

Mark Twain Rural
Telephone Company

Mark Twain
Communications Company

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Mark Twain News

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FastTrack Internet Speeds Increase

One of our goals at Mark Twain has been to provide you with modern, dependable Internet services at the lowest possible price. When we started offering our high-speed internet service back in 2001, we offered you the speed of 256k/128k for \$51.95 per month. Now, we offer speeds from 768k/256k to 6.0m/1.0m and by signing up for our prepaid annual plan, you can save as much as \$109.95 per year.

We have adjusted our rates or speeds more than 6 times since we started offering high-speed Internet service 9 years ago. In the past year, we were able to increase our subscriber's basic speed from 512k/256k to 768k/256k without a price increase.

If you have been thinking of upgrading your FastTrack Internet speed, now is the perfect time to do so. We will waive the service order charge during the month of February for all speed upgrades.

Please contact our office if you are interested in upgrading your current speed or changing to a prepaid annual plan. Note: Fast Track Internet Speeds may not be attainable at all locations.

Legislation Could Raise Your Rates—Help Us!

We are closely watching developments in Jefferson City as the 95th MO General Assembly debates Bills of interest to our Coop. The Legislature convened on January 6th to begin their 2010 session, which will last about four months.



We have become aware of three proposed pieces of Legislation that have us very much concerned and, if passed, could drastically increase your cost for telephone and broadband services. All three Bills would require us to lower the per minute charges – referred to as access charges – that we charge other carriers when they use our network to originate or terminate their subscriber's calls. These per minute access charges provide us with a significant source of revenue and ensure that subscribers in rural Missouri receive modern dependable service at affordable rates.

These Bills are a blatant attempt by companies that pay us access charges, such as AT&T, Verizon, Sprint and the cellular companies, to lower their cost of doing business and increase their profits at your expense. They want a free ride when they use our network.

A similar Bill was introduced in the Senate during the last Legislative session. We calculated that if this Bill had passed these access payers would have received a huge financial windfall and we would have had to raise local rates by over **\$13.50 per month** to recover our lost revenue. With the help of Senator Shoemyer, we were successful in getting that Bill defeated last year.

This year, there are two similar Bills in the Senate, SB 698 & SB 785 that we oppose. In addition, Representative Tim Jones has drafted a House Bill that would also have the same disastrous affect if passed.

We have contacted our Representatives and Senator and explained to them how these bills will increase your rates and deprive us of the revenues needed to continue our broadband deployment. We ask that you do the same. Please call them, write them or send them an e-mail. Ask them to stand up for rural Missouri and work with Mark Twain to ensure fair and affordable telephone rates for all.

Spend Broadband Money With Care

Guest Commentary
By Richard Telthorst

As hopeful applicants around the country scramble to take advantage of more than \$7 billion in federal stimulus funds to expand the reach of the Internet, policymakers both in Missouri and Washington need to watch carefully how the money will be spent. Taking a “ready, fire, aim” approach without good planning could waste taxpayer dollars without bringing better Internet access.

The federal stimulus program to improve high-speed Internet service (known as “broadband”) already has attracted more than 2,200 applicants looking for nearly \$28 billion – more than four times the amount allocated by Congress. In Missouri, more than 60 applicants have filed plans to spend more than \$1 billion on projects across the state.

Among those plans is an ambitious idea to build 2,500 miles of additional “middle-mile” broadband network. That’s the infrastructure pipeline for delivering Internet access, but it doesn’t include the connections directly to homes and small businesses, known as the “last mile.” This plan would also give the state of Missouri access to a portion of the network to carry government Internet traffic.

State government’s partnership in this private sector project could potentially hinder additional fiber deployment by telecommunications providers in the state. Local Internet providers would be harmed if the new network were used to provide access to some providers in competition with others, or to bypass private providers and serve their customers directly. Dozens of telecommunications companies have invested millions of dollars in private capital to build a robust broadband network reaching all corners of the state.

More private investment is pending to expand this network even further. But using a state network to

undercut or overbuild private Internet providers or to subsidize the operations of particular providers would reduce the incentives that the private sector has to expand services. It’s not the way public money should be spent – especially money that is in short supply given the number of competing projects.

A recent industry study points out that the “middle mile” networks built in Missouri by telecommunications providers, cable companies, electric cooperatives and others already have an extensive reach. A more detailed study of this network in Missouri should be undertaken before federal funds are invested. State government, using federal stimulus funds, should lead this mapping effort. Further network deployment to extend the “last mile” of Internet connections to more-distant customers is driven by demand. Demand depends on customers understanding the value of a broadband connection and having a computer to connect to the Internet.

Federal stimulus money also is available to finance projects to establish public computing centers, educate and train people in computer skills, and help create the demand needed for further private sector investment.

These projects may not garner as much media attention as do “shovel-ready” plans to string more fiber across the state, but they are critical in bringing more broadband access to Missouri.

Richard Telthorst is president and chief executive officer of the Missouri Telecommunications Industry Association in Jefferson City.



Our office will be closed Monday, February 15th in observance of President's Day.