



**Article:** Connect Ohio formulates 2-year broadband plan

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Estimated cost for infrastructure about \$270,000

HOCKING COUNTY - As part of Gov. Strickland's effort to get statewide broadband to all four corners of Ohio, a representative from Connect Ohio, the agency responsible for helping the Appalachian region achieve this goal, visited Thursday to discuss the steps needed to make it happen within two years.

Gary Lambert, southeast region field director for Connect Ohio, noted the goal of Connect Ohio is to "accelerate technology in the state and close the digital divide." He said having broadband across all areas of the state, especially southeastern Ohio, is important for economic development. "Businesses don't ask when broadband will get here (when they look to move here). They say 'we are thinking of locating here; where's the broadband.'"

Connect Ohio is a public-private partnership that works with businesses, government entities and universities to bring affordable broadband access to Ohio, and is an additional resource for the Hocking-Perry-Vinton Regional Network (HPVRN), which has already submitted a broadband proposal to the Ohio Broadband Council (OBC). That proposal is still awaiting approval.

According to the proposal itself, having broadband in all three southeastern counties (Hocking, Perry and Vinton), would help promote "job growth, telemedicine capabilities, reduction in government costs, increased capabilities and support to both K-12 schools and institutes of higher education, as well as improved availability of affordable broadband service to rural residential families throughout the three counties."

If approved, the OBC could provide state assistance and a community access point (CAP), could be created in Logan which would broadcast broadband to a variety of locations such as government buildings, Hocking College and the Hocking Valley Community Hospital. The broadband would then spread to Perry and Vinton counties and would include wireless distribution to rural areas in both Perry and Vinton Counties.

Connect Ohio has done an analysis of all the potential broadband transmitter locations within Hocking County and has created a methodology for the expansion of broadband

coverage into rural parts of the county.

According to Connect Ohio's assessment, the county terrain could make the project difficult. "The terrain in Hocking County can best be described as 'unforgiving and treacherous,'" humorously reads the report.

The estimated cost for infrastructure equipment and labor in the county is approximately \$270,000. That estimate doesn't include the price of networking equipment, additional structural analysis of towers (which range in price from \$1500 to \$5,000 per study), tower rental and electricity at the tower sites or customer equipment.

According to Lambert, 92 percent of Ohio has broadband availability in the state, however, only 45 percent use it. He noted that 350,000 families in Ohio don't have broadband access, and most live in the Appalachian region. "We want to have a good adoption rate," Lambert continued. "Of that 45 percent who don't use it, only 18 percent say they can't have it because of cost. The others don't know how to use it."

He noted a similar effort in Kentucky increased broadband availability by 45 percent in three years.

Hocking County Commissioner Greg Green noted he has received phone calls from citizens who believe once broadband is in the county, that it will be free, which isn't the case. "Folks are getting the perception they'll be getting this free. But we're really making it affordable to them," he said.

Lambert was quick to point out that affordability is a major goal of Connect Ohio, but that "it will take time to do this right."

Towards the end of the meeting, Lambert asked for people in the following areas to bring five to 10 people to the next meeting: business and industry, k-12, healthcare, library, higher education, community based or faith based organizations, government, tourism and agriculture.

The following people will represent the nine areas: business and industry, Bill Rinehart of the Logan-Hocking Chamber of Commerce; K-12, Gary Kanade, information technology of the Logan-Hocking School Board; healthcare, Brian Longnecker, network technician for the Hocking Valley Community Healthcare; library, Dutch Yunge, board member of the Logan-Hocking County District Library; higher education, Jerry Hutton, dean of the Hocking College Energy Institute; community and faith based organizations, commissioner Green; government, Hocking County Auditor Ken Wilson; tourism, Hocking County Tourism Director Karen Raymore; and agriculture, Anthony Chesser of the Hocking County Farm Bureau.

The next meeting will be announced at a later date.