

Maine Government News

Maine Receives Critical Federal Funds for Broadband Expansion

December 17, 2009

Governor's Office

AUGUSTA - Governor John E. Baldacci thanked the U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke for traveling to Maine today to announce a \$25.4 million federal Recovery Act grant to expand high-speed Internet service to rural areas of the State. The Secretary was in Orono and Bangor to highlight the grant, called the "Three Ring Binder" Middle Mile Project. The project is led by GWI of Biddeford. It was one of a number of proposals supported by the Governor in a letter to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration in October.

"This federal Recovery Act funding will help Maine people across the State access technologies that are critical to our educational aspirations, our health, and certainly our workforce development and economy," said Governor Baldacci. "We know Maine people can successfully compete anywhere in the world, but to realize opportunities and grow jobs, we need to ensure that Mainers have access to the latest technology, including high speed broadband connections. That's why I have made high-speed broadband development a priority of my administration. This \$25 million grant will provide a significant boost to the State's efforts."

The federal funds will support a large portion of the total project cost, which is estimated to be \$31.75 million. The remaining balance of the total project cost - \$6.35 million - will be paid by private investors.

The project will bring benefits in construction and jobs, and will consist of 1,100 miles of "dark fiber" installed through western, eastern and northern areas of the State. The middle mile infrastructure will be open to all providers. There are 10 Internet Service Providers that have expressed interest in purchasing or leasing space in order to provide service to homes, businesses and community anchor institutions, such as hospital, schools and libraries. The Governor has asked Dick Thompson, his designee on federal Recovery Act Broadband matters, to ensure that the project makes the most effective and efficient use of the taxpayer dollars by eliminating overlaps and duplication of infrastructure.

Secretary Locke said that this grant announcement – one of the largest made today - is one of 18, with more awards to come in the next few months.

The Governor recognized the partnership that was critical in moving this proposal forward, including the Obama Administration, Maine's Congressional Delegation, the ConnectME Authority, the Broadband Strategy Council, and the other public-private partners.

"I appreciate GWI's efforts to bring together a broad array of interests, including Maine businesses, libraries, hospitals and Internet providers, to develop this plan, and I look forward to seeing real results on the ground. These are important investments in our State."