

## Few lack high-speed access

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By Paul Glasser  
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After two years of working to improve Internet access for users in Franklin County, officials at Connect Kentucky say 94 percent of residents can now subscribe to high-speed service.

Sage Cutler, central Kentucky regional manager at Connect Kentucky, said only a few areas in northern and eastern Franklin County lack access. That's an improvement from 2005, when only about 70 percent had access to high-speed Internet services, he said.

Overall, the first phase of the project has been a success with most of the original benchmarks achieved, Cutler said.

Cutler worked with companies such as AT&T and the Frankfort Plant Board to secure the necessary investments in technology infrastructure.

Only the harsh topography, including hills and trees, prevents complete coverage in Franklin County, Cutler said. He said future plans to work with wireless providers in Owen and Woodford counties could provide high-speed coverage for the remaining areas.

Cable Superintendent John Higginbotham said the Plant Board will introduce high-speed service to more than 200 customers on Owenton Road this spring. It will cost an estimated \$375,000 to install three miles of fiber optic cable between Bethel Baptist Church on Owenton Road and Perkins Lane.

The expansion will be funded and implemented independently by the Plant Board. Higginbotham said the project has been on the drawing board for some time and demand for high-speed service has been growing.

"The take rate has been huge," he said.

Now, Cutler said the Connect Kentucky program will move into a different phase and focus on providing broadband users with new applications and services. A variety of benchmarks have been established for different local government, education, business and community groups.

One proposal from the local eCommunity Leadership Team, which coordinates the local program, would allow Internet to pay parking fines online using a credit card. Another would allow patients at the Franklin County Health Department to schedule appointments over the Internet.

"We are always looking at ways to use technology to be more cost effective and efficient in local government and business," Cutler said.

Cutler also wants to recruit new members for the leadership team from nine different sectors, including: city and county government, tourism, economic development, education, healthcare, libraries, agriculture and civic groups.

"We had a good core group of participants," he said.

The original team included 23 representatives, but many of the members contacted by The State Journal said they were no longer active. Keenan Bishop, agriculture agent for the Franklin County Cooperative Extension Service, said the project is important, but he wasn't able to participate.

"There are only so many hours in the day, and you can't do everything you want," he said.

Cutler said he hoped there would be more participation in the next phase and plans to rebuild the leadership team and continue moving forward.

"This is actually a great time for any new folks who want to come on board," he said.

There's no specific timeline for rolling out the new services and applications but it could last into 2009, Cutler said.

In the final phase of the project, Connect Kentucky would help match small and medium-sized businesses with technology consultants. They would provide assistance with security and help the companies invest in software and hardware improvements, Cutler said.