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High-speed broadband expansion connects communities across Washington

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By Kitsap Peninsula Business Journal

TACOMA — Construction is now complete on Northwest Open Access Network's (NoaNet) nearly 1,000-mile expansion of broadband fiber, connecting nearly all unserved areas of Washington state that have struggled with limited access to high-speed Internet.

NoaNet received two federal American Reinvestment and Recovery Act grants to bring high-speed Internet access to schools, hospitals, emergency response agencies and libraries across Washington, and to lay the groundwork for bringing affordable broadband service to thousands of businesses and households. An additional 600 miles of expansion is scheduled for completion this summer through the second grant.

"This broadband initiative created immediate jobs during construction and brings economic investment to rural areas for years to come that have been left behind by the digital revolution," said Greg Marney, chief executive officer of NoaNet. "Washington is now nationally recognized as one of the most wired states in the country and we're proud to have contributed to this accomplishment."

Remote areas often have only the most rudimentary Internet capabilities needed to share critical information among firefighters, police, hospitals and first responders. Additionally, businesses are reluctant to relocate or expand in areas not served by broadband.

The new broadband service will expand public safety access to critical emergency and healthcare services to the hardest to reach locations in the state. The enhanced broadband system will also increase availability and viability for using broadband to transfer real-time data over networks, allowing hospital physicians to communicate with EMTs en route from injury sites.

"The strong partnership between NoaNet and the Washington State Library was key to improving broadband access to nearly 50 local libraries," said Rand Simmons, Washington State Librarian. "Our state's libraries are now able to help community members participate in e-learning, e-government and provide online services and digital resources for the 21st century."

The new broadband infrastructure creates a seamless network connection capable of:

- Connecting community colleges and universities, creating opportunities for collaboration on research and information exchange.

- Making remote diagnosis, enhancing professional training with reduced travel, and making it possible to provide immediate assessment and guidance to emergency workers via videoconferencing.
- Enabling businesses to utilize broadband to enhance business-to-business and machine-to-machine computing requirements, allowing efficiencies in automation of processes including inventory and fulfillment systems and web-oriented sales that are not currently available or extremely limited.
- Giving farmers access to advanced production technologies and real-time online trading markets; improving efficiencies and worldwide competitiveness of this important commercial agriculture sector.

"NoaNet and its member public utility districts have been working for more than a decade to bring broadband access to unserved and underserved areas of our state. We know from experience that world-class broadband connectivity is essential for job creation and providing key community services like healthcare, education and involvement in government," said Dave Siburg, general manager of Kitsap Public Utility District.

About NoaNet: NoaNet is leading the effort on behalf of a consortium of more than 60 private, governmental, tribal and nonprofit participants. NoaNet is a nonprofit mutual corporation providing wholesale telecommunications transport and is headquartered in Tacoma. For more than 10 years, it has operated a reliable public open-access broadband communication network totaling 1,831 fiber miles that provides rural areas access to broadband services, supporting 61 last-mile providers that serve more than 260,000 customers. NoaNet's members are 12 public utility districts — including those in Kitsap, Mason and Jefferson counties — and a joint operating agency that have served wholesale customers in Washington state since 2000.

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