

For immediate release:

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MASSACHUSETTS BROADBAND INSTITUTE RECEIVES IMPORTANT FEDERAL APPROVAL TO ADVANCE *MASSBROADBAND 123* NETWORK

Westborough, MA (March 14, 2011) – The MBI today announced it has received the necessary federal approval to advance the *MassBroadband 123* network project. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has formally approved the MBI’s environmental assessment, a critical requirement to commencing the 1,338 mile Internet backbone network build that will expand broadband access in western and north central Massachusetts communities.

“This is an important milestone in moving the *MassBroadband 123* project forward and reaching Governor Patrick’s goal of broadband connectivity in the region,” said MBI Director Judith Dumont. “We’re making great progress toward bridging the digital divide.”

The NTIA found that the *MassBroadband 123* project will have no significant impact on biological and cultural resources in the service area. The environmental assessment, which assured compliance with state and federal environmental protection laws, thoroughly analyzed the potential impact of fiber-optic cable deployment on water and air quality, geology and soil, land use and other resources in the project’s service area. This finding was needed before any groundbreaking activity could begin on the project, including work that the pole owners will have to do in anticipation of the MBI’s network build.

To expand high-speed Internet access in the region, the MBI will attach fiber-optic cable to over 30,000 existing utility poles in western and north central Massachusetts. The MBI will begin full-scale aerial fiber deployment this summer and has been surveying the utility poles to determine what work will be required by the pole owners to make room on the poles for the MBI’s cable. This effort is already underway and will be used by the pole owners to estimate and execute the necessary “make-ready” work that will begin on time in the late spring.

The MBI is a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC), a public economic development agency chartered by the Commonwealth to spur innovation across Massachusetts. MTC will own the *MassBroadband 123* network and is responsible for its design and construction, which is expected to be completed by summer 2013. MTC will soon issue a request for proposals for a design-build contractor to build the network.

The MBI recently signed an agreement with Axia NGNetworks USA to serve as the network operator for the *MassBroadband 123* network. Axia will provide wholesale services on the network to broadband service providers and maintain and refresh the fiber-optic network to ensure its operability and efficiency. The *MassBroadband 123* network will be open access to allow any broadband provider to connect and offer its services, which will increase competition and affordability of options available to consumers.

MassBroadband 123 will connect over 120 communities in western and north central Massachusetts. *MassBroadband 123* is a critical component of Governor Deval Patrick's initiative to expand broadband connectivity across the state. The MBI was awarded \$45.4 million in federal stimulus funding to develop the *MassBroadband 123* network. The Commonwealth is providing \$26.2 million in matching funds, bringing the total investment in the project to \$71.6 million.

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About the MBI

The Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) is working to extend affordable high-speed Internet access to all homes, businesses, schools, libraries, medical facilities, government offices and other public places across the Commonwealth. Governor Patrick created the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, when he signed the Broadband Act into law in August 2008. The Act gives the MBI the authority to invest up to \$40 million of state bond funds in necessary and long-lived infrastructure assets, such as conduits, fiber-optic cable and wireless towers. For more information on the MBI, please visit www.massbroadband.org.