



Berkshire Connect, Inc.



**PIONEER VALLEY
CONNECT**

Connects' Reaction to the State's Announcement of a \$25 million Broadband Incentive Fund

August 2, 2007

Introduction

Berkshire Connect, Inc. and Pioneer Valley Connect (the Connects) are regional initiatives devoted to creating a more competitive and robust telecommunications landscape in Western Massachusetts. Currently, one-third of the 101 municipalities in Western Massachusetts have no access to basic broadband technology, such as Digital Subscriber Lines (DSL) or cable modem broadband. To the Connects as well as residents, business leaders and public officials, this situation is unacceptable. Access to affordable, reliable broadband telecommunications is vital for economic development, public health and safety, government efficiency, and education today and in the future.

Massachusetts Broadband Incentive Fund

The Connects have worked tirelessly over the past ten years to address the broadband access problem in Western Massachusetts. Today's announcement by the Patrick-Murray Administration and with the support of the local legislators is an exciting moment for the Connects and signifies the start of the next phase for bringing broadband to the unserved areas of this region. The announcement proposed a \$25 million Broadband Incentive Fund, designed to target public investment in enduring telecommunications infrastructure assets in unserved communities of Western Massachusetts. This public investment will provide the incentive to attract private partners to also invest in deployment of broadband technologies. (For more information about the Broadband Incentive Fund, go to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development's "State Unveils \$25 Million Broadband Incentive Fund" press release from August 2, 2007, available online at www.bconnect.org or www.pioneervalleyconnect.org.)

This proposed Fund reflects the Connects' "Connecting Western Massachusetts" proposal presented to the Governor's Administration, state agencies and local legislators over the past few months. The Connects' proposal was the result of the culmination of two important projects and the tremendous experience that these organizations have acquired through broadband advocacy over the past 10 years. The Connecting Western Massachusetts proposal advocated the investment of public monies through a competitive procurement process to build sustainable infrastructure assets to deploy carrier neutral networks. The Connects asked the Massachusetts legislative delegation and Governor Patrick's Administration for a commitment for the upfront capital necessary to achieve a robust, future-focused broadband network for the region. This public sector capital investment would solve the market failure experienced in this region of the Commonwealth, which has hindered economic development, e-government, public health and safety, and educational initiatives.

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Next Steps

With the Broadband Incentive Fund announcement by the Governor's Administration, there are several steps that need to be taken before the deployment of infrastructure may begin. The Governor's proposal will need to go the Massachusetts legislature for their endorsement. The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative has been assigned the task to manage the fund and to create the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, a division to oversee the fund. Considerable work and many decisions must be made to determine how to administer the fund, such as how to conduct the competitive procurement process to select private partners and to facilitate the private investment in complementary infrastructure.

At the same time, the Connects will be actively involved in the necessary work to encourage the most efficient and strategic use of this fund to achieve an advanced telecommunications landscape that will provide affordable, reliable and redundant high capacity broadband services throughout Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties. It is incumbent on the unserved and underserved communities of Western Massachusetts to work collaboratively with the Connects through this process. Key, local-level information must be gathered, such as the potential overall market for broadband in a community and where these potential users are located, and inventory of the assets and potential obstacles for broadband deployment in a community. The Connects are developing an online "Municipal Broadband Toolkit" to provide guidance and useful tools for town governments and local broadband groups to utilize to collect information. Additional tools will be added to the website as they become available, such as model zoning bylaws and a zoning checklist to determine how broadband deployment may be impacted by current regulations. The Connects will also be working with state agencies to help identify policy changes that may need to take place at the state level to help facilitate broadband deployment.

The Patrick Administration's announcement today signifies the commitment sought by the Connects for an investment in the future of Western Massachusetts. Now the work begins.