

Sen. Patrick Leahy (D), Sen. Bernie Sanders (I), Rep. Peter Welch (D) and Vermont Gov. Jim Douglas (R) Friday announced the largest public investment in broadband infrastructure ever made in Vermont. Federal agencies have awarded two Vermont telecommunication organizations a total of \$47.1 million in federal economic recovery grants to build fiber optic networks that will help form the core of Vermont's broadband network. The new funds will be used to wire "anchor institutions" across the state and bring high-capacity, lightning-fast, affordable broadband bandwidth closer to end users.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke told Leahy, Sanders and Welch that Locke Friday would be announcing that the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) is awarding a \$33.4 million grant to the Vermont Telecommunications Authority (VTA) and a \$13.7 million grant to the Vermont Telephone Company (VTEL) through NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP). The two grants are part of a \$7.2 billion broadband investment program that Congress and President Obama crafted as part of last year's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Both grants are awarded through BTOP's Comprehensive Community Infrastructure program, under which NTIA, according to the agency, solicited "projects to deploy new or improved broadband internet facilities and to connect 'community anchor institutions' such as schools, libraries, hospitals, and public safety facilities. These networks help ensure sustainable community growth and provide the foundation for enhanced household and business broadband internet services." For more information about the program visit <http://www2.ntia.doc.gov/about>.

VTA will use the funds to build Vermont Fiber Link, a statewide, mid-mile fiber network increasing bandwidth and reducing broadband costs to state offices, healthcare institutions, schools and other critical customers. Springfield-based VTEL will use the \$13.7 million grant to create an open-network middle-mile hub-and-spoke fiber network to schools, colleges, public safety facilities, healthcare facilities, and telecommunications providers.

On May 12th, Leahy, Sanders and Welch wrote to Secretary Locke in support of both the VTA proposal and the VTEL proposal.

"This is a major infrastructure investment in the future of Vermont's economy," said Leahy. "VTA and VTEL submitted applications that address a crucial need – laying a more comprehensive web of broadband-carrying fiber optic transmission lines to users across the state." Leahy, a senior member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, who pressed for inclusion of broadband infrastructure funding during drafting of the economic recovery package, added, "These federal investments are the largest public investments in boosting broadband access in Vermont's history, and the benefits will ripple throughout our economy, bringing lightning-fast bandwidth much closer to end users. Both VTA and VTEL will lay fiber where it does not exist today. This is the vital first step in delivering state-of-the-art broadband service to every Vermonter."

“Every day I hear from Vermonters upset about inadequate broadband service in our state,” said Sanders, who has long been an advocate of affordable and universal broadband service. “This \$47 million award of federal grants will bring Vermont broadband service into the 21st century. It will improve our business climate and help our schools, colleges, hospitals and other medical facilities perform better. It must also pave the way for reasonably-priced broadband services for virtually every household in the state of Vermont.”

“It is no overstatement to say that the future of Vermont’s economy depends upon the swift and complete deployment of broadband throughout our state. Yet Vermont continues to lag behind, preventing families, businesses, schools and hospitals from joining the digital age,” said Welch, a member of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet. “This grant is a major boost to Vermont’s communications infrastructure. It will provide broadband access to key institutions and bring us closer to our goal of a truly connected state.”

"Ensuring that all Vermonters have access to broadband service is a top priority of mine," said Governor Douglas. "We've been working hard to achieve that goal through the e-State initiative, the VTA and support of other broadband initiatives." Douglas, who launched the e-State initiative in 2007 that led to the creation of the VTA, noted that during the past legislative session Vermont invested \$2 million in the Capital Bill that will contribute to this project and another nearly \$3 million for his Backroads Broadband program to help service those hardest to reach Vermonters. "The success of this application is the result of so many working together with a shared vision. As a result we are closer to achieving our goal, while creating jobs today and strengthening our economy for the future," he added.

Friday’s announcement complements an announcement Leahy, Sanders and Welch made earlier this year of a \$69 million Department of Energy American Recovery and Reinvestment Act smart grid grant. That grant will be used to deploy technology, including high-speed internet access and fiber optic infrastructure, to better manage power demand and supply.

The United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service, which also solicited applications for broadband infrastructure funding as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, has not yet announced if any Vermont applicants will receive funding.