

# NFBA Project

## Executive Summary

### **8. Executive Summary of Project for BIP and BTOP**

The North Florida Broadband Authority (NFBA) is applying for project funding under the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) and Broadband Initiatives Program (BIP) as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The NFBA project will build a new Middle Mile broadband infrastructure, which will extend the high speed internet backbone capacity to local last-mile providers in order to serve vital public sector services and private sector commercial customers. The \$39.4 million project includes in-kind contributions from the membership of over \$9.2 million and a formal request for just over \$30 million in Federal Broadband Stimulus funding. Support for this new middle mile infrastructure is unanimous across government, incumbent providers and new entrants alike. Further, this area has been hard hit by the recession and will remain without broadband for many years to come without this grant.

The North Florida Broadband Authority is a newly formed government entity, established specifically for the purpose of bringing Broadband services to the North Florida region. Based on Florida Home Rule statutes which allow governments to create a single entity by interlocal agreements, the Authority provides independent management of a truly open access system . The assets provided from the federal government will not be owned or controlled by commercial interest. The Authority will operate much like an independent utility, similar to a water, sewer or electrical utility, but focused on providing a sustainable and ubiquitous Middle Mile broadband transport network. The counties served by this utility include: Columbia, Baker, Bradford, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor and Union.

The North Florida Broadband Authority ("NFBA") project fully complies with all of the BIP and BTOP statutory goals as identified in the grant application. When completed, the project will provide the first-ever -- and only -- open, ubiquitous, Middle Mile access to broadband Internet services for both private entities and public institutions in the underserved areas of northern Florida. This area, which is composed of a 14 county RACEC (Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern), is deemed by the Governor as a priority for broadband, specifically as a means to enable greater economic growth and employment opportunities. The NFBA network will deliver up to 1 Gbps capacity throughout the region – up to 600 times the current capacity available to public and private entities in the region – well within the stipulated 3-year time frame.

This network will provide capacity and reach to cover more than 154, 000 households, and 26,893 businesses. In addition, the project will provide the potential to connect to 1,573 critical facilities, and 265 health care entities, according to the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration.

The NFBA Middle Mile project will spur additional private investment in Last Mile infrastructure as a result of extending the large capacity network to reach the entire geographic region. Redundant, multi-megabit broadband access will be made available to critical governmental (first responder) services, as well as to local internet service providers which will result in increased economic investment by existing and relocating companies to the region. In fact, there is a RUS funded last mile provider, Main Street Broadband, who has already received \$8 million in funding for 12 of the 14 counties. They have been unable to launch due to lack of middle mile infrastructure – it is not currently available in the region. Our deployment will not only allow this to occur but will speed up their deployment by 50-75% and perhaps insure the RUS loan provided by USDA. Most importantly, NFBA will accomplish these goals at a reasonable cost and in an open, neutral-access network in accordance with the rules spelled out in the NOFA and following FCC principles.

The NFBA project will support community anchor institutions, such as schools, hospital, clinics, public safety, libraries and community colleges by bringing very high speed ubiquitous broadband to these areas, either as a primary or back-up provider. These institutions will be able to provide area residents, including those who do not own a computer, with access to a variety of services including virtual learning, online vocational and technical training, formal education courses and awareness programs. In addition, new online K-12 education level courses for children can be offered with full access to the same resources found in a “normal” classroom, such as specialized book collections, course materials, and library resources.

The NFBA project is designed to be the backbone supporting a range of e-government deployments, which connect government entities with constituents in the county and the region. Low-income, unemployed, aged and otherwise vulnerable populations in the area will have online access to support agencies, such as American Red Cross, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Environmental Protection Agency, Association of Health Care Administrators and other organizations at the Federal, State, and Local level.

In addition, the NFBA project will greatly expand broadband access to public safety/first responder agencies. Specifically, the project design incorporates a secure multi-megabit connection for intranet and internet connectivity. The network will give public safety organizations the ability to leverage vertical assets while its architecture accommodates the likely future deployment of fleet mobile broadband connectivity.

The IP-based system has been designed to allow for secure, prioritized LAN connectivity including the potential ability to interface land mobile radios (LMRs) directly into the NFBA IP network. Further, this IP based system will be the groundwork for the recently allocated 700 MHz spectrum data network of the future. This feature, which will allow first responders to make voice calls and talk groups from LMR systems and new 700 MHz data systems to anywhere in the world, means that emergency relief efforts can be quickly

coordinated in response to catastrophic events, such as flooding, tropical storms, hurricanes, and power outages, which are common to the north Florida region.

This project will also greatly stimulate the demand for economic growth and job creation. For example, the number of employees to be hired directly for this project within the 14-county area is estimated at more than 100 over the next five years. The jobs created through indirect growth and expansion of businesses is likely to many times that number. These will be high technology network and IT engineering positions, along with call center, customer service and administrative positions. With a majority of these positions based in the 14-county RACEC, the NFBA project will bring the additional benefit of improving living conditions for area residents and families. Lack of broadband infrastructure has hindered recent developments to lure new industry to the area.

Another significant impact will be realized in the form of job growth through access to Last Mile broadband services in both the private and public sector. For example, Main Street Broadband will be requiring an estimated 10-15 employment positions in each county, covering Internet-based employment and remote telecommunications, with specialists in the areas of telemedicine, virtual learning and online sales.