

#009 Regional Internet Access

April 2011

Opportunity: Expand broadband width and availability to become one of the most wired regions in the country.

Background: Going by different names—fiber, fiber optics, high speed, broadband, broadband DSL, wireless—it means the same thing: access to the internet. In Northeast Indiana, the ability to access the internet is inconsistent. In some areas, WiFi hot spots seem to be everywhere. In other areas, internet access is spotty at best. Throughout the Vision 2020 process, this issue arose repeatedly, with seven different counties listing it as a high-priority *must have* or *game-changing tactic* for their county. In the end, “Expand broadband width and availability” was listed as the third-highest must have infrastructure initiative, and was of great enough concern that it was voted on at the Regional Economic Summit.

Broadband was listed by the region as a tool to attract and maintain businesses, create a competitive business climate, attract more entrepreneurs who may choose to live in a rural area, create bedroom communities, and attract more diverse industries. Additionally it was listed as critical to success and fundamental in a communication-driven economy.

In Steuben County, iMAN is deploying a community fiber optic data network and using revenue from paid subscriptions to the fiber backbone for ongoing charitable projects through the community foundation. Funding support was also provided by the county commissioners. Adams County is also engaged in a program to provide fiber throughout the county.

Update – September, 2011:

No update at this time.

Citizens Advisory Panel Feedback – September 28, 2011

Impact

- It is needed to “keep up” in economic development – not geographically bound, brings international impact.
- Possible opportunity to establish the region as a technology leader

Difficulty

- Fairly Expensive – Will the cost outweigh the benefit?
- Do we have the resources?
- Will there be opposition from current providers?

Possible Opportunity Strategies:

1. Regionalize current iMAN initiative model
2. Explore other methods of achieving regional broadband access
3. Rely on existing utility providers to supply area with broadband access

Options:

- A. Pursue opportunity
- B. Obtain further information
- C. Realign/Refocus the opportunity
- D. Put aside for future consideration