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Patrick files bill for \$25M broadband investment in Mass.

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Businesses and residents in remote areas of Massachusetts may finally be able to have high-speed internet access as a part of a \$25 million state investment in broadband infrastructure.

But the measure will need to get the support of major telecommunications players before anything can happen.

Governor Deval Patrick announced the filing of a bond bill Thursday that would establish a Massachusetts Broadband Institute, whose mission would be to extend access to every community in the state by 2010. State officials say state-wide broadband will spur economic developments in areas it is needed.

"There's ample evidence that access to broadband triggers profound job creation and economic development opportunities," said Daniel O'Connell, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development. "The residents and businesses of underserved communities will realize a significant return on a very targeted and worthwhile investment and our state's entire economy will be that much stronger because of it."

There are 32 communities in Massachusetts without broadband Internet access and 62 others with limited access. Most of the areas are in the western parts of the state.

Area telecommunication providers stand to gain from the bill, as the Broadband Institute doles out funds to establish public-private partnerships to build and maintain the state-owned infrastructure. Both existing telecommunications providers and incoming ones would be eligible to bid for the funding.

Some inside the telecommunication industry have expressed skepticism in the past of the governor's broadband plans. **Verizon**, one of the largest telecommunications companies in the state, said they are willing to consider the legislation.

"We are looking forward to reviewing the bill and meeting with legislative leaders and the administration to determine what role we might be able to play," said Carol Baribeau, Verizon regional director of public affairs, in a statement. "All of us are familiar with the challenges of providing broadband in rural areas and this proposal by the governor may be one creative approach to do so."

Jackie Noblett can be reached at jnoblett@bizjournals.com

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