

Feds Fund High Speed Internet for Hilltowns

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It's the announcement dial-up internet users have been waiting to hear for years. Broadband is on its way to rural regions of Western Massachusetts.

On Thursday, U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, Senator John Kerry, Congressman John Olver, Congressman Richard Neal and Governor Deval Patrick joined together at Greenfield Community College. They want to make sure rural Western Mass residents know they will soon be able to log on to high speed Internet service.

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke says "45 Million dollars is coming right here to Western Massachusetts."

That money is coming from \$794 million in new projects that will expand broadband access across America. It will be matched by \$26 Million in state funds and will allow construction of 1,000 miles of new fiber-optic cable to rural communities in the Pioneer Valley and the Berkshires. Governor Deval Patrick says, it's been a long time coming.

"As beautiful as it is and as sophisticated as we are in Western Massachusetts. We don't have sophisticated infrastructure. Internet is a key part of that."

The project will take about two years. When complete, 123 rural communities who have lacked broadband service will finally be connected.

Senator John Kerry says "It allows you to operate and provide jobs to people within that community so they can stay there, grow up there, and live the life that their parents led and they led as children and want to lead as adults and sometimes feel they just can't."

The new project will also create jobs. Some of them, immediate. Hundreds of Western Mass residents will be able to go back to work digging trenches and laying fiber-optic cable.

Secretary Locke says "This is going to lay the groundwork for sustainable economic growth in the medium to long term."

The new broadband service will connect more than one million residents and 44,000 businesses.