

What is it? A new 770 mile fiber optic communications network. It will be a “middle-mile” network, which means it is designed to provide wholesale data transport services to other service providers such as Internet Service Providers, telecom companies and cellular companies. Consistent with the objectives of the federal grant program, it is also designed to provide high-capacity connections to specific “community anchor institutions” such as K-12 schools, libraries, colleges, state government offices, public safety communications networks. The project will provide data transport service at speeds up to one gigabit per second to institutions, businesses, local broadband service providers, and cellular operators.

What is it not? This project will not deliver internet service to the doors of Vermont households. That would be a “last-mile” project, which was not encouraged by the BTOP funding opportunity announcement. (There are different state and federal grant or loan programs intended to support rural “last-mile” projects.) However, “last-mile” providers are potential users of this network; the high capacity of this network will offer services to transport communications traffic between last-mile facilities in local communities and the regional, national, and international networks to which they seek to connect.

Who is involved in the project? The Vermont Telecommunications Authority (VTA), Sovernet Communications, Vermont Department of Libraries, Vermont Department of Education, Vermont State Colleges, Vermont Law School, Vermont Department of Public Safety, Vermont Department of Information and Innovation, and the New England Telehealth Consortium. These entities represent over 340 locations which this network seeks to connect.

Examples of its benefit:

- Enabling upgrades in broadband and cellular services currently offered, and make extension of broadband and cellular service to new areas of the state economically feasible.
- Increased opportunity for students and educational institutions through media-rich on-line learning.
- Improved patient care through support for use of Electronic Health Records, including transfers of large medical imaging files.
- Enabling more web-based interaction by Vermonters with state agencies and reducing state costs of travel and data center space through video conferencing and data center consolidation.
- Improved access by the public to super high-speed broadband service at public libraries.

Where is it? The community anchor institutions that will be served by this network are in Rutland, Bennington, Windham, Windsor, Orange, Washington, and Caledonia counties of Vermont.

How much will the network cost to construct? Roughly \$48 million.

When will the network be complete and offering service? Department of Commerce grant rules require the network to be “substantially complete” (2/3rd’s) within 24 months of the grant being accepted, and “complete” within 36 months.

Who are the funders? The largest share, \$33.4 million of the funding for the project will come from the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP), a stimulus program under the U.S. Department of Commerce. The largest share of non-federal funds will be provided by Sovernet Communications in the amount of \$11,603,455. The VTA will provide \$2,308,102 and the Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation \$399,900 through the Vermont Department of Libraries.

Who will run the network? The network will be built, owned, and operated by Sovernet Communications. The VTA will administer the grant, provide oversight of the sub-grant to Sovernet and act as liaison to the Department of Commerce.