

The Berkshire Eagle

Wednesday, July 30, 2008

Editorial

'Net access for county

The Legislature's passage of the \$40 million broadband Internet access bill will have great benefits for Berkshire County, the home of nearly half of the state's communities that do not have high-speed access. Given that the county's highway transportation network will only get marginally better, this major improvement to its Internet transportation network, so to speak, will help established businesses while attracting new ones.

The state Senate Monday unanimously passed the legislation creating a Broadband Institute to work with private providers in connecting the state's 32 unserved communities. The funding provides a powerful incentive for private companies to compete to wire these communities and provide needed upgrades for the many communities with some access. Attractive Berkshire towns should appeal to small, high-tech businesses that need Internet access, not highways or factory space.

Governor Patrick, a broadband access proponent who proposed a \$25 million program, can be expected to sign the bill into law. The additional funding approved by the Legislature came about in large part through the efforts of Representative Denis Guyer of Dalton, who has made expanded access a priority. The entire Berkshire delegation pushed for the legislation, with Pittsfield's Ben Downing carrying the ball in the Senate.

The state, which hasn't improved its highway network sufficiently, must do better with its Internet network, given the rapid pace of technological upgrades. That will be an ongoing challenge for legislators in the years ahead.