



Pioneer Valley Connect Hosts Meeting with United States General Accountability Office (GAO) Staff

On August 23, 2005, a select panel of Pioneer Valley Connect Steering Committee members and a representative from a telecommunications service provider from the Pioneer Valley met with JayEtta Hecker, Amy Abramowitz and Nina Horowitz of the GAO Physical Infrastructure Team. On the panel were the following individuals:

- Matthew Crocker, Vice President of Crocker Communications, a regional telecommunications service provider and a Preferred Provider of Pioneer Valley Connect;
- Rick Oliveri, the information technology director for Baystate Health Systems which operates three hospitals in the region;
- Ann Burke, Vice President of the Springfield Business Development Corporation, an affiliate of the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts;
- Teri Anderson, Economic Development Coordinator for the City of Northampton;
- Aron Goldman, Co-chair of the Shutesbury-Leverett Broadband Committee (SLBC) and home-based business owner in Shutesbury; and
- Jessica Atwood, Economic Development Planner for the Franklin Regional Council of Governments and staff person to Pioneer Valley Connect.

The two-hour meeting was held at the Greenfield Community College Downtown Campus in Greenfield, MA. The panel greatly appreciated the opportunity to speak with the GAO team about the broadband needs of this region. A copy of the Broadband Availability Database was given to the GAO team. This database was created using funds from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative's John Adams Innovation Institute and is found on the websites of Berkshire Connect and Pioneer Valley Connect. For discussion purposes, a map of western Massachusetts identifying municipalities that do not have access to either DSL or cable TV service was created based upon this information.

Each of the participants offered a great amount of useful information to the GAO team. Matthew Crocker's experience operating a CLEC provided great insight on the existing infrastructure, the difficulties of a changing regulatory environment, and the challenges of competing with Verizon as it is the primary network provider in the region. Aron Goldman discussed SLBC efforts, including how programs like the USDA's rural broadband program was not applicable for rural areas that do not meet the specific grant criteria thresholds. Ann Burke presented the status of underserved areas found in urban areas, such as in parts of Springfield. Rick Oliveri explained the challenges for creating a network connecting three local hospitals, as well as creating eventual connections to doctors' offices and patients' homes. Teri Anderson presented concerns from a municipal perspective related to the deployment of infrastructure in a community, from right of way issues to working with private corporations. Jessica Atwood discussed the history of the Pioneer Valley Connect effort and its current role as a collaborator and facilitator of various activities that impact broadband deployment and telecommunications infrastructure in the region. The panel appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences and thoughts on the important issue of broadband deployment.