



BERKSHIRE CONNECT, INC.



October 20, 2006

“Connects Awarded John Adams Innovation Institute Grant to Increase Broadband Availability in Western Massachusetts”

The leadership of Berkshire Connect, Inc. and Pioneer Valley Connect are pleased to announce a recent grant award from the John Adams Innovation Institute to further strategies to advance broadband into Western Massachusetts' underserved communities. The Innovation Institute, a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, supports technology-based economic development initiatives in the Commonwealth. A carefully developed collaborative proposal by the Connects has resulted in a two-year, \$300,000 Regional Priority award for the Pioneer Valley and Berkshire Regions.

“This award represents the transformative economic development that Legislature supported when they created and funded the John Adams Innovation Institute,” said Representative Daniel E. Bosley (D-North Adams), “Berkshire Connect and Pioneer Valley Connect have served as national models to bring Internet access to underserved communities. Now, through this grant award, they are seeking to leverage their success in this telecommunications area to bring broadband to our rural communities and wireless solutions to our hometowns and downtowns.”

The joint award will allow the Connects to build upon previous work conducted to address the telecommunications needs of the region and to pursue short- and long-term solutions to increase broadband access to many underserved residents and businesses in the region that currently have little or no access to high speed internet. Representative Stephen Kulik (D-Worthington) said "This groundbreaking award will allow our ongoing regional broadband work to step up to a new level. The Berkshire and Pioneer Valley Connect organizations will now have the financial resources to test the best technologies for high speed telecommunications services for our rural and underserved communities, as well as involve the public in planning and implementing this critical economic development tool throughout western Massachusetts."

Senator Stanley Rosenberg (D-Amherst) stated that "affordable and reliable broadband service will help rural communities compete in the high-tech economy. The Connects have never wavered in their pursuit of that goal and this grant is a reward for their efforts." The mission of the Connects is to create an advanced telecommunications landscape that will have affordable, reliable and redundant high capacity broadband services available throughout Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties. Both Connects have had successes in advancing telecommunications in the region, but significant challenges remain. One-third of the 101 communities in Western Massachusetts have no access to broadband, such as DSL or cable modem technologies. The Connects believe that T-1 offerings are too expensive as a substitute and satellite services do not represent a true broadband service. In many of the communities that have broadband access, it may only be available in limited areas. Broadband access for all communities of Western Massachusetts is essential in today's economy and is a necessary tool to support public health & safety, education, and government efficiency.

This award will enable the Connects to pursue the following types of tasks:

1. Implement experimental approaches and beta test programs for the application of wireless technologies in three communities;
2. Conduct a series of broadband public forums;
3. Develop regional approaches and identify funding to implement a long-term solution; and
4. Develop a public-private organizational solution capable of overseeing the long-term management of assets.

For more information about the Connects, go to their websites at www.bconnect.org or www.pioneervalleyconnect.org.

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