



FIBER PROJECT Q&A

Q - Given the pandemic, how much of a sense of urgency is EBTC experiencing? We had originally planned to deploy fiber in other areas of the Winthrop rural service area this year, but the Covid pandemic and the creation of the CARES Act grant funding changed our goals as the targeted areas for the grant differ from our original plans. So instead we are deploying in other service areas that are under the grant “umbrella” which still covers 26% of the Winthrop service area, but also includes a whopping 84% of the Quasqueton service area! These combined areas are larger than our original plans. Add to that a critical deployment deadline of July 1st, and you have the perfect storm to keep engineers, contractors, and our staff incredibly busy. After the July 1, 2021 CARES Act grant construction deadline has passed, we will then turn our focus to the remaining 74% of the Winthrop rural area as originally planned.

Q - How has the grant that EBTC received assisting in deployment plans? We received a \$2.3 million federal CARES Act grant that is administered by the State of Iowa’s OCIO. The grant was created in response to COVID-related needs from people all across the U.S. to assist them with tele-commuting, tele-health, and of course studying online – all due to the increased health risk of COVID-19. While the grant we received was a huge benefit for EBTC’s cooperative members and because of the enormous size of the project, we needed to procure a separate \$2.4 million loan for project completion. And we still need to carefully budget for fiber deployment in remaining rural areas not included in this grant project that are planned for the second half of 2021.

Q - How durable is fiber optic cable? Fiber optic cable has an incredibly long life cycle. Since it is somewhat new as compared to copper wire, fiber is estimated to have a life span of up to 40 years or more. But in reality the glass tubes as small as a human hair that we commonly refer to as fiber never rust nor corrode because they’re non-metallic. To increase speeds in the future, theoretically only the electronics at both ends of the fiber need to be replaced. These glass tubes or “fiber” transmit light signals – so yes – data, video, and voice calls are literally transmitted at the “speed of light”!

Q - Are you pleased with initial progress? West Union Trenching has now started in our area and are plowing in the conduit at a rate of about 20,000 feet per day – nearly 4 miles. That is very fast, but ultimately the contractor will need to begin “blowing” the fiber into the conduit which is currently empty. But burying the conduit now allows the contractor to work throughout the winter months on the remaining tasks including splicing the fiber cables together which is a very complex task. Ultimately because of placing the conduit underground in a speedy manner this Fall, we will be farther along in the construction process when the ground thaws next Spring so we can again begin deploying the remaining conduit and fiber to meet our stringent timeline.

Q - Have you received customer feedback on the portions completed and if so, what have you heard? Our current project does not yet have any customers connected to fiber. We hope to begin connecting some of these new fiber customers in December, but some areas might not be connected until June as this is an extremely huge project for both us and the contractors and engineers. Our Aurora-Stanley rural service area was completed with fiber last January, and as is typical of completed fiber projects, customers appreciate the new speeds and trouble calls have dramatically been reduced.

Q - If a customer has concerns about their internet connection in the meantime, what can be done to maximize the connection they currently have? Funny that you should ask because just recently we heard of a customer that was working from home and not happy with their Internet speeds – it simply wasn’t fast enough for their needs. When we were made aware, the very next morning we were able to upgrade the customer’s copper connection. They are now enjoying much faster speeds that they weren’t aware even existed and were available to them! If other customers have issues, they should simply call our office and we can research the fastest speed available at their location. Only a decade ago 10 Mbps was considered a fast speed. In today’s tech-savvy world, 10 Mbps is very slow because of the vast amounts of video being streamed. Video is the “semi-tractor trailers” of the data world – a person loves the content that they deliver, but sometimes a large number of semi traffic on the highways slows down the traffic flow. And it’s much the same in the Internet world. In comparison to voice or “normal” data such as email or viewing websites without video, video streaming demands a ton of bandwidth – Internet capacity – and normal Internet usage may suffer as a result of too many video streams within your household. Think of all the devices that are connected to the Internet in your home: PC’s, laptops, tablets, smartphones, gaming consoles, smart speakers, alarm systems, webcams, video doorbells, smart thermostats, smart refrigerators and the list goes on and on. Each one uses bandwidth, so the demand for faster speeds in each household continues to grow and we continue to try and meet those needs as your member-owned cooperative. Fiber will provide the information super-highway of the future right to your doorstep.

OUR INTERVIEW, CONTINUED...

Q - Is there anything else that you would like customers to know?

There are several items that we should mention:

- The EBTC Board of Directors has recently approved and consolidated all Internet rate plans into just 4 plans – including for the first time the ability of cooperative members to subscribe to the Internet without the need of also paying for a landline phone. These new plans can be found on our website at www.eastbuchanan.com.
- In-town customers are currently able to receive from 50 Mbps to 100 Mbps Internet on our old copper lines depending on their distance from our switch locations in each town. Again, customers should call our office to see what speeds are currently available to them, and what new prices that they qualify for with those speeds. We hope to allow all cooperative members to telecommute, access telehealth services, and to be able to study online whether they're high school or college students. And for those members in rural areas, we are deploying fiber optic cable as fast as possible to allow up to 1 Gbps (1,000 Mbps) speeds in all rural areas.
- There is no cost to customers to be converted to fiber optics during this construction phase. However if a customer is adamant that they do NOT want fiber installed at their home, we have three very good reasons why they should re-consider their decision:
 1. The copper cables that provide phone service in the rural areas will be decommissioned and rendered out of service once the fiber construction is complete.
 2. On a nationwide average, the real estate value of a home with fiber is about 7% higher than a property without fiber.
 3. Once construction crews have left an area, if a homeowner later decides that they want fiber installed, it will be installed at cost to the homeowner which we estimate would run between \$5,000 - \$10,000. So right now during the construction phase is the best time and only time to have the fiber optic cabling installed for FREE.
- Fiber construction has many stages of deployment: Budgeting, engineering, site surveys and placing the NID (Network Interface Device or “box” on your rural home), burying conduit, burying drops to each home from the road or street, blowing the fiber into the conduit, splicing all fibers outside the home, running fiber into each home and placing an ONT (Optical Network Terminal) near a power outlet in the home, installing a battery backup if desired by the homeowner, testing and turning on the fiber capability, and finally closing out the project with engineering certifications that the project is complete!
- October is “Cooperative” month all across the nation, and we want to thank all EBTC cooperative members for allowing us to serve you!
- EBTC staff has completed many site surveys, but many more need to be completed. An EBTC technician is REQUIRED to visit with each homeowner to determine where the best location is to place

the NID on the house, ONT on the inside of the home, and also determine if there are any underground obstacles such as sewer lines, lawn irrigation systems, underground pet fences, etc. that the contractors burying the fiber to the home will need to avoid. Utility companies are locating their own underground facilities and marking them prior to the ground being disturbed. We do not want the contractor to cut any existing facilities, so please respond as soon as possible when you are contacted by an EBTC employee.

- As part of the CARES Act grant, EBTC was also awarded \$38,000 to entice “non-adopters” to take broadband service. A “non-adopter” is defined as anyone who currently does not subscribe to 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload Internet speeds. Because this is part of the federal grant money, there are also strict guidelines for a customer to participate in the program which provides a one-time credit of between \$400-\$450. These guidelines include:
 1. Customer must subscribe to a minimum speed of 25/3 (EBTC now has a 50/50 package available)
 2. The need to subscribe to these speeds must be COVID-related. Examples could include the need for telecommuting, tele-health, or studying online
 3. The customer must not be eligible for the federal Lifeline program – and must go online to establish non-eligibility and provide proof to EBTC (contact EBTC for the website)
 4. Deadline to sign-up is November 23rd at 5:00pm
 5. Only 50 credit packages are available within the East Buchanan school district, but the credit packages are not limited to school families – they are available to the general public
 6. Customers cannot receive federal funding from two different federal programs
 7. Any customer currently living within a town or which has fiber optic cable should be able to obtain the minimum speeds required for this program

This project was supported by federal funds made available through the CARES Act and State of Iowa, acting by and through the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). Points of view expressed herein are those of the author or speaker and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the United States Government or State of Iowa or endorsement of the project.

Closed for Thanksgiving Weekend

Our office will be closed on Thursday and Friday, November 26-27th to allow our staff to spend time with their families. Happy Thanksgiving everyone!

ANNUAL COOPERATIVE MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Mark your calendars for Monday, December 7th at 1:30pm for the East Buchanan Telephone Cooperative membership meeting to be held at St. Patrick's Social Hall for social-distancing purposes. No refreshments nor food is being served this year due to Covid. Masks will be required for all attendees.

Return your ballots!

Friendly reminder to return your Board of Director election ballots. They will be mailed to cooperative members on **November 10th** along with our annual meeting notice. Be sure to make your voice heard & help us select the best people to lead East Buchanan Telephone Cooperative in providing quality services for all!



SAVE THE DATE!