

## Broadband bill marches forward

### OpenCape awaits further action on Beacon Hill

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The effort to provide the entire Cape with reliable, redundant broadband access cleared another hurdle last week, but the project still has a way to go before it crosses the finish line, say those involved.

The project is OpenCape, a proposed wireless broadband network that would cover the entire Cape.

The state Senate on Thursday unanimously passed a \$40 million broadband bill that could provide vital funding to the project; the House approved a version of the legislation at the end of June.

Originally, the legislation called for \$25 million in spending and focused on expanding broadband access in unserved parts of western Massachusetts. The House, however, added another \$15 million intended for communities with existing, but limited, broadband access.

There are still several legislative and logistical steps to go, however, before OpenCape could receive any of the \$5 million it has requested.

"There's still a lot of work to do," said Dan Gallagher, the president of the OpenCape Corp., the nonprofit group driving the project.

The Senate made some changes to the bill, regarding procedures and administration of funds. Therefore, the legislation must now return to the House to be approved in its new form, according to a government Web site that outlines the process of lawmaking in the state.

If the House does not agree to the modified bill, a compromise would have to be negotiated by a committee consisting of members of both legislative branches. Once the bill is passed by the entire legislature, the governor would then have 10 days to sign it into law.

After the law is enacted, the specific nature of the broadband bill would mean still further delays before OpenCape would receive the money it is requesting.

"Once this is signed by the governor, will OpenCape get a \$5 million check?" Gallagher said. "No, that is unlikely to happen."

The legislation calls for the creation of a Massachusetts Broadband Institute, within the existing Massachusetts Technology Collaborative.

Once formed, this body would determine procedures for allocating funds before any money could be dedicated to the OpenCape project.

Though the bill, in its current form, does not specifically designate money for OpenCape, Rep. Matthew Patrick, D-Falmouth, said that he believes the region will receive funds.

"I think Cape Cod is recognized," Patrick said. "I don't think its going to lose any impact with them if we're not specifically mentioned."

The complex process could also yield some opportunities, Gallagher said. As more people become involved, there could be a chance to create partnerships with private enterprises or the federal government.

"A broader participation as to how we will build out the network down here will lead to even better ideas possibly," he said.

Despite the obstacles yet to be overcome, Gallagher is fairly confident that the funding will come through.

"Hopefully by next hurricane season we'll be moving forward," he said.