

Better broadband can enhance health care

By DENIS PAISTE
New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER — Broadband connectivity across the state will improve business, public safety, health care and education, said Scott Valcourt, who leads the Network New Hampshire Now project, on Wednesday at a telecom summit.

"The opportunities demand us to rethink our roles in the world," said Valcourt, who also is project management director for information technology at the University of New Hampshire.

New England Telehealth Consortium, an FCC pilot program, is working to coordinate health care organizations in New Hampshire, Maine and Vermont using broadband, Valcourt said, "to ensure no matter where you live in New Hampshire, you have the best health care coverage possible."

High-definition videoconferencing can bring better diagnosis and treatment, he said.

"You don't have to live in a city to do that; you can take advantage of the life that we want to maintain in New Hampshire, no matter where you are, and broadband is the tool to allow you to do that," he said.

Valcourt spoke at the New Hampshire Telecommunications Summit at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Manchester. About 150 registered for the event.

Network New Hampshire Now, spearheaded by the University System of New Hampshire, received \$44.5 million under the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program



Scott Valcourt, with Network New Hampshire Now, speaks during the opening session at the New Hampshire Telecommunications Summit on Wednesday at the Radisson Hotel in Manchester.

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(BTOP).

The program has four major components:

- Building out 700 miles of middle-mile fiber optic infrastructure.

- Replacing separate microwave wireless networks used by five public safety agencies with a single system and freeing space on 21 mountaintop towers for wireless broadband access.

- Rolling out broadband beginning in Enfield and Rindge through N.H. Fast Roads.

- Expanding the Department of Transportation intelligent transportation system from the Salem-Manchester corridor along I-93 to Concord.

The New Hampshire Public Utilities Commission doesn't regulate broadband, but Kate Bailey, director of telecommunications, said, "The PUC knows firsthand how important getting broadband to everybody is and so we do what we can to try to promote that."

Defining broadband

The federal threshold for broadband is 768 kilobits download speed by 200 kilobits upload speed.

New Hampshire broadband mapping project coordinator Michael Blair said by that definition almost every community in the state has an area where broadband service is either unavailable or very expensive.

FairPoint Communications had to meet a goal of broadband access to 85 percent of its customers last year, and its next milestone is 95 percent by April 1, 2013.

"They'll have to start to focus on the North Country, and that is still an area that is very underserved in several places, and we're hoping that all of these initiatives will get service everywhere," Bailey said.

During a panel discussion, Gunnar Berg, president and founder of CyberPine Cooperative Inc. in Sandwich, said a wireless solution was what was needed in an area where there are only about 10 people per square mile.

Newer 4G wireless service may bring broadband to the entire state within two years, said Jeremy Katz, president and CEO of SegTEL in Lebanon.

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