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## THE RECORDER

### State launches \$25M rural broadband plan

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Combined Sources

BECKET -- Money for high-speed Internet connections could soon be rushing to 32 towns that currently don't have broadband access. State officials were in this Berkshire County town Thursday to discuss details of a Broadband Incentive Fund that will funnel \$25 million to communities that need the infrastructure to support broadband networks.

"This is exactly what we've been asking for," said Linda Dunlavy, co-director of Pioneer Valley Connect, which has been working for seven years to bring high-speed telecommunication to even the smallest towns in the region. "It exciting." Dunlavy, who attended Thursday's press conference, said the state funds would be used to invest in expensive infrastructure, which until now has been a disincentive for telecommunications providers to serve sparsely populated areas. Such a project, for example, could consist of a "fiber ring" that Pioneer Valley Connect could have built to tie into a high-speed "backbone" tied to the nexus in Springfield. Such a ring could then be used to attract providers to build and operate wireless systems in under-served communities.

The initiative would call for an "aggressive" schedule of service throughout western Massachusetts by 2010, Dunlavy added. Area legislators applauded the governor for the taking this step, which Sen. Stanley Rosenberg, D-Amherst, said is "about hope. ... Providing broadband access to residents of rural western Massachusetts is critical to improving economic opportunities in these areas."

By providing money for basic infrastructure like fiber and wireless towers, officials are hoping private companies will invest in the communities to provide high-speed Internet services. Along with the 32 towns that have no broadband at all -- all but one of which are located in western Massachusetts -- another 63 communities have limited access to the service.