



BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT

Issue:

For future economic growth, it is necessary for Garrett County to have affordable and accessible high-speed internet. While reliable coverage data is not available, currently it is estimated that only about 65% of the county residents and businesses have broadband access. Even with the approximately 40 miles of fiber backbone connecting major county institutions that was funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for the One Maryland program, Garrett County must have federal assistance to fund the last mile for private businesses and residents. High-speed internet is a necessity to compete in today's global economy and to have a good quality of life.

Garrett County will continue to lose ground without the continued development of broadband and high-speed internet connectivity.

Background:

In 2012, the Garrett County Department of Economic Development released a study that found that broadband service was only available to 65% of the county and that supply and demand lags behind the nation's metropolitan areas. Garrett County suffers from many of the same broadband challenges as do other rural parts of the country, including large unserved remote areas; relatively little competition in population centers; high pricing that prevents consumers from fully benefiting from the networks where they do exist. These challenges are of enormous importance in light of the county's clear understanding of the connection of broadband availability to community and economic development.

The study presented recommendations for expanding both broadband facilities and broadband use in Garrett County. They range from expanding "middle-mile" broadband infrastructure to educating county residents about the value of broadband. Furthermore, the study provided a roadmap for expanding broadband infrastructure and use, which have long been recognized as an essential for economic development.

The smaller population of rural communities means a lack of competition of private service providers which not only creates higher prices for customers but also leads to minimal investment towards expansion of the network by those providers. Their business models are based on return on investment for the company and it is understandable the reluctance to invest that money to build the "last mile" of fiber when there is not a large enough population base to generate the needed return.





BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT

Garrett County worked with a private partner to develop a fixed wireless network providing broadband service to currently over 1,000 residents and businesses that were previously un/under served. To help reduce the infrastructure development costs, Garrett County matched three, \$250,000 ARC grants for the three-phase effort to reach specific targeted areas with fixed wireless service.

Garrett County Broadband History of Funding Summary:

Federal/State/Local: One Maryland Broadband network (OMBN), funded by ARRA Stimulus funds, 2010

- Approximately \$115 million to State, funded fiber backbone and electronics to all MD jurisdictions to connect Community Anchor Institutions including local/state/federal government, schools, college, public health and emergency services
- Garrett County received approximately 40 miles of fiber, and connections to 49 Community Anchor Institutions
- Construction complete, and network operational in August 2013

ARC Matching Grant, \$250k ARC/\$250k County, Broadband Extension, received June 2012

- Install approximately 4.5 miles additional fiber to connect an additional 23 CAI's
- Construction complete, all CAI's connected

Three ARC Matching Grants, each with \$250k ARC/\$250k County, Last Mile Broadband Wireless Network

- Design, deploy, test and operate a last mile wireless network utilizing TV White Space technology to reach as many as 3,000 unserved households/businesses
- Currently over 1,000 customers are receiving service, and over 500 on a waiting list

Action Requested:

Affordable access to the internet has become a basic right in this country, and residents in rural communities like Garrett County are being denied that right. Countries around the world understand that their federal governments must fund broadband development to remain competitive. We need Congress to make that same commitment. It's about job creation, job retention, telemedicine, access to resources, and basic quality of life.





BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT

In order for Garrett County to assess which areas of the county have access to broadband, and what access level is available for each location, reliable data is needed. Currently Internet Service Providers (ISPs) only share rudimentary, generalized data for where they currently serve customers. Company-specific, address-level data would enable local governments to make better decisions as to the technologies needed to reach un/underserved areas.

As federal resources are made available to ISPs, it would be helpful to allow local input on these applications. Local government may have additional information that would be valuable to the decision-makers, such as which assets exist nearby that could possibly be used to enhance project success.

Local governments are working with limited resources and limited knowledge in a quickly changing industry. Allowing flexibility in federally-funded programs to allow project managers to take advantage of new technologies that can reduce costs and extend coverage more efficiently is essential.

Additionally, we request \$20 million to assist with the development of last-mile fiber for the areas of Bittinger, Pleasant Valley, Swanton & Finzel. These areas serve large numbers of businesses and residents but ISPs will not make the investment. It is vitally important to future community and economic development that these areas have accessibility to broadband.

