Texas A&M University awarded $6.6 Million Broadband Technology Opportunities Program Grant

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Texas A&M University, on behalf of The Texas A&M University System's TTVN Network, has been awarded a $6.6 million Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant. This award, along with $3 million in matching contributions, will allow the A&M System to provide high-speed broadband access to all 11 A&M System universities, the Texas A&M Health Science Center, and communities served by the A&M System. Through a public-private partnership with five independent rural telephone and cable television companies in Texas, the City of Corpus Christi, the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), and the A&M System, the grant will fund construction of Texas Pipes, a fiber optic network with minimum data rates of one gigabit per second (Gbps) and capable of supporting up to 40 Gbps. Grant funds also enhance public safety by increasing broadband capabilities for campus police departments. "This initiative once again demonstrates Texas A&M University and the A&M System's desire to be a leader in collaborative networking," said Dr. Pierce Cantrell, Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Information Officer.

Texas Pipes will leverage the existing broadband infrastructure of the A&M System's TTVN Network by building new connections to the Lonestar Education and Research Network (LEARN), the Texas regional optical network that serves higher education institutions, community colleges, and K-12 public schools. LEARN provides high-speed access to the Texas Education Intranet and specialized higher education research and education networks, such as, Internet2 and National LambdaRail. Constructing these new connections will expand LEARN’s reach into currently underserved areas of Texas, increasing access to distance learning, research, and health services.

Mike Phillips, Executive Director of LEARN, said, "This award would not have been possible without the leadership and collaborative nature of a broad and diverse set of partners working together on behalf of Texans. The project will enable us to bring needed broadband based services to many new communities throughout Texas. LEARN is excited to have the opportunity to work with our partners on this innovative and dynamic project."

Partners in the fiber optic network construction include five independent telephone and cable TV companies that belong to the Texas Lone Star Network (TLSN). Brad Seymour, TLSN General Manager, said, "TLSN and our participating Member Companies are proud to play our role in the public/private partnership with Texas A&M. The BTOP Grant funding will enable TLSN to provide high-speed broadband services to our Member Companies, who serve the end users in the rural areas. This partnership with Texas A&M will benefit a large number of people with a much better quality of broadband service."

Another project partner, the City of Corpus Christi, will be expanding their network and connecting community centers, libraries, and public safety facilities, as well as making their resources available to Texas A&M University Corpus Christi.

Funding also is provided for next generation Internet-based radio gateways that allow campus police departments to communicate with local DPS radio systems over the broadband network. DPS will be making
their public safety databases (including wants and warrants) over a shared link, eliminating the need for costly satellite-based communication links.

According to Cantrell, "This grant was only made possible through a public and private partnership that embraces the spirit of the BTOP grants. The required 30% grant match was shared by all of the partners that will benefit from the grant.

The Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) is providing BTOP grants to fund comprehensive broadband infrastructure projects, public computer centers, and sustainable broadband adoption projects. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act provided a total of $7.2 billion for the NTIA and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to expand access to and adoption of broadband services in communities across the U.S.

For more information, visit http://texaspipes.tamu.edu/.