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Harrisburg

Lancaster city's plan to offer residential internet service may have gotten off to a slow start, but it's picking up speed. Make that super high-speed.

When **first announced in February 2015** as part of an overall municipal broadband project to

improve city services, city officials said the fiber-optic network would allow speeds of 300 megabits per second. During an update to City Council on Tuesday, an official with installer MAW Communications Inc. said speeds up to 1 gigabits per second will be offered.

How fast is that? Brian Kelly, MAW's corporate strategist, said high-speed generally means download speeds of faster than 20 Mbps. Downloading a standard-definition movie at 20 Mbps would take nearly half an hour, but just 30 seconds at 1 Gbps, he said.

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installation won't begin until next year, residents can preregister at **LanCityConnect.com**. Anyone who registers by Dec. 31 will have installation fees waived. Registration is non-binding, meaning whoever requests is can decide against installation

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Harrisburg Patriot-News
Editorial: Are you backing Donald Trump or not, Sen. Toomey? Decide

when it becomes available. Preregistration interest will help MAW figure how to proceed with installation, Kelly said.

Service will be offered at four levels, ranging from \$35 a month for 50 Mbps to \$90 a month for 1 Gbps. A subsidized rate will be offered for low-income families. The rates are less than comparable plans from Comcast and Verizon. Comcast's top speed, 150 Mbps, is about \$83 a month. Under state law, the city had to offer right-of-first refusal to build such a system to its predominant telecommunications carrier. That's Verizon, which declined to build such a system in Feb. 2015.

MAW, of Reading, will also allow some residents to get free installation and three months of free service in exchange for feedback so it can work out any kinks with installation, quality and billing, according to Kelly. That program will be in all four quadrants of the city. Pat Brogan, chief of staff for Mayor Rick Gray, said that will be done "representative of the city's demographics."

Currently, no other Pennsylvania municipality offers the public-private partnership Lancaster and MAW are forging. Kutztown has something similar, but on a smaller scale. The city is paying MAW \$500,000 to install the system, but MAW will make money on installation and a portion of service plan costs. The city will also receive a percentage of subscription revenues.

If people don't sign up? "That is a risk," Kelly said, adding it was unlikely people won't sign up, given its rates. Brogan outlined the main reason the city is installing the system: improved city services. For example, the project will allow remote reading of water meters and police and other city employees won't need aircards to connect computers to the internet because they'll be able to connect securely through the network.

Free Wi-Fi will also be offered in public spaces, including parks. "Our goal really was to make this a smart city," Brogan said, "... not just how government could use this, but how residents could use this." When announced, the city had hoped to begin offering residential service by the end of last year.

Charlotte Katzenmoyer, the city's public works director, acknowledged the project has gone slower than initially expected. She attributed that to trying something that's not been done before and therefore running into the unexpected. Also, the city decided to add [Lancaster Safety Coalition](#)'s camera network all at once, instead of in phases. — *Lancaster Intelligencer-Journal*

A federal appeals court said on Wednesday the U.S. Federal Communications Commission could not block two states from setting limits on municipal broadband expansion, a decision seen as a win for private-sector providers of broadband internet and a setback for FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler.

Cities in Tennessee and North Carolina had sought to expand municipal broadband networks beyond current boundaries, but faced laws forbidding or placing onerous restrictions on the expansions. The FCC voted 3-2 in 2015 to issue an order seeking to pre-empt those state laws, saying a 1996 law required it to remove barriers to broadband investment and that the municipalities wanted to expand service into areas with little or no internet service.

Wheeler criticized the decision that "appears to halt the promise of jobs, investment and opportunity that community broadband has provided in Tennessee and North Carolina." He said since 2015, "over 50 communities have taken steps to build their own bridges across the digital divide. The efforts of communities wanting better broadband should not be thwarted by the political power of those who, by protecting their monopoly, have failed to deliver acceptable service at an acceptable price."

Republican FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai said that "rather than wasting its time on illegal efforts to intrude on the prerogatives of state governments, the FCC should focus on

implementing a broadband deployment agenda to eliminate regulatory barriers that discourage those in the private sector from deploying and upgrading next-generation networks." USTelecom, the trade group that represents internet service providers including AT&T and Verizon Communications Inc, praised the decision as "a victory for the rule of law."

The group said the FCC should "concentrate on eliminating federal regulatory impediments to innovation and investment - where there remains to be much that can and should be done." The city of Chattanooga, Tennessee's municipal electricity provider since 2009, has offered high-speed broadband internet service to residential and commercial customers in its 600-square-mile service area. About 63,000 subscribe to the service. Residents in neighboring communities have asked to use the service.

Wilson, North Carolina in 2005 constructed the backbone of a fiber-optic network connecting all city-owned facilities that was expanded to a municipal broadband network now known as "Greenlight." The city offers phone, internet and cable services which it says are cheaper than its private-sector competitors. The city also provides free Wi-Fi service to its entire downtown area and each of the top seven employers in Wilson is a customer. Individuals in five neighboring counties have also sought to join.

The FCC has noted that companies in Tennessee, including Amazon.com Inc and Volkswagen AG, use the service in Chattanooga. – **Reuters**

Disney CEO Robert Iger is not a fan of Dish's new 'Skinny TV' programming package that's designed to appeal to consumers looking for fewer channels for a reduced price. "That new (Dish) product is pretty skinny," Iger said yesterday during a conference call with financial analysts. "I was going to say so skinny that you can't even see it."

Called the Flex Pack, the basic \$29.99-a-month Dish package consists of 50 channels including AMC, TNT, USA Network, HGTV, E!, Cartoon Network, History, A&E, CNN, Discovery, TBS, Food Network and FX. Consumers can then enhance the basic plan by choosing one of eight add-on packages from \$4 to \$10 a month each. If you pay \$39.99 a month, you will get one add-on plan as part of the package. (The plan is available to both new and existing customers.)

The basic \$30-a-month plan has apparently prompted Iger's ire because it does not include ESPN. By excluding ESPN, Dish is able to offer the Flex Pack at a reduced price because the satcaster does not have to pay the sports network the high carriage fees it would require for the package.

The Skinny TV plan seems designed to counter Dish's recent subscriber decline, but Iger thinks it's doomed to failure. "As we look at the product they are offering, we really don't believe that it's going to have...a great future," Iger said. "It's lacking some of the most attractive channels that's out there." Iger didn't mention ESPN as one of those 'attractive' channels, but he probably didn't need to. – **TVPredictions.com**



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