

FCC ready to rewire broadband plan

Increased access could benefit rural Delaware

BY AARON NATHANS • THE NEWS JOURNAL • MARCH 16, 2010

Federal regulators today will detail a plan to extend high-speed Internet to more rural areas, which could help fill holes in Delaware's network of high-speed coverage, especially in Sussex County, local technology specialists say.

The Federal Communications Commission's proposal would ideally bring affordable, high-speed Internet connections to nearly all Americans and make access much faster for people who already have broadband. The FCC released the executive summary on Monday.

The FCC wants to connect 100 million U.S. households to broadband, with connection speeds of 100 megabits per second, by 2020, the agency reported. That's at least 20 times faster than most current home connections.

The plan underscores the Obama administration's view that high-speed Internet is not a luxury, but a basic necessity for education, health care and economic development.

"To me, broadband is an infrastructure challenge that's very akin to what we've faced in the past with telephones and electricity," said FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski.

Adding bandwidth would help attract businesses to more areas in Delaware, said Michael Hojnicky, chief customer officer for the state's Department of Technology and Information. The agency was awarded a \$1.5 million grant last year to map out the state of broadband access and plan for future expansion.

The University of Delaware has made a proposal to be part of that project. Doug Tuttle, the university's principal investigator on the project, said service tends to get spottier farther away from a population center. Any home with a land-line phone can get dial-up service, but DSL service isn't available everywhere, he said.

"Our sense is clearly as you move south in the state, it is more and more missing links," Tuttle said.

The FCC plan also calls for every American community to have at least one anchor

institution, such as a school, library or hospital, that has ultra-high-speed access, at least a gigabit per second, or 10 times faster than the 100 megabits per second envisioned for home connections.

Tuttle said wireless Internet is the best way to reach people living in rural areas, since it doesn't make a lot of economic sense to string fiber to a single farmhouse.

State Rep. Darryl Scott, D-Dover, said the state lost out on a second grant that would have helped build out wireless networks in rural areas and he hopes the FCC plan would help serve the same purpose.

"It's really a challenge for businesses where they don't have the density to support the investment," said Scott, chairman of the House Telecommunication Internet & Technology Committee. "We have to insist on that last mile of coverage."

About two-thirds of U.S. households have high-speed Internet access now. Many people in the other one-third could get broadband but choose not to buy it, either because they think it's too expensive or because they don't see a need for it. The FCC plan calls for increasing adoption rates to more than 90 percent of the population.

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