

BROADBAND TIMELINE FOR LINCOLN COUNTY, WASHINGTON



The 2009 American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) included funding to expand access to broadband services. Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet) received two ARRA grants totaling \$138.8 million to bring high-speed broadband fiber to anchor institutions in rural communities throughout Washington. Lincoln was one of the counties where NoaNet installed the fiber – a \$5 million investment. The following list chronicles the steps taken since the EDC learned that NoaNet was coming.

2021

- As of January 1, the estimated completion date for the CERB-funded planning project is March 31.

2020

- Lincoln County was awarded the CERB grant in January. At the same time, Coronavirus was hitting Washington. A state of emergency was called by the end of February and businesses were closed by the end of March. Schools struggled to move education online in a large, rural county with inadequate options.
- Virtual meetings kept communication flowing for some. Zoom's prevalence enabled a grant-required Community Meeting to take place with over 50 broadband consumers and providers from across the state. Lincoln County and Petrichor Broadband were able to talk about the grant project and get feedback on the plan. Unfortunately, Zoom also separated the rural from the remote rural and half the city halls in the county struggled to Zoom on their 10 down/3 up DSL.

2019

- The Mayor of Harrington was asked to speak in Olympia during an event where Governor Inslee introduced his broadband proposal for the coming biennium.
- The Economic Development Council hosted the Eastern Washington Rural Broadband Workshop in Davenport. The event brought together over a hundred broadband stakeholders to share best practices for the delivery of broadband to rural communities.
- During the 2019 session, the Legislature passed new broadband policy that 1) funded a statewide broadband office; 2) defined and set standards for broadband; 3) established broadband deployment goals; and 4) provided funding for a competitive broadband grant and loan program to be administered by the Public Works Board.
- Partnering with Lincoln County, the EDC submitted an application for a CERB broadband planning grant in November. Petrichor Broadband was the proposed consultant.
- Odessa Office Equipment was purchased by LocalTel Communications at the end of 2019. OOE founder Marlon Schafer will continue to manage the office and staff in Odessa throughout the transition.

2018

- The Harrington PDA's broadband project came to the attention of the State Senate's Committee for Economic Development and International Trade who invited PDA members to talk about the project during a Senate hearing. Eight months later the EDC hosted a policy meeting in Harrington with Governor Inslee's advisor on rural broadband.
- An update to the Lincoln County Comprehensive Plan added Policy 6.14 – *Encourage developers to install the infrastructure necessary for broadband and phone when installing other utilities (Broadband Conduit Deployment Act of 2015)*.
- LocalTel Communications, a provider of fiber internet and phone out of North Central Washington, won the bid for Lincoln County in the Connect America Fund Phase II auction. As the winning bidder, LocalTel will receive \$684,709 to build out fixed broadband to a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds with low latency over the next six years. Lincoln County will follow LocalTel builds in Grant and Adams counties and the EDC will work with LocalTel to ease and expedite the process.
- The EDC surveyed Lincoln County business owners about their internet use and needs. Fifty-nine businesses responded and of those businesses, 35 were located within a downtown business district; 15 were located in town, but outside a downtown business district; 8 were located outside of a municipality; and 1 did not use the internet.

Highlights from the survey are:

- 18 (30.5%) find their current internet to be adequate while 41 (69.5%) find their current internet to be inadequate.
- Of the 41 who find their current internet inadequate, the number one complaint was connection is too slow followed by inadequate upload speeds; the slowdown that comes with unlimited data; and the fees associated with data caps.
- 46 of 59 (78%) say that super-fast download and upload speeds will be "very important" to the success of their business in the next few years.

2017

- Lincoln County was invited to participate in a National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Connectivity Assessment project. The project enabled Lincoln County to develop a countywide broadband assessment that will support infrastructure funding requests. The project also enabled the NTIA to gain a better understanding of access and adoption in rural areas and greater awareness of discrepancies within the FCC data regularly used by government decision makers.

The assessment resulted in the following "next steps":

- Improve Broadband Availability: Explore white space; utility partnerships; increase hot spots in communities and along highways; derive more value from ARRA-funded fiber.
- Use of Public Assets: How can we streamline access to rights of way, especially on state lands, and tower access?
- Farming & Precision Ag: Improve understanding and support for precision ag for both farmers and Olympia. How much bandwidth is needed for precision ag?
- State Support: Connect with the State broadband office if re-established by legislators.
- Broadband Data Collection and Accuracy: Need way to get local ground truth on broadband availability – house by house. Consider "boots on the ground" crowd source model for house to house survey. Develop a map from the results.
- Digital Skills: Are there opportunities to increase access to digital skills training for adults and businesses? At libraries? Who should lead the process?

Project results are summarized in a report available on the EDC website LincolnEDC.org under the Broadband tab.

- A mid-year meeting with a CenturyLink representative brought more bad news: CenturyLink has no plans in place to expand, replace, or otherwise improve their copper wire network in Lincoln County. Phone lines remain available, but there are no DSL connections available to new customers in several communities unless an existing customer leaves and closes their account.

2016

- The Harrington Public Development Authority (PDA) connected their business district to NoaNet fiber. The PDA purchased the equipment and partnered with internet service provider Spectrum Online Services (now owned by LocalTel Communications) on the installation.
- CenturyLink was awarded financial support through the FCC's Connect America Fund to expand services to Fort Spokane, Seven Bays, Lakeview Ranch Estates, Lincoln, and Deer Heights. By July of 2017, 40 MB service was enabled to all five locations. Since this grant commitment was finalized, no further investment has been reported from CenturyLink.

2015

- T-Mobile installed seven cell towers throughout the county with financial support from FCC Mobility Funds.
- After a couple years of deteriorating service, CenturyLink customers in the northern part of the county reported experiencing bandwidth exhaust. This was confirmed by CenturyLink, who did not have plans to add any new customers or to upgrade service.

2014

- Three service providers pursued contracts to utilize the new NoaNet fiber: Odessa Office Equipment, Spectrum Online Services (purchased by LocalTel in 2017); and an eRate provider from western Washington who serves only the Davenport Library. Odessa Office Equipment is the only one of the three that continues to expand their service area in Lincoln County.

2013

- NoaNet expanded their connections beyond original anchor institutions, adding several schools that were not included in the initial build.
- The County and the EDC partnered on an application for a Local Technology Planning Team grant and it was awarded. The grant was provided by the State Broadband Office, which has since closed. A planning team was formed to 1) Inventory the existing broadband infrastructure in the county; 2) Assess current and potential future broadband access and use; and 3) Evaluate the Lincoln County Public Utility District (PUD) as a middle mile provider by evaluating the models being used by Stevens, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Douglas, and Chelan counties. Project results are summarized in a report available on the EDC website LincolnEDC.org under the Broadband tab.

2012

- Lincoln County and NoaNet signed mutual inter-local agreements to locate NoaNet's fiber optic hub in the County's datacenter in Davenport.
- The county's first Economic Development Strategy was adopted and included *Broadband Expansion* as a planned infrastructure investment. *Establishing a Broadband Planning Team* and *Implementing a Broadband Expansion Plan* were included in the action plan. The County's Comprehensive Plan will also incorporate those strategies.

2011

- Lincoln County EDC hosted the statewide NoaNet Project launch and a regional Broadband Roundtable in Davenport. Later, a workshop was held for Commissioners, Mayors and Public Works Directors to facilitate communication throughout the install. Because the fiber connections were housed in several libraries, the County's Librarians began working with the Washington State Library to plan for their new fiber connections.

2010

- Lincoln County EDC learned that the county would be included in NoaNet's fiber build. Fiber would be installed to libraries, health care facilities, and schools in six Lincoln County cities and towns. Lincoln County Commissioners and their Information Services & Public Works Departments began meeting with NoaNet in advance of the build to assure that their fiber installation went smoothly.