

**October 14, 2013**

**Update regarding the Virtual Highway Project:**

Since our last update (see pages 1 to 4)



1. Cheryal Hills, Bob McLean, and Stacey Stockdill met with Commissioner Tingerthal, Commissioner Zelle and Commissioner Siben. They requested a budget for the Rural Broadband Impact Assessment. We have submitted one and are waiting for a response from them regarding next steps.
2. Yuri Hupka (resident of Little Falls, Finishing his MA in Applied Economics at SCSU) was hired by UMN CURA/CAP to assist with the Rural Broadband Impact Assessment. He is focusing on the ROI questions and trying to locate successful rural projects. So far he has only been able to find one in England and in China (none in Rural USA).
3. Michelle Adkins continues to volunteered her time to begin to help us: a) update the telehealth impact literature and b) to start to drill down on what is and is not reimbursable by VA, Private Insurance, Medicare and Medicaid.
4. Dr. Chad Couette (ED, NJPA) has agreed to serve as Resilient Region Theme Champion for Education and Workforce Development and on the Resilient Region Broadband Taskforce. He and Cheryal Hills (ED, R5DC) have agreed to distribute a broadband/PC inventory for K-12 and LUGs respectively. The DRAFT survey was submitted for review and is being finalized.
5. Stacey met with Bill Coleman and Roxy Traxler, Project Director for the East Broadband Taskforce. They agreed to send out a similar needs assessment for the counties they serve. We also talked about working with them to host a spring Broadband Summit in the region.
6. Stacey has set up a meeting to meet with Kim Nagle, Director, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Economic Development, on the Leech Lake Broadband Taskforce work – on November 1.
7. Great News! WTCA was identified as one of 7 Smart Rural Communities!! Their celebration will be held October 24 from 5-7 at Blueberry Pines in Menahga.

**September 11, 2013**

**Update regarding the Virtual Highway Project:**

Hi all:

So much has been happening since our last update!

The Connectivity Champions (now joined by Kevin Larson CTC) have been exploring a number of options for next steps.

1. Cheryal Hills (R5DC, Champion for Education and Workforce Development), Deanna Hemmesch (CMHP, Champion for Housing), Robert McLean (HUG, Champion for HealthCare) and Stacey Stockdill met with Commissioner Tingerthal (MHF), Warren Hansen (GMHF) and Margaret Kaplan. That meeting resulted in:
  - a. An exploration with Representative John Ward and his staff regarding the degree to which GO Bonds could be used for broadband infrastructure. It was learned that at this time – this does not seem to be the best approach to increase broadband infrastructure

- within the region; however, Representative Ward and his staff want to continue to work with us on other options.
- b. Commissioner Tingerthal is arranging for a meeting with the Resilient Region partners and other Commissioner Zelle (MNDOT) and Commissioner Sieben (MNDEED) to talk about ways to expand broadband infrastructure.
  - c. We also have begun to identify a number of other state-wide studies (in other states) that are helping us begin to identify the outcomes/value proposition from broadband infrastructure.
2. Bill Coleman has helped us make connections with 2 other broadband Initiatives: a) Leech Lake Broadband, and b) East Central Broadband Initiative. Stacey will be meeting with Bill and the coordinator of the East Central Broadband Initiative on September 16 to determine common goals and next steps. Kim Nagle, Director, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Economic Development and Stacey are working to find time to meet in Little Falls with their technical advisor Madonna Yawakie, Turtle Island Communications, Inc.
  3. Don Hickman connected us with the Northland Connect Broadband group. Stacey and Cheryal will be meeting with them on Tuesday September 24.
  4. Sue Boehland from the Central Minnesota Carl Perkins Consortium talked with Stacey about the struggles a number of schools within the consortium are having with connectivity (Parents saying they cannot afford to have internet at home, homework often being required where children must find an internet connection. One young mother is driving at night to her mother's house so her daughter can gain the access so she can complete her homework assignments). We are planning to put together with the help of CTC a survey to better understand what infrastructure/equipment exists as well as to better identify the needs for K-12 students within the five-county area.
  5. Larry Lundblad wrote, "NJPA in Staples took the lead in developing a RUS USDA grant with the Freshwater District and CLC to provide resources to link (10 or 12) high schools. Six are up and running for this fall. CLC will be delivering college classes to the districts which will expand options for students in these small rural districts. Wanted to give you a heads up that USDA is invested in this region through this and other projects. Good luck. Larry"
  6. The University of Minnesota is providing us with a CURA/CAP student. Merritt Bussiere prepared the application and we are excited to announce that we have found and hired a local Little Falls Master's Candidate in Applied Economics – Yuri Hupka! Stacey and Yuri met this week and will continue to meet face-to-face on a weekly basis for the next few weeks. Yuri will help us with the Rural Broadband Impact Assessment. (It will use some of the pieces from the BCBS HIA framework we learned about.) We are planning to have this student focus on these areas:
    - a. Increased jobs?
    - b. Generate new businesses? (via Rural Sourcing)
    - c. Encourage entrepreneurship within rural places?
    - d. Retain businesses?

**Does Broadband = Enhanced Learning in Rural Areas?**

- e. Increase learning?
- f. Master competencies they need to be competitive in the global market place?
- g. Build the high-tech sector competencies needed to fill the local demand for a high-tech skilled workforce?
- h. If they don't have access - does that mean they fall further behind? Does not having access mean that the region will not be able to survive in the future market place?

If you wish to be a part of guiding the work of Yuri, please let Stacey know. Stacey and Merritt will be supervising the student and will set up weekly meetings (to be published) for anyone who wants to learning from the students' work and to help direct next steps. We will also begin to use basecamp as a way to allow the Virtual Highway Taskforce to provide feedback on documents produced.

- 7. Michelle Adkins has volunteered her time to begin to help us: a) update the telehealth impact literature – building from her initial synthesis of this literature for the VA and her Master's thesis and b) to start to drill down on what is and is not reimbursable by VA, Private Insurance, Medicare and Medicaid. We have also asked for our Hospital and county partners to provide us with specific details regarding current reimbursement policies.
- 8. Dan Donahue (Lakewood Health System) has prepared a summary of some of the issues with tele-health reimbursement. We will incorporate this information into the summary Michelle Adkins is preparing.
- 9. If anyone else has additional insights (public or private health care providers), we would greatly appreciate your help.
- 10. Kathe Dellacecca (Lakewood Health System) has connected us with the work of Zoi Hills and the University of Minnesota work on Telehealth. Their website includes a cost/impact calculator <http://www.gptrac.org> Stacey will set up time to meet with Zoi to explore our common goals and ways to collaborate.
- 11. Tad has identified that there 15 ARMER towers within the region. We are beginning to schedule time with the County Emergency Managers to learn more about this resources within the five county region. We need to identify who truly makes decisions regarding the use of and access to these towers. If anyone knows of a specific contact – please let Stacey know!
- 12. Colleen Landkamer introduced us to Thomas Jensen, USDA Telecommunications Program/Rural Utilities Service. Stacey met with Tom. He provided a number of contacts with successful USDA projects in related topics.
- 13. Kevin Larson, Todd Froemming (Co-owner/Partner, Syvantis Technologies) and Stacey presented at Brainerd Lakes Area Economic Development Corporation's EXECs meeting yesterday. There were four who asked to be included in the work of the Virtual Highway Task Force.

**Thank you all for your continued partnership! We truly appreciate all your support!**

**Respectfully Submitted by:**

Stacey Stockdill, Volunteer Project Director

On behalf of the Connectivity Champions

Pam Mahling, Tad Erickson, Janelle Riley, Kevin Larson, Cheryal Hills