the Ohio Board of Regents Ohio Technology Consortium. The 100 Gbps network will connect OARnet to Internet2 through connection points at the northern and southern ends of the state. Internet2, a nationwide advanced networking consortium, spans U.S. and international institutions that are leaders in the worlds of research, academia, industry and government.

Kasich said the state also will offer assistance to 33 of Ohio's four-year public and private and two-year community and technical institutions to contract with vendors to upgrade their last-mile connections to the network backbone. These enhancements will provide each campus with substantial speed boosts of up to 1 Gbps, and will establish a new minimum standard for broadband connectivity for higher education institutions. The faster connections will facilitate the institutions' ability to access the latest technology required to communicate and compete with other higher education institutions across the country and ensure their ability to have the tools needed to train tomorrow's workforce.

"This is an incremental investment that will reap tremendous returns for our state," Kasich said. "Ohio soon will be able to transmit the 'Big Data' that is critical to research and economic growth throughout every corner of our state. Additionally, our higher education institutions also will be on competitive footing with other institutions that are educating and training the next generation of technology leaders."

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