

Cuomo: Twin Counties getting over \$12.2M for broadband

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HUDSON — Actions to expand broadband for all New Yorkers within the next two years, including over \$12.2 million to the Twin Counties, were announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo at the Hudson Area Library this morning.

Cuomo was joined by Michael Tucker, president and chief executive officer of the Columbia Economic Development Corporation, and Audrey Zibelman, chairwoman of the New York State Public Service Commission, to discuss the next steps in the New NY Broadband Plan.

Launched in March, the plan aims to provide high-speed internet access for all of New York state by the end of 2018.

Round one award winners were announced, with awarded projects expected to serve over 30,000 homes that are underserved or without high-speed internet access.

In this round, \$8,720,560 is being given to State Telephone Company Inc. based out of Coxsackie, \$2,512,562 to Germantown Telephone Company and \$1,009,339 to Mid-Hudson Data Corp., which serves Columbia, Greene and southern Albany counties.

Tucker opened the event with a speech in front of a packed crowd in the library's community room.

"Today's announcement is an important milestone in this plan and a perfect example of what we can achieve when government comes together and delivers on the needs of the community," he said. "The New NY Broadband Plan is making a difference in the way communities communicate, especially through schools, households and community institutions like this library. We will only see this progress continue to grow."

Zibelman took the podium next to present the four actions that will ensure high-speed internet access for all New Yorkers.



State broadband map 2016

A map of the state areas with highspeed internet access in 2016.

The first involves the merger between Charter Communications and Time Warner, which was approved by the Public Service Commission in January. Under the conditions, Charter agreed to upgrade internet service for more than two million homes and businesses to speeds of 100 Mbps by the end of 2018.

During the presentation, Zibelman announced that Charter has committed to completing the upgrades this winter, which is two years earlier than expected.

The merger also requires Charter to commit to building 145,000 additional internet connections by 2017, which is the second action of the broadband plan, she added.

The first six target counties for those connections are Columbia, Erie, Jefferson, Onondaga, Oswego and Sullivan.

“What that means is by mid-2017, the vast majority of customers in these areas are going to have access to 100 Mbps or more,” Zibelman said.

She then announced the first 25 awards under the state Complimentary Broadband Grant Program.

The Capital Region is being awarded \$6.2 million from the program, which will help provide expanded high-speed internet to 338,613 homes in the region.

Of that, \$2.5 million will go to Columbia County to expand services to 14,500 homes.

“Ninety-seven percent of New York homes for the first time are going to have access to high-speed broadband,” Zibelman said.

She also announced the launch of the second round of Request for Proposals to reach the remaining residents in the state's most rural areas.

Recipients of that grant will be announced later this year. A third and final round of Request for Proposals will also be announced at the end of the year.

“I’m very proud to say we are on track to meet Gov. Cuomo’s ambitious plans,” Zibelman said.

Cuomo was the last to speak.

“This is an exciting day,” he said in his opening remarks.

Broadband is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed in rural parts of the state, Cuomo said.

“This is everything. This is infrastructure for today. This is what the road system was in the 50s. You need roads, otherwise you can't get there. If you don't have a road, you can't develop an area. If you don't have broadband, there's no discussion,” he said.

Cuomo emphasized that New York state is the only state in the country that is ensuring all of its residents have high-speed internet and that the state is executing its broadband plan at a very fast rate.

“We are going to go from 99 percent that doesn't have high-speed internet today to 100 percent having it in two years, which is going to be an amazing transformation,” he said.