

North Florida Broadband Authority
<http://www.nfba-fl.org/>

BACKGROUND

The North Florida Broadband Authority (NFBA) has been awarded funding under the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The NFBA project will build a new Middle Mile broadband infrastructure, which extends the high-speed Internet backbone capacity to local last-mile providers. This serves vital public sector services and private sector commercial customers.

The \$39.4 million project includes in-kind contributions of over \$9.2 million from the membership and the \$30 million in Federal Broadband Stimulus funding. Support for this new Middle Mile infrastructure is widespread. The participants include 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. This area has been hard hit by the recession and will remain without broadband for many years to come without this grant.

When completed, the project will provide the first and only open Middle Mile access to broadband Internet services for both private entities and public institutions in the underserved areas of northern Florida.

THE AUTHORITY

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, by interlocal agreement, a single entity, 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 cities and counties served by the Authority include: Baker County, Bradford County, Cedar Key, Columbia County, Cross City, Dixie County, Gilchrist County, Hamilton County, Jefferson County, Lafayette County, Lake City, Levy County, Live Oak, Madison County, Monticello, Perry, Putnam County, Suwannee County, Taylor County, Union County, Town of White Springs, Wakulla County, and Worthington Springs.

THE NETWORK

Within 3 years 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.

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.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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, last mile provider, Main Street Broadband, has already received \$8 million in funding for 12 of the 14 counties. They have been unable to deploy due to lack of Middle Mile infrastructure. The NFBA project will speed their deployment by 50-75 percent and maximize the value of the loan provided by USDA. Most important, 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.

This project will also greatly stimulate 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 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 efforts to recruit new industry to the area.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS: Education, recreation, health and safety

The NFBA project will support community anchor institutions, such as schools, hospital, clinics, public safety, libraries and community colleges by bringing very high speed universal 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 uses, connecting governments 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.

The investment in this high-capacity, open access network will have a profound and lasting impact on the lives and economic opportunities of the more than 380,000 residents of the region.