

Gov. Northam participates in broadband event

by Jackie Nunnery

WARSAW—Expect to see more utility trucks traveling area roads now that the first phase of the Northern Neck regional broadband project is officially underway.

Gov. Ralph Northam on July 8 joined key players Dominion Energy, All Points Broadband, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative (NNEC) and the Northern Neck Planning District Commission in marking the event at the NNEC headquarters in Warsaw.

“This is truly an exciting day, and a day that exemplifies what happens when we put politics aside and have the vision to know what is needed,” said Gov. Northam. “By leveraging federal, state, local investment and private capital, this project will bring connectivity and opportunity to rural, unserved communities in the Northern Neck. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it’s really been the importance of broadband. Just like electrification that occurred back in the early 1900s, this is the electrification of 2021.”

The first phase of the project is expected to deliver fiber-optic broadband to 7,200 homes currently unserved in King George, Northumberland, Richmond and Westmoreland counties. Using a \$10.3 million Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant, Dominion Energy will install 200 miles of “middle mile” fiber optic cable from Fredericksburg to Kilmarnock. A partner in the project,

All Points Broadband, will lease the middle mile fiber, and extend the “last mile” fiber to unserved homes in the region.

A second phase, with timing still to be determined, will include another 2,700 unserved homes in Lancaster and Middlesex counties.

While the announcement is both welcome and long overdue, those without high-speed internet will still need some patience before expecting to log on. Ed Diggs, manager of electric distribution grid solutions for Dominion’s Rural Broadband Program, said Dominion crews would be working for the next year to create the middle mile backbone of the project.

“We’ve got a plan for the rest of this year and plan to complete construction in the Northern Neck by the third quarter of 2022,” he said. “As we finish major segments, we’ll turn those over to All Points and then they’ll take over that middle mile to serve that last mile customer.”

While easements to install cable on the existing poles are already in place, “there’s a need to form partnerships with land owners that need to sign supplemental communication easements in order for the project to be successful,” said Diggs. “We have provided notice to those all along the main route and we’re working through the thousands that are on that list.”

“The supplemental communication agreement enables Dominion to make that capacity from the cable available to the last mile provider so that we can deliver internet,” said All Points

Broadband chief executive officer Jimmy Carr. “The additional fiber is going to be on those poles today, but what Dominion needs help with is making sure that the broadband is

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From left, All Points Broadband chief executive officer Jimmy Carr and Northern Neck Planning District Commission executive director Jerry Davis ceremoniously accept a \$10.3 million Virginia Telecommunications Initiative grant check from Gov. Ralph Northam. The funding will help bring broadband to previously ignored pockets of the Northern Neck.

Photo by Jackie Nunnery

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available to people that don't have it today.

"We're expecting to begin the last mile installations to consumers in the fourth quarter of this year," said Carr. He suggested that "interested residents should go to fiber.allpointsbroadband.com to make sure their location is preregistered. Beginning approximately 90 days before service is available

in any given area, we will contact the locations that are coming online and schedule their installation appointments."

District 99 Del. Margaret Ransone, District 4 Sen. Ryan McDougle and District 28 Sen. Richard Stuart were among the elected officials, local government representatives and industry leaders present or participating in the ceremony.

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