

## Broadband Advocates Testify in Boston

Staff reports - February 14, 2008

BOSTON - Gov. Deval Patrick and Western Massachusetts legislators are staying true to their promise in trying to deliver broadband service to the 32 unserved communities throughout the state by 2010.

During testimony delivered this morning before the Joint Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures and State Assets, officials said the approval of the broadband bond bill (An Act Establishing and Funding the Massachusetts Broadband Institute) would stimulate economic development, create jobs and increase property values, tax receipts and business formation.



[Click here for a larger image of the broadband map, courtesy of MTC.](#)

"The existing lack of service in over a third of Western Massachusetts cannot be ignored any longer. This digital divide slows and deters economic development, threatens public safety and health and restricts creativity in the classroom. The governor has stated many times that the entire commonwealth must be open for business and we truly cannot accomplish this goal without broadband available in all 351 municipalities," said Sen. Benjamin B. Downing, D-Pittsfield, in written testimony to the committee.

The Patrick administration and local lawmakers are looking to create a Broadband Incentive Fund, capitalized by a \$25 million general obligation bond and managed by a new division within the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative. According to a statement released by the governor's office on Thursday, the bond authorization will seek public-private partnerships to develop broadband infrastructure.

"The fund will enable the state to direct up to \$25 million toward such essential, long-lived broadband infrastructure as conduits, fiber and wireless towers, making it more cost-effective and attractive for private companies to invest additional funds and deliver complete solutions to customers in regions without broadband access," read the statement.

The text of the bill can be found [here](#).

Downing and Patrick joined Reps. Denis E. Guyer, D-Dalton, Daniel Bosley, D-North Adams, William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox, Stephen Kulik, D-Worthington, and members of the governor's administration at the hearing, as Berkshire County residents who traveled by bus to the city listened in.

Of the 32 towns in the state that are unserved by broadband, 22 are in Berkshire, Hampshire or Franklin counties. An additional 63 municipalities are considered underserved, 15 of which are in that same district. Of the 48 communities Downing represents, only 11 have access to broadband service.

"The fact is that most of my constituents do not enjoy the same technological advances

taken for granted by their neighbors to the east. This is more than an inconvenience. I submit that Massachusetts' policymakers must take appropriate steps now by passing this legislation in order to ensure that companies will continue to operate, expand and relocate to all regions of our Commonwealth, so their workers will have the family-friendly option of telecommuting, and so students in every school district will have the same broadband resources available to them," said Downing.

This was the only hearing scheduled on the bill, which was announced last fall by the the Berkshire delegation and Patrick administration officials in Becket.



The following is the text of Sen. Downing's written testimony in support of H. 4311:

*Dear Chairman Montigny and Chairman Flynn:*

*I write to register my strongest support for H. 4311, An Act Establishing and Funding the Massachusetts Broadband Institute , a bond bill filed by Governor Patrick which will have great and vast impacts on my district. I urge the Committee to release this most important proposal with a favorable report as quickly as possible.*

*Access to high-speed Internet, also known as broadband, is essential infrastructure that has been proven to stimulate economic development, create jobs and increase property values and tax receipts. Yet, today in Massachusetts 32 communities (all but one in western Massachusetts) are completely in the dark, without any access to broadband whatsoever. In my capacity as State Senator of the Berkshire, Hampshire and Franklin District I represent 22 of these unserved towns. An additional 63 municipalities in Massachusetts are considered underserved, with broadband access available in limited areas of the community. I represent 15 of these partially served towns. Out of the 48 wonderful communities in my district only 11 have access to broadband service today.*

*As the Boston Herald editorialized on January 26<sup>th</sup>, broadband providers may not have incentive to invest hundreds of thousands to build out their systems in these communities where a few hundred people might use it. They noted their collective surprise to learn that so many communities west of the Hub are without service. I*

*know, with our Blackberry phones and high speed internet service in our offices that it is hard to imagine getting through one day without these luxuries. But the fact is that most of my constituents do not enjoy the same technological advances taken for granted by their neighbors to the east. This is more than an inconvenience. I submit that Massachusetts' policy-makers must take appropriate steps now by passing this legislation in order to ensure that companies will continue to operate, expand and relocate to all regions of our Commonwealth, so their workers will have the family-friendly option of telecommuting, and so students in every school district will have the same broadband resources available to them.*

*The existing lack of service in over 1/3 of western Massachusetts cannot be ignored any longer. This digital divide slows and deters economic development, threatens public safety and health, and restricts creativity in the classroom. The Governor has stated many times that the entire Commonwealth must be open for business, and we truly cannot accomplish this goal without broadband available in all 351 municipalities.*

*H. 4311 creates the Massachusetts Broadband Institute within the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC) to leverage existing resources and expertise to meet an aggressive objective: broadband service for the 32 unserved communities by the year 2010. This will be accomplished by creating the Massachusetts Broadband Incentive Fund, capitalized by the issuance of a \$25 million, general-obligation broadband bond. This bond authorization will seek public-private partnerships to develop broadband infrastructure to all corners of the Commonwealth, targeting our currently unserved communities.*

*There is not a single item of more importance to my district than ensuring broadband service to all Massachusetts cities and towns in an expedited fashion. I applaud the Patrick Administration for putting forth this proposal and making this matter a priority. I suggest that \$25 million is a valid investment for the economic prosperity of our Commonwealth. When we reach the goal of full broadband connectivity from Pittsfield to Provincetown and every community in between, our Commonwealth will reap countless academic, public safety and economic benefits.*

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iBerkshires • 106 Main Street • P.O. Box 1787  
North Adams, MA 01247 • tel: 413.663.3384 • fax: 413.663.3615 • [info@iberkshires.com](mailto:info@iberkshires.com)