

High hopes for \$71M broadband project

Lawmakers make announcement at Greenfield C.C.

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GREENFIELD, Mass. (WWLP) - More than 1,000 miles of new fiber optic cable will be installed across the Pioneer Valley and Berkshire County, designed to improve broadband access and the economy.

It's all part of a \$45.4 million project funded through federal stimulus money, matched with \$26 million in state funds.

It will provide high speed Internet to schools, colleges, police and fire departments, and dozens of healthcare providers in the area.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke was joined by Governor Deval Patrick, Sen. John Kerry, Representatives John Olver and Richard Neal for the announcement at Greenfield Community College on Thursday.

"This critical investment will lay the groundwork for sustainable economic growth by connecting areas of Massachusetts that have been without the full economic, educational and social benefits of high-speed Internet," Locke said.

In this day and age it's hard to imagine doing anything without the internet but in many rural parts of western mass logging on requires dialing up.

At the Double Edge Theatre in Ashfield, the director of an upcoming performance wants to broadcast it online but without strong broadband the options are limited.

"You will find third world countries today that are ahead of us in terms of their access to the internet. It's just embarrassing but worse than embarrassing it's costing us jobs, competitive ability and it is a turnoff to businesses that try to make a decision about where to come and locate," said Sen. John Kerry.

Those who live in rural communities like Goshen are cautiously optimistic. Past efforts improve broadband access have left them out.

"We pay taxes just somebody else, the next person, but we don't really reap the benefits," said Dawn Scaparotti of Goshen.