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STATE TO IDENTIFY HIGH-PRIORITY BROADBAND INVESTMENT TARGETS THROUGH ADVANCED MAPPING TECHNOLOGIES

BOSTON, MA (May 6, 2009) — The Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) today announced a partnership between the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and EEA's Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS) to develop sophisticated mapping that will help the state determine the highest-priority areas for investments in broadband infrastructure and technology. The mapping project will initially focus on western Massachusetts, where problems with broadband coverage are most acute. It will also lay the foundation for comprehensive, statewide broadband mapping, as targeted for funding by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Governor Deval Patrick has made deploying high-speed Internet, or broadband, to unserved and underserved areas of Massachusetts a top priority. In August 2008, Governor Patrick signed *An Act Establishing and Funding the Massachusetts Broadband Institute* to accelerate investment in broadband infrastructure assets, such as fiber-optic cables and wireless towers.

The Commonwealth's existing broadband map, developed in June 2007 based on a survey conducted by the John Adams Innovation Institute, identified which Massachusetts communities had partial or no broadband coverage. To best inform the public investment decisions the MBI will need to make to remedy these broadband coverage gaps, the new mapping project will identify the availability of broadband access at a much more detailed level, based on mapping of broadband infrastructure by individual block. This four-month project will focus on unserved and underserved communities in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties, and will incorporate multiple data sets into one map, creating an extensive inventory of existing assets and a detailed picture of where broadband gaps need to be addressed. The maps will also be used to create a baseline to track the incremental progress of the MBI.

“This mapping project is a critical next step towards prioritizing specific and targeted broadband investments,” said Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Greg Bialecki. “It will enable the MBI to maximize the use of public funds, both state and potentially federal, and help to attract private sector investments that will reduce the overall cost of deployment.”

Increased broadband availability leads to improved health care, public safety, and public education services throughout Massachusetts. Access to broadband also stimulates economic growth, helps create jobs and increases property values. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides for \$7.2 billion to improve broadband access nationwide, including \$350 million for grants to states to develop comprehensive broadband maps over the next two years.

“We are already using digital geographic information systems to improve our management of environmental resources and determine the best sites for alternative energy development,” Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Ian A. Bowles said. “This collaboration will tap the technical and data management expertise of MassGIS to advance the goals of the Massachusetts broadband initiative.”

“This project will provide a way to incorporate public input regarding coverage gaps experienced by Massachusetts residents and will put more sophisticated data to work in support of Governor Patrick’s goal to bridge the digital divide in Massachusetts by 2011,” said MBI Director Sharon Gillett. “In addition to helping the MBI make immediate operational and investment decisions in western Massachusetts, the interactive GIS platform created will be scalable in the longer term and well positions Massachusetts for state-wide mapping with federal funding through the Recovery Act.”

The mapping project fulfills the directives of the Massachusetts Legislature, which authorized the MBI to develop and monitor a comprehensive understanding of the locations, cost, speed, and quality of telecommunications and broadband infrastructure and services in Massachusetts.

“The mapping work will support some important objectives for the MBI both in understanding where we are at today and making sure that future investments are cost-effective,” MassGIS Director Christian Jacqz said. “I look forward to supporting the MBI as they develop their own GIS capacity and integrate it into their operations.”

For more information on the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, visit www.masstech.org/broadband .
For more information on MassGIS, visit <http://www.mass.gov/mgis/> .

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