

## Timeline of Berkshire Connect, Inc., and Franklin Connect/ Franklin-Hampshire Connect/Pioneer Valley Connect, and WesternMA Connect, Inc.

### Key to Frequently Used Acronyms:

BRPC - Berkshire Regional Planning Commission

CAIs - Community Anchor Institutions

CMRPC – Central Mass. Regional Planning Commission

DSL – Digital Subscriber Line

DTC – Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications & Cable

FRCOG - Franklin Regional Council of Governments

ITS – Intelligent Transportation System

JAIL - John Adams Innovation Institute

MBI - Massachusetts Broadband Institute

MRPC - Montachusett Regional Planning Commission

MTC - Massachusetts Technology Collaborative

RFP – Request for Proposal

RPAs – Regional Planning Agencies

PVPC – Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

UMDI – University of Massachusetts’ Donahue Institute

### 1997-1998

#### *Berkshire Connect History*

- The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), supported by the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC) and the University of Massachusetts’ Donahue Institute (UMDI), spearheaded the “Berkshire Telecommunications Initiative” as a June 11, 1997 directive from the Berkshire legislative delegation. The delegation recognized that there was no region-wide planning initiative underway that could provide objective analysis of improvements needed to the telecommunications infrastructure in the region. The framework was established for a locally driven and outcome-based approach to solve the infrastructure problem.
- A volunteer “Berkshire Telecommunications Task Force” was formed and its first meeting was held on October 24, 1997 in Lenox.
- In October 1997, Governor Paul Cellucci announced a state award of \$250,000 to conduct a regional telecommunications study of Berkshire County.
- Based on work to inventory demand for telecommunication services, map the existing telecommunications infrastructure, and identify options for bypassing barriers to access, the project entered a new phase and was named **Berkshire**

**Connect.** The first meeting of the newly formed volunteer Berkshire Connect Steering Committee was held on April 2, 1998 with Donald R. Dubendorf as Chair. A survey of “Critical Users” was conducted to form the foundation of the aggregation effort.

- The MTC issued the “Berkshire Connect Assessment and Recommendations Report” in July 1998. The consulting firm of Flack & Kurtz was retained to provide technology design and business planning services for Berkshire Connect. Their final “Assessment of Technology Options” report was issued on November 19, 1998.

#### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- The Franklin County Commission’s (precursor to the FRCOG) Franklin County Overall Economic Development Program Policy Committee hosted a workshop on March 7, 1997 titled “Telecommunications & Economic Growth in Greater Franklin County” to discuss the status and challenges of the region’s telecommunications infrastructure and service availability.
- The Franklin Regional Council of Governments’ (FRCOG) Franklin County Overall Economic Development Program Policy Committee formed a subgroup called the Greater Franklin County Connect Working Group to address telecommunications issues in the region.

## **1999**

#### *Berkshire Connect History*

- The May 1999 “Berkshire Connect Business Plan” demonstrated the economic feasibility of building a high capacity, redundant, affordable communications network throughout Berkshire County.
- Building upon private sector interest expressed, Berkshire Connect issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) in July 1999. Seven qualified providers responded. After reviewing these proposals, the team of Global Crossing Ltd. and Equal Access Networks, LLC was selected as Berkshire Connect “preferred providers.” In exchange for the Berkshire Connect endorsement, Global Crossing committed 100% of the financial resources to design, build and manage a new, facilities-based network. Legislation passed to fund Berkshire Connect’s work to improve and expand the information technology infrastructure of the Berkshire County region for the purpose of fostering a more favorable and responsive environment for technology intensive and dependent industry.

#### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- The FRCOG launched the Telecommunications Survey of Franklin County businesses and published a report which identified the demand for additional services and the need for improved infrastructure.
- The FRCOG hosted the Greater Franklin County Telecommunications Forum titled “Can They Get Here From There” held at Greenfield Community College. The

forum included: telecom industry speakers, Telecommunications Survey findings, perspective of users panel, and a panel discussion on possible regional solutions.

- On September 16, 1999, **Franklin Connect** was established and launched at a public forum held at Greenfield Community College.

## 2000

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- On February 2, 2000, Articles of Organization were filed with the Secretary of the Commonwealth to officially form Berkshire Connect, Inc. as a non-profit membership organization.
- More than 300 stakeholders, including Governor Cellucci, U.S. Senator John Kerry, U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy and the western Massachusetts legislative delegation, celebrated the launch of the new partnership with Global Crossing and Equal Access Networks on February 4, 2000 at the Berkshire Life Insurance Company in Pittsfield.
- In the October issue of CIO Magazine, an article entitled “The Road Less Traveled” cited Berkshire Connect, Inc. as a successful initiative in crossing the digital divide.
- Berkshire Connect, Inc. received the 2000 AOL Rural Telecommunications Leadership Finalist Award in the category of “Infrastructure Technology”. This \$2,000 award was, in turn, presented to the Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire, Inc. (CDC) in recognition of its work to bolster the Berkshire Connect effort in South County.
- At Bentley College in Waltham, Mass High Tech presented its fifth annual All-Star award to Donald Dubendorf recognizing his superior achievement in the technology community as chairman of Berkshire Connect’s Steering Committee.

### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- The FRCOG requested the MA Department of Telecommunications & Energy expand its investigation (DTE 99-77) into the practices, equipment, appliances and services of Bell Atlantic to include all the communities of Franklin County.
- In a letter dated July 28, 2000, the legislative delegation of Franklin County requested the FRCOG lead and coordinate efforts to develop a competitive and affordable telecommunications infrastructure in the region, with the assistance of the MTC.
- The first meeting of the Franklin Connect Steering Committee was held on November 9, 2000 in Greenfield. The Steering Committee consisted of regional business and community leaders interested in improving the telecommunications infrastructure in Franklin County.
- Through resources from the MTC, the consulting firm of Flack & Kurtz provided technical assistance to Franklin Connect. Flack & Kurtz presented an introduction

to information technology to the Steering Committee titled, "Technology 101: Information Technology Basics."

## 2001

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- Berkshire Connect participated in the Telecom Sub-Committee of the Vermont Council for Rural Development statewide videoconference; Itec Massachusetts Technology Showcase; and National Summit on Broadband Deployment: 2001 A Digital Odyssey. In addition, Berkshire Connect was invited by the Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation to serve on the "Technology & Infrastructure Working Group" of the "Massachusetts Wireless Steering Committee & Working Groups". This working group was focused on issues related to the deployment of emergency 911 cell service.
- Annabel Z. Dodd, author of the national bestseller "The Essential Guide to Telecommunications," inserted in the book information about the Berkshire Connect, Inc. demand aggregation model (pg. 251).

### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- Franklin Connect launched a demand aggregation effort modeled after Berkshire Connect, Inc. and expanded to include sub-T-1 level services. Rugg Lumber Company of Greenfield and Hatfield submitted the first letter of support for the Franklin Connect aggregation.
- In March, the FranklinConnect.org website was launched and a periodic e-newsletter began for Connect Steering Committee members, other stakeholders and interested individuals.
- DTE 99-77 investigation concluded. The relief requested for Verizon to correct practices, equipment, appliances and services was denied. However, further orders required Verizon to report on projected exhaust dates and upgrades of selected switches, report its plan for contacting municipal authorities, and supplement monthly service quality reports with a separate section identifying service quality measures for the 30 petitioner towns.
- The consulting firm of Flack & Kurtz presented "The Real Deal: An Inventory of Telecommunications Services – Availability and Costs." The presentation identified the types of telecommunications services and providers operating in selected areas in western Massachusetts. The presentation concluded that while telecom infrastructure exists in the region, without marketplace competition there continues to be problems related to affordability and provisioning of services.
- At the request of MA Senator Stanley C. Rosenberg, Northampton Mayor Claire Higgins, Easthampton Mayor Michael Tautznik as well as other Hampshire County business and community leaders, the Steering Committee voted to include Hampshire County and change the name to **Franklin-Hampshire Connect**. Additional members representing Hampshire County businesses and organizations

were added to the Steering Committee. In addition, subcommittees were formed to further pursue aggregating telecommunications demand in the region.

- On April 17, 2001, U.S. Senator John Kerry met with Steering Committee members and regional leaders at a forum at the Deerfield Inn to discuss Franklin-Hampshire Connect. Senator Kerry expressed his support for the project and offered his services to contact each president of the five colleges and the new CEO of Yankee Candle Company on behalf of Franklin-Hampshire Connect.
- Franklin-Hampshire Connect issued a RFP to solicit proposals from telecommunications service providers. Specifically, the RFP requested a facilities-based solution to provide ubiquitous voice and data telecommunications at lower costs and with higher levels of service quality. In response, five proposals were received. On the recommendation of the Technical Review Committee, the Steering Committee voted to start negotiations with the partnership of Global Crossing and Equal Access Networks to become the endorsed provider for Franklin-Hampshire Connect.

#### *Connects' Collaboration / WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- Throughout 2001, representatives from Connects in New Hampshire and Massachusetts met to share experiences regarding bringing high speed, competitively priced telecommunications services to New England. The group referred to itself as New England Connect since most participants were utilizing the Berkshire Connect, Inc. model of aggregating buying power to achieve new, facilities-based telecommunications infrastructure. The list of efforts included: Monadnock Connect, North Country Connect, Capitol Region Connect, Franklin-Hampshire Connect and Coastal Connect. Additionally, Connect-type projects began forming in southeastern Massachusetts and northern Vermont.

## **2002**

#### *Berkshire Connect History*

- Berkshire Connect met with the Appalachian Regional Commission, representing a 16-county area in Northern Mississippi, to explain the demand aggregation model. Berkshire Connect was a speaker at the Vermont Business & Industry Expo panel titled "Rural Telecom Aggregation Strategies for Vermont."
- At the invitation of Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Michael Powell, Donald Dubendorf traveled to Washington, DC, on August 21, 2002. Chairman Powell noted that he was very familiar with the Berkshire Connect model and cited it many times in presentations and discussions about overcoming the digital divide. The Chairman pledged the ongoing support of the FCC towards the continued success of Berkshire Connect.
- In September 2002, the BRPC, an originating stakeholder of Berkshire Connect, conducted an evaluation study of the first two years of Berkshire Connect. The report informed many areas of interest including: strengths and weaknesses, future

mission, quality of service from the preferred providers, organization of the corporation, and strategic planning.

- On November 6, 2002, MA Speaker of the House of Representatives Thomas M. Finneran appointed Donald Dubendorf of Berkshire Connect, Inc., to a special commission dedicated to study statewide information technology strategies for Commonwealth entities. Berkshire Connect's participation focused on ensuring the Commission understood the extent to which the buying power of the Commonwealth in voice, data and Internet services represented a critical component to bringing access and affordable services to every community in Massachusetts.
- Representatives from Berkshire Connect and Franklin-Hampshire Connect served on the Advisory Committee of The MassBroadband Initiative, which was a joint project of the Massachusetts Software & Internet Council and the MTC. Both Connects were highlighted in this project's report titled, "MassBroadband: A Broadband Roadmap for Massachusetts".

#### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- Berkshire Connect preferred provider Global Crossing announced its Chapter 11 filing for bankruptcy. Included in the filing was their subsidiary, Equal Access Networks. Franklin-Hampshire Connect suspended a decision to sign contracts with Global Crossing and Equal Access Networks that were previously negotiated until further information was available. Berkshire Connect membership consensus was that their best position was to wait out the Chapter 11 process and remain closely allied to the FCC so that action could be taken in the event that there was any increased risk for continuity of service.
- In May 2002, the consulting firm of Flack & Kurtz worked with Franklin-Hampshire Connect, the MTC and the UMDI to prepare a report that assessed the infrastructure technologies currently serving telecommunication users in Franklin and Hampshire Counties. The report highlighted the unique challenges of the region, in comparison to the eastern part of the state.
- On June 21, 2002, Berkshire Connect and Franklin-Hampshire Connect provided representatives from Congressman John W. Olver's office with a detailed briefing on the allied, but substantially different, efforts to solve the digital divide in western Massachusetts. This meeting was one in an ongoing series of face-to-face meetings organized by Berkshire Connect to ensure that elected officials have a full appreciation of progress, setbacks and future challenges.
- In November 2002, the Connects initiated its first review of potential public and private funding programs for broadband. It was determined that no federal funding programs at that time were applicable to the region.
- In December 2002, Franklin-Hampshire Connect prepared and distributed a white paper on the use of public investment in infrastructure to leverage private investment, and in particular, the importance of the I-91 Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) project to be connected to the broader telecommunication system.

## 2003

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- With the December 2002 U.S. Bankruptcy Court of Manhattan approval of the Global Crossing plan to emerge from bankruptcy, the Berkshire Connect Board of Directors voted unanimously to sign a new, three-year agreement with Global Crossing. The Board also unanimously voted to endorse Richmond NetWorx, a Berkshire County facilities-based provider of voice, data and Internet services, as a preferred provider to complement services offered by Global Crossing.

### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- The Franklin-Hampshire Connect Steering and Technical Review Committee voted to invite Hampden County businesses and organizations to be part of a renewed and expanded effort called **Pioneer Valley Connect**.
- The FRCOG and Pioneer Valley Connect advocated for the economic development component of the I-91 fiber and conduit project. Congressman John W. Olver announced federal funds for the planning and design of an I-91 ITS System from Northampton to the Vermont border. This funding started the process of building fiber-optic conduits along the northern part of I-91 to be used for both public and private information technology purposes.

## 2004

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- Members of the Berkshire legislative delegation requested that Berkshire Connect take the lead in implementing an exciting new wireless learning pilot program in Berkshire County. The initiative, known as the Berkshire Wireless Learning Initiative, was implemented to test a one-to-one approach (i.e. one laptop for every student and teacher) using laptop computers and wireless communication to transform teaching and learning. The program's goals were to help improve student achievement and transform the way education was delivered in North Adams and Pittsfield middle schools.

### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- Pioneer Valley Connect prepared and widely distributed a Telecommunications Survey. This Survey asked about current and future use and expenditures. The responses formed the foundation for a renewed demand aggregation of more than \$600,000 per month in current telecommunications expenditure from businesses and organizations in the three counties.
- Pioneer Valley Connect issued a RFP to service providers and infrastructure builders in the telecommunications industry to serve the more than \$600,000 per month in current telecommunications demand. In response to the RFP issued, five proposals were submitted for consideration.

## 2005

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- On March 21, 2005, Global Crossing announced its sale of the Small Business Group to Platinum Equity's Matrix Telecom. Because most Berkshire Connect members were categorized by Global Crossing as a small business, this transaction significantly impacted Berkshire Connect membership as evidenced by its decline. Since there was no contract between Matrix and Berkshire Connect, once a member account was transferred to Matrix Telecom, there was no guarantee that Global Crossing would be providing the service.
- Berkshire Connect launched the Berkshire Wireless Learning Initiative in select Berkshire County middle schools. The purpose of this three-year program was to test a one-to-one approach of using laptops in middle school classrooms to enhance the learning process and improve student achievement. Berkshire Connect responsibilities included project oversight, management of state operational funds, grant match requirements, school cash and staffing contributions, and a fundraising effort.

### *Franklin Connect / Franklin-Hampshire Connect / Pioneer Valley Connect History*

- Pioneer Valley Connect completed a demand aggregation effort by soliciting potential business demand and using the resultant figures to lure more private telecommunications investment to the region. Pioneer Valley Connect endorsed local company, Crocker Communications, as its Preferred Provider. Since that endorsement, Crocker Communications installed equipment into the Northampton and Greenfield Verizon Central Office locations and planned to continue expanding their infrastructure throughout the region as demand indicated.
- More than \$11 million was secured to install telecommunications fiber and conduit the length of the I-91 corridor between the Connecticut and Vermont borders. George "Chip" Brodeur, retained by the Connects as their Chief Technology Consultant, was assigned to work with MassHighway District 2 to assist them with the design of the I-91 Conduit & Fiber Asset Project. His assistance helped incorporate potential users of the asset and facilitated the selection of potential interconnection locations.
- Pioneer Valley Connect, as well as Berkshire Connect, were interviewed by the U.S. General Accounting Office for their study of broadband availability and adoption in seven states across the country.
- Pioneer Valley Connect participated in meetings with the Western Massachusetts Homeland Security Council to explore opportunities for collaboration to address the telecommunication needs of state and local public safety departments

### *Connects' Collaboration / WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- The MA Department of Public Health (DPH) created a web-based bio-terrorism alert system to be used by local Boards of Health, which needed broadband access to be most effective. DPH allocated approximately \$300,000 to bring T-1 lines to underserved communities in western Massachusetts for a one-year

period. Pioneer Valley Connect, in coordination with Berkshire Connect and the region's public health coalitions, secured two providers to bring T-1 lines to these communities. In the towns of Mt. Washington, Hawley and Heath, the condition of the Verizon wiring was not equipped to deliver T-1 lines. Additional Special Construction Fees were being applied to get a T-1 to these locations. Given that there were no extra funds to pay for these fees, a lengthy process was undertaken to try to resolve this issue. In the end, Mt. Washington and Heath were able to proceed in the project using funds from towns that withdrew from the project. This included the town of Hawley, which voluntarily withdrew, but remained very interested in participating if funds became available.

- Funded by a grant from the MA Executive Office of Economic Development through the Pioneer Valley Regional Competitiveness Council; matching cash investment by Berkshire Connect, Inc; ongoing technical assistance from the JAIL; and matching support from the FRCOG and the Pioneer Valley Connect Steering Committee, the Connects developed the *Broadband Availability Database*, conducted the *Pilot Project Study* and launched the *Underserved Communities Project*.
- To the best degree possible at the time, the Connects were able to ascertain the availability of broadband in western Massachusetts municipalities, creating the first broadband availability database and map for western Massachusetts. The *Broadband Availability Database* provided information about the current status of broadband availability, cable television broadband and digital subscriber line (DSL) service availability, and the location of the primary Central Office (CO) serving each individual municipality. This comprehensive assessment of broadband availability revealed that one-third of the municipalities in western Massachusetts had no access to affordable and reliable broadband services, such as DSL or cable television broadband. Another one-third of the municipalities had very limited access to these services. This information was essential in advocating for broadband access issues at the state level and for developing models for broadband deployment.
- The purpose of the *Pilot Project Study* was to develop a network design consisting of both fiber and wireless elements that would provide access to unserved and underserved communities as identified in the *Broadband Availability Database*. Expert consultants from BNC Network Consulting and AccessPlus Communications developed a hybrid fiber-wireless model solution that would create a facilities-based, broadband network that was economical and efficient, and possessed assets that would endure over a long time horizon and adapt to evolving technologies. The purpose of the *Underserved Communities Project* was to study how to bring and distribute broadband to three underserved communities in an affordable and replicable way.
- Utilizing research gathered from the *Broadband Availability Database* previously created and the *Pilot Project Study*, the communities selected were Egremont, Leverett and Worthington. The study concluded that the solution should consist of three network infrastructure elements (a regional Internet Protocol backbone connecting communities to the closest Point of Presence; a local fiber optic

backbone; and a wireless mesh network to distribute broadband within the community). A financial analysis clearly demonstrated that implementation of this model would require initial public investment in infrastructure to leverage private sector investment in the solution. The sub-regional approach would leverage economies of scale and reduce the overall cost of implementation.

## 2006

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- Berkshire Connect renewed contracts with their Preferred Providers for two years.

### *Connects' Collaboration / WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- In Shelburne Falls on February 24, 2006, the Connects provided a half-day briefing of their *Pilot Project Study* and *Underserved Communities Project* findings to members of the western Massachusetts legislative delegation. These leaders gave the Connects the following responsibilities: (1) pursue a grant from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative to convert the *Pilot Project Study* and the *Underserved Communities Project* analysis into a solution; (2) find a way to reduce the total cost by aggregating like communities into sub-regions; and, (3) return to the delegation with a plan and request for state investment.
- In April 2006, the Connects submitted a joint Concept Paper to the JAll describing their goal to “aggressively foster and implement regional solutions for robust and affordability broadband access”. This goal was to be achieved by sustaining and extending current critical projects (such as the I-91 Fiber and Conduit Project) and by developing, funding and launching a Western Massachusetts Broadband Authority. This Western Massachusetts Broadband Authority would have the legal standing, organizational capability and government support to conduct all of the current tasks as well as assemble, build and manage assets in an unbiased manner to truly develop, sustain and expand a robust telecommunications system.
- The Connects were awarded a joint Regional Priority Grant from the JAll. This award allowed the Connects to develop a long-term, sustainable broadband solution for the unserved and underserved communities in western Massachusetts, as well as test wireless broadband technologies for their effectiveness in serving small, neighborhood areas as a short-term solution. This next phase of the Connects effort, called *Connecting Western Massachusetts*, was a three-stage plan concurrently implemented. The first stage established the criteria for defining the geographic sub-regions and completed the technical design and business model for these sub-regions. The second stage addressed some very important questions that emerged during the *Pilot Project Study*; and the third stage pursued the implementation of the funding mechanism and management structure previously identified.
- In June 2006, the JAll on behalf of the Connects funded consultant Janette Dudley to assess public and private grant programs for broadband expansion. The report findings concluded that with the exception of one municipality, western

Massachusetts communities were not eligible for federal broadband funding due to the guidelines that existed at the time, and that “the Connects, JAll, or a broadband authority should consider developing a business plan for providing backhaul services to underserved rural communities in Western Massachusetts.”

- The Connects launched the *Beta Test Program* to test and assess the success of installing and operating wireless broadband technologies and networks in three rural, unserved areas of western Massachusetts. To select the partnering communities, a competitive application and evaluation process was developed and implemented. To be considered for selection, communities were required to form a local broadband committee.
- The Connects held a series of broadband forums in Berkshire County and in the Pioneer Valley. To educate local officials and the public, the first set of forums provided an overview of telecom technologies and issues that impact unserved and underserved communities in the region. The second set of forums presented the efforts to develop a long-term, sustainable solution as well as short-term activities proposed to address the problems faced by these communities.

## 2007

### *Berkshire Connect History*

- As more alternative fiber-based transport carriers became available in western Massachusetts, Global Crossing determined that it would be mutually beneficial to move all member traffic on the existing microwave network to fiber utilizing one of these carriers. Global Crossing began decommissioning the sites and terminating leases. Berkshire Connect recognized AccessPlus Communications as a Preferred Provider.

### *Connects' Collaboration / WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- The Connects leadership met with state legislators and Governor Patrick administration officials in Boston on March 22, 2007 to present the *Connecting Western Massachusetts* proposal seeking support to secure the public capital necessary to leverage private sector investment and deploy broadband into the unserved areas of western Massachusetts. The development of this public-private sector model contributed to the creation of the MBI legislation.
- Of the 17 applications received in the Connects Beta Test Program, areas in Florida, New Salem and Worthington were selected for inclusion. Equipment for the wireless broadband network was installed and service initiated to residents, businesses and government offices by AccessPlus Communications.
- The Connects assisted MA Representative Denis Guyer's office in coordinating and were featured speakers at “A Roundtable Discussion on Rural Broadband Access with Lt. Governor Tim Murray” event held at Jiminy Peak Mountain Resort in Hancock on April 20, 2007.
- The Connects assisted a Boston Globe reporter with understanding the problem and challenges faced by this region in preparation for their July 18, 2007 front

page article titled “Towns left scrambling for touch of broadband” about the lack of broadband in western Massachusetts. The article was the first time the JAIL’s map depicting the unserved and underserved communities across the state was published in the media.

- In July 2007, the Connects submitted a response to the USDA’s request for comments regarding their Rural Broadband Access Loans and Loan Guarantees Program. The Connects encouraged the USDA to expand their county per capita income threshold to allow more regions located in the Northeast to be eligible, and to offer zero percent interest rate loans.
- In Becket on August 2, 2007, the Connects collaborated with the MTC and Governor Patrick’s office to coordinate the announcement of his proposed legislation to create an entity and incentive fund that would leverage public-private investments in communities without broadband access. This event was the first public announcement of the proposal to create the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and Incentive Fund.
- The Connects presented at the Hilltown Community Development Corporation’s Broadband Forum.
- The Connects launched the *Regional Broadband Survey* to gather address-level data regarding broadband availability. The purpose of the survey was to gather information that would better define unserved areas and demonstrate the region’s demand for broadband, including an assessment of “take rates” at various price points. Survey results were shared with the legislative delegation and others to demonstrate the digital divide problem and need for broadband during the public comment period when the state broadband legislation was being debated in the statehouse.

## 2008

### *Connects’ Collaboration / WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- On January 26, 2008, the Connects with representatives from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development and the MTC met with local broadband advocates in Buckland and Shelburne, and in Great Barrington to discuss Governor Patrick’s broadband legislation.
- The Connects submitted public hearing testimony in support of “House No. 4311, An Act Establishing and Funding the Massachusetts Broadband Institute”, and encouraged residents, businesses and local officials to submit testimony as well. Under the lead of the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, a bus was chartered on February 14<sup>th</sup> to bring interested individuals to attend the public hearing held by the State Committee on Bonding, Capital Expenditures & State Assets at the Statehouse in Boston.
- The Connects presented the *Connecting Western Massachusetts* project findings at the February 28, 2008 meeting of Small Town Administrators of Massachusetts.

- The Connects co-sponsored, with the JAIL, Senator Stanley C. Rosenberg and Representative Stephen Kulik, an event called “A Broadband Forum for Western Massachusetts”, which was scheduled for March 1, 2008 but was cancelled due to inclement weather. Over 270 attendees were pre-registered for the event, which was to feature Federal Communication Commissioners Jonathan S. Adelstein and Robert M. McDowell, Massachusetts DTC Commissioner Sharon Gillett, U.S. Senator John Kerry, U.S. Rep. John Olver, and Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray. Sessions had been scheduled to allow for citizens, federal and state officials, and the private sector to interact and discuss important broadband issues and policies. The day before the Forum was to be held, Verizon announced the expansion of DLS services into 22 new communities in western Massachusetts.
- On March 12, 2008, the Connects presented to the Rural Health Forum, which consisted of western Massachusetts and statewide public health and healthcare industry people.
- Following the conclusion of the *Regional Broadband Survey* in June 2008, a summary of survey responses was created as well as a table of responses by municipality using the over 5,000 surveys submitted. Each survey asked if the respondent would like to “opt in” to receive future correspondence regarding broadband in their community. A list of these responses was forwarded to each municipality or community broadband committee for outreach efforts to garner local support for broadband access.
- In Goshen on August 4, 2008, the Connects collaborated with the MTC and Governor Patrick’s office to coordinate the Patrick administration’s event signing legislation to create and fund the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) and \$40 million Incentive Fund.
- The Connects were invited to present at the National Rural Telecommunications Conference held at Smugglers Notch, Vermont on October 5-8, 2008, and participated in a workshop sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S Senator Ted Kennedy on October 18, 2008 in Northampton.
- The Connects coordinated and co-sponsored two Community Forums held in Greenfield and Lenox on October 25, 2008. The panel of speakers included DTC Commissioner Sharon Gillett, Bill Ennen of the JAIL, Donald Dubendorf of Berkshire Connect and Linda Dunlavy of Pioneer Valley Connect.
- On November 6, 2008, the Connects participated in a ceremony held at the MassHighway District 2 office in Northampton to celebrate the start of construction for the I-91 ITS & Fiber Conduit Project.
- In December, the Connects submitted a joint response to the MBI’s “Call for Solutions for Western Mass” and participated in a MBI forum held in Northampton on December 4. The Connects prepared to move from a role primarily of advocacy to a more direct role in supporting the MBI with their swift and efficient implementation of the broadband access in the region.

## 2009

### *Connects' Collaboration / WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- Pioneer Valley Connect Steering Committee members Linda Dunlavy and Rick Oliveri of Baystate Health Systems, and Berkshire Connect, Inc. President Don Dubendorf were appointed to the MBI Board of Directors.
- The Connects submitted a comment letter supporting a proposed regional investigation by the DTC regarding Verizon telephone service quality in western Massachusetts.
- In April 2009, the Connects participated in the Opportunity Online Summit panel titled "Economic Development & Broadband Equity in Massachusetts." This Summit, hosted by the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners, was designed to bring together libraries, local leaders, and state leaders to discuss the state of library connectivity in Massachusetts and direct a plan for improved sustained connectivity.
- On May 26, 2009, the Connects collaborated with the MBI and Governor Patrick's office to host a broadband roundtable discussion in New Salem. The Governor was joined by Congressman John W. Olver, MA Senator Stanley C. Rosenberg, MA Representative Chris Donelan, MBI Director Sharon Gillett and Linda Dunlavy of Pioneer Valley Connect.
- In May 2009, Pioneer Valley Connect dissolved and the FRCOG secured representation on the Berkshire Connect Board of Directors. To better reflect the magnitude of the region it serves and the scope of its activities, Berkshire Connect changed its name to **WesternMA Connect, Inc.** and launched the new [www.westernmaconnect.org](http://www.westernmaconnect.org) website.
- WesternMA Connect released the first WesternMA Connect newsletter providing a broadband update to more than 500 stakeholders including WesternMA Connect board members, legislators, interested individuals, MBI Community Reps, and local government leadership.
- The DTC issued an order on June 1, 2009 to open a regional investigation of Verizon telephone service quality in western Massachusetts (DTC 09-1). WesternMA Connect submitted testimony at an August public hearing held by the DTC and encouraged residents, businesses and local officials to provide comments to the DTC as well.
- WesternMA Connect coordinated two regional meetings to provide an opportunity for local residents to directly communicate with legislators and MBI Director Sharon Gillett. Held in Deerfield and Great Barrington, these meetings provided an excellent opportunity for residents to hear about the efforts being proposed to encourage broadband infrastructure deployment.
- The FRCOG and WesternMA Connect submitted two grant applications to the first round of federal Broadband Technology Opportunity Program in coordination with the MBI's application and 24 regional partners. The projects identified in the applications were selected to provide new opportunities for public computer

centers and sustainable broadband adoption projects in the region. These applications and the MBI infrastructure application were identified by Governor Patrick as among his top priorities for the Commonwealth.

- In September 2009, WesternMA Connect responded to the MBI's RFP to pre-qualify entities that could be hired by the MBI to provide consulting services. As a result, Connect was selected as a pre-qualified entity.
- In October 2009, WesternMA Connect was selected to contract with the MBI to provide services in support of the MBI's federal State Broadband Data and Development Grant. This program consisted of two parts – a planning component and a mapping component. This work was conducted for the purpose of addressing key problems in expanding broadband internet access and adoption in western Massachusetts. WesternMA Connect administered the contract, provided day-to-day project management services, and contracted with the regional planning agencies (RPAs) to provide staff support.

## **2010**

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- In January 2010, the MBI, WesternMA Connect and the FRCOG were informed that their applications for Round I federal broadband grants for western Massachusetts were not successful.
- Options for Round II applications for Public Computer Centers (PCC) and Sustainable Broadband Adoption (SBA) were diligently explored by Connect, the FRCOG, Round I application partners and other stakeholders. Based on an examination of the new federal program guidelines, an assessment made of statements by the federal funding authorities, a review of Round I awards, and due diligence by regional partners, there was consensus that a PCC or SBA regional application for Round II would not be pursued. There was agreement that the MBI's application for federal infrastructure funding was of utmost importance to the region and that it was important for the federal funding authority not to view other western Massachusetts applications as competition to the MBI's application. In addition, it was agreed that the projects and collaborations identified through this funding application process were very promising and would be of great benefit to the region.
- WesternMA Connect provided assistance to the MBI in developing their Round II application for federal broadband infrastructure funding. Connect submitted a letter of support and attached to it a timeline depicting its efforts for more than a decade, demonstrating the longstanding inequity of broadband access in the region. Connect encouraged other stakeholders to submit letters of support describing the challenges encountered due to the lack of broadband access and the many opportunities broadband access would avail.
- On February 3, 2010, a municipal broadband forum was held at the Northampton High School. This event was coordinated by the MBI, WesternMA Connect, the BRPC, the FRCOG, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) and the MA

Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development. The purpose of the forum was to establish a framework of collaboration with municipal decision-makers and local broadband advocates for the goal of facilitating broadband deployment in the region.

- WesternMA Connect was granted an award in June from the MTC to be used to verify the broadband data that the MBI collected and submitted to the National Telecommunications Infrastructure Administration (NTIA). A pilot program (Broadband Mapping Verification Project) was initiated with the FRCOG and the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) to develop and implement a broadband data verification process which would be replicated and used to provide guidance to other regional planning agencies.
- With the announcement of the federal funding award to the MBI for their *MassBroadband 123* fiber-optic network, the MBI and WesternMA Connect hosted regional meetings providing information about next steps in the project. Meetings were held in Northampton, Dalton and Gardner.
- To support the MBI's efficient deployment of the *MassBroadband 123* network, WesternMA Connect collaborated with the FRCOG to develop three databases – Route Conditions, Wireline Facilities, and Wireless Facilities – to assess barriers and assets to broadband infrastructure deployment. Data collected was provided to the MBI and G4S (the MBI *MassBroadband 123* network design builder) and was instrumental in the MBI successfully accelerating their response to federal funding authorities regarding conditions of their network's path.
- On September 30, 2010, with support from WesternMA Connect, Inc. and the MBI, the FRCOG won a competitive grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration to study the potential for a new Interconnection Facility and Data Center in the greater Greenfield area. The study was completed in October 2011, and determined that there is a market for such a facility and that the project would be feasible and profitable to be undertaken. Such a facility would also greatly leverage the *MassBroadband 123* network and act as a catalyst for further economic development.

## 2011

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- WesternMA Connect developed a series of databases for the MBI to use in their outreach efforts, which included municipal contacts, media outlets and community venues (such as regional commissions or chamber boards).
- WesternMA Connect and the FRCOG proposed to the MBI a summit on last-mile networks. The result was the Broadband Technology Summit held in Northampton on March 19, 2011. The event introduced Axia NetMedia Corporation as the MBI's partner in operating the *MassBroadband 123* network.

- WesternMA Connect participated in a study led by UMASS Assistant Professor Martha Fuentes-Bautista on organization broadband networks in western Massachusetts.
- WesternMA Connect received an additional award in September from the MTC to continue the Broadband Mapping Verification Project with the BRPC, the PVPC and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC).
- WesternMA Connect assisted in the coordination of the “e-Health and Broadband in the Berkshires” event on September 12, 2011. Information was shared about the State’s e-health initiative and efforts to bring high-speed broadband access to the Berkshires.
- WesternMA Connect, the MBI, and Axia invited communities to attend one of a series of regional meetings for an update on the *MassBroadband 123* project and Axia, Community Anchor Institution (CAI) connections, last-mile strategies, and small business grant opportunities. Meetings were held in October and November in Northampton, Sturbridge, North Adams, Worthington, Great Barrington, Fitchburg and Greenfield.
- WesternMA Connect and the FRCOG promoted the resulting outcome of the DTC investigation into incumbent telephone quality services that resulted in Verizon being required to make significant improvements in its infrastructure and landline network in western Massachusetts.
- In August, WesternMA Connect and the FRCOG supported the DTC in coordinating and promoting four public forums to seek comments on a range of issues and questions related to consumer protection in the telecommunications industry.

## **2012**

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- WesternMA Connect implemented the Wireless Broadband Zoning Bylaw Review Project with partnering RPAs to review how fixed wireless broadband facilities relate to municipal zoning. RPA planners worked with the towns of Athol, Cheshire, Heath and Washington to review and revise existing zoning bylaws (or develop new ones if none existed) under the direction of their respective municipal Planning Board and with input from residents. The final report reviewed the different types of zoning bylaws developed, and assessed their advantages and disadvantages. This report was shared with the MBI, professional planners and Planning Board members across the Commonwealth.
- With review by WesternMA Connect, the MBI and Axia, the FRCOG created a document titled “Innovative Uses of Broadband in Your Community”. This brochure illustrates how next generation broadband capacity can be used by local governments, K-12 educational institutions, libraries, and public health and safety departments to achieve cost-effective and highly efficient outcomes.

- WesternMA Connect, the MBI and Axia hosted informational workshops in Greenfield, Pittsfield, Springfield and Leominster to update and inform CAIs about their connection to the *MassBroadband 123* network.
- WesternMA Connect, in collaboration with the FRCOG, developed a CAI Baseline Inventory Survey tool to assess the current telecom contracts, current and anticipated usage, and potential interest in a joint procurement project of municipally-based CAIs. The survey tool was distributed by the FRCOG, BRPC and PVPC to their member communities.
- Using responses from the CAI Baseline Inventory Survey, WesternMA Connect, the FRCOG and Axia proposed one-on-one municipal meetings to discuss their CAI service needs. The towns of Deerfield, Erving and Warwick were selected as pilot communities for these meetings.

## 2013

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- Using lessons learned from the 2012 pilot one-on-one municipal meetings and following the MBI *Fiber Segment Target Completion* schedule, WesternMA Connect scheduled briefing meetings for the MBI and Axia with the other communities in the *MassBroadband 123* network area.
- WesternMA Connect collaborated with the MRPC and the CMRPC to implement the CAI Baseline Inventory Survey in their municipalities within the *MassBroadband 123* network area.
- With input from WesternMA Connect, the MBI, Axia, and data collected from the submitted CAI Baseline Inventory Surveys, the FRCOG developed a Request for Information (RFI) for internet service providers (ISPs) seeking to supply high-speed dedicated services via the *MassBroadband 123* network to municipalities in western and north-central Massachusetts. The RFI was released twice and the eleven responses received were posted online.
- WesternMA Connect and the FRCOG submitted a proposal to the MBI in response to their RFP for Last Mile consulting services. The proposal was accepted and a contract was finalized between the MBI and the FRCOG with Connect as a subcontractor.

## 2014

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- Connect provided support services to FRCOG related to MBI last-mile networks, the *MBI Kitchen Cabinet*, the *Address Point Verification Project*, the *MBI Mapping Outreach Project*, and the *Municipal Technology Assistance Pilot Program*. These services included creating reports/presentations, scheduling and participating in meetings/conference calls, event planning, conducting research and outreach, and performing administrative tasks as needed.

- Both WesternMA Connect, Inc. and the MBI maintained websites with current information on broadband efforts in the region, Commonwealth and nation. So as to avoid duplication of effort, Connect no longer maintained an active website. However, to ensure that the valuable information about the history of WesternMA Connect, Berkshire Connect, Pioneer Valley Connect and the eventual creation of the MBI, remained accessible, the FRCOG posted a static version of the Connect website on [www.frcog.org](http://www.frcog.org).
- Connect continued to support the MBI in its work to address broadband access inequity in western Massachusetts through their completion of the *MassBroadband 123* network, development of last mile initiatives and efforts to encourage broadband adoption. Connect continued to support the MBI in its broadband mapping efforts, which include collecting, verifying and mapping broadband availability data statewide.
- Connect was engaged by the FRCOG to perform services associated with its *Broadband Technology Assistance* program. As funded by a state grant to the FRCOG, the *Broadband Technology Assistance* initiative was a pilot program that provided ten Franklin County towns with expert technical assistance to understand their IT needs and provide network recommendations that can be used to solicit services from the provider community.
- The 2014 Broadband Communities national conference was held in September 2014 in Springfield, MA, which included a presentation by FRCOG Executive Director and Connect Board Member Linda Dunlavy on the planners role in planning for broadband infrastructure.
- FRCOG and Connect helped MBI to coordinate a series of public meetings to discuss critical issues related to the rollout of last mile in unserved areas. These meetings were held at five locations across western Massachusetts in October and November 2014.
- FRCOG and Connect coordinated the Last Mile Broadband Financial Forums for experts to present more detailed information about bonding and finance mechanisms that may relate to a last mile project. Select Board and Finance Committee members from unserved towns had the option to attend one of four sessions held in Greenfield and Lenox in December 2014.

## 2015

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- Connect and FRCOG continued to support the MBI in its work to address broadband access inequity in western Massachusetts through September 2015. Specifically, Connect supported the MBI's public outreach to discuss the last mile project at regional and community meetings.
- Under a MOA with the FRCOG, Connect provided financial administration and management services/support to the *Innovation Institute at Mass Tech*.

- Connect supported the FRCOG in its efforts to provide access to municipal finance expertise to local governments. A FRCOG staffperson with this expertise, Joe Markarian, provided one-on-one technical assistance to Finance Committees in nineteen unserved towns.

## **2016**

### *WesternMA Connect, Inc. History*

- The Connect Board of Directors resolved to make grants to further the Corporation's mission. Grants were awarded to the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC). Connect, Inc. engaged the regional planning agencies to map middle-mile and backhaul wireline assets as well as major wireless facilities.
- At its annual meeting on February 10<sup>th</sup>, the Connect Board of Directors determined it was in the best interests of WesternMA Connect to dissolve the Corporation voluntarily and a Plan of Dissolution was approved and adopted.
- A Final Judgment of Dissolution was issued on June 15, 2016.

*Please note that significant technical assistance and support throughout the history of the Connects has been given by the UMASS Donahue Institute, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, the John Adams Innovation Institute and the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.*