

Western Mass. in line for \$71M broadband expansion

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Rejected in an initial round of grants in January, a proposal to expand broadband coverage in western and north central Massachusetts got a boost from the federal government today in the form of a \$45.4 million stimulus fund grant.

Gov. Deval Patrick announced the grant award and said the state will chip in \$26.2 million in matching funds, bringing the total funding to \$71.6 million.

The federal stimulus funding was awarded to the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI), a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, through the second round of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP).

The MBI project is intended to create jobs by bringing broadband access to businesses and residents in 123 communities.

"The MBI is looking forward to bringing affordable, quality broadband access that will improve the lives of residents and put an end to the digital divide in Western and North-Central Massachusetts," said MBI Director Judith Dumont in a press release.

The project, MassBroadband 123, will construct approximately 1,100 miles of fiber-optic cable to connect homes and businesses, as well as community anchor institutions, including community colleges, public safety institutions, hospitals and libraries. The proposed service area covers over one-third of Massachusetts.

The MBI's network will also contain 55 miles of fiber-optic cable that was deployed along I-91 from the Vermont border to the Connecticut border through the MBI's partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). This \$5 million project will be a key component of the greater MassBroadband 123 network.

MassBroadband 123 is intended to be a publicly owned, open access, middle-mile backbone that will allow last-mile service providers to connect and deliver broadband services to households and businesses.