

NoaNet to bring broadband, jobs to unserved WA communities

TechFlash - June 29, 2011

<http://seattle.bizjournals.com/seattle/2011/06/noanet-expands-in-washington.html>

BROADBAND

NoaNet to bring broadband, jobs to unserved WA communities

Aislyn Greene on Wednesday, June 29, 2011, 12:37pm PDT

Washington residents with little or no access to broadband Internet will soon see a change. The [Northwest Open Access Network](#) (NoaNet), a

nonprofit wholesale communications company based in Tacoma, plans to install over 1,000 miles of broadband infrastructure in unserved, rural areas around the state.

"This broadband initiative will create immediate jobs during construction and attract economic investment to rural areas that have struggled from limited access to broadband," said NoaNet CEO Greg Marney in a statement.

The project will cost an estimated \$183 million, \$140 million of which was provided by two federal grants as part of the American Reinvestment and Recovery acts. Job creation is a huge part of the expansion said Rob Kopp, NoaNet's chief technology officer.

"From a Recovery Act perspective, this is all about the creation of jobs," said Kopp. "In the previous quarter we generated 50 direct jobs; in construction, that job creation is expected to increase dramatically through the summer."

NoaNet has already kicked off the project and said that, once completed, the broadband network will reach more than 170 communities and 2,000 schools, hospitals, emergency responders, and libraries. The installation will be concentrated in the rural western portions of the state, including coastal regions such as Clallam and Pacific Counties, and rural areas east of the Cascades, from Colville to Walla Walla. (Check out this [interactive map](#) of broadband coverage in Washington.) Construction is expected to be completed within three years.

NoaNet is a mutual nonprofit, which means it's owned by a group of members -- in this case, a group of rural public utility districts. And, unlike Comcast and AT&T, it builds infrastructure that any retail service can use on a nondiscriminatory basis, said Kopp.

He said the nonprofit's mission is to increase telecommunication competition and provide high-speed Internet access in rural Washington to increase healthcare and economic development.

"Comcast and AT&T are more driven by shareholder value," said Kopp. "We're more driven about the long-term benefit to the state of Washington, rather than increasing shareholder value."

Kopp said that when NoaNet talks about bringing broadband to unserved areas, it can mean that an area either lacks any broadband access, or is served by a single provider, and lacks competition. Comcast doesn't have a great deal of coverage in areas like Eastern



A map of broadband availability in Washington. The gray indicates wireless connections, the green wireline connections.

Washington and though AT&T offers greater wireless coverage in the region, it's still not enough for most rural areas.

"There's a reason telecommunication companies have not invested in rural America, because there's not a great business case," he said. "If I'm the CEO of AT&T and I can invest \$1 million in the Seattle core market or a \$1 million in Pomeroy... do I need to say more?"

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