

Gov. Northam Presents \$15.6 Million Check to CPPDC for Historic Broadband Expansion

VATI Award Will Help Create More Than 13,000 New High-Speed Internet Connections in Four Counties

BREAKS, Va. – Local leaders and community stakeholders joined Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam and other state representatives Monday in Dickenson County to celebrate the approval of more than \$15.6 million in Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) grant funding to the Cumberland Plateau Planning District Commission for far-reaching fiber broadband expansion throughout the district's four-county area.

The funding – the largest such award for broadband in the history of the Commonwealth – allows the CPPDC along with its private broadband partner, Point Broadband, to deploy residential and commercial fiber broadband service to nearly 13,500 new potential connections in the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell. The entirety of the project will impact homes and businesses that are currently unserved or underserved by high-speed internet.

Monday's event celebrating the recently-announced award was held at Breaks Interstate Park, not far from where work has already begun by Point Broadband to expand the fiber broadband network.

"We could not be more impressed by Virginia's commitment to rural broadband expansion, specifically here in the coalfields of Southwest Virginia," CPPDC Executive Director Jim Baldwin said following Monday's event. "Our sincere thanks go to Governor Northam and the entire VATI team that helped make this historic project possible."

Northam announced the VATI grant award in late January.

The VATI funds – in the amount of \$15,636,544 – are matched by additional public and private funding for a total project of more than \$45 million. The VATI funding will facilitate the deployment of more than 1,300 miles of new fiber broadband infrastructure throughout the PDC's four counties.

"Providing access to the internet and expanding broadband is a top priority for me," Del. Will Morefield noted. "The recent VATI award could not have come at a better time for the region. All of the local partners should be commended for their hard work on seeing this award come to fruition. I am committed to supporting these types of projects and as a member of the House Appropriations committee I will make every effort to increase funding. Every resident in Southwest Virginia should have access to the internet."

Added Sen. Travis Hackworth, "This funding through the VATI grant will provide crucial access to broadband for families and businesses that will improve our quality of life, enhance education and workforce opportunities, as well as improve our healthcare through telemedicine options. This is a huge step, and I am appreciative of all those involved in the initiative. It is a great day in SWVA."

To help bolster the VATI request, the Cumberland Plateau Company (CPC) pledged \$1 million toward the holistic fiber broadband project. Point Broadband, the project's private partner, will match the award with \$10 million of their own private funds, as well as more than \$16 million in federal CAF2 funding.

"Point Broadband is proud to be a partner with the Cumberland Plateau to expand broadband access to rural Southwest Virginia," remarked Joseph Puckett, Point Broad's Regional General Manager, following Monday's event.

Thanks to a variety of public and private partnerships, the CPPDC set the stage for the broadband expansion effort 18 years ago through the development of a robust fiber broadband backbone network in all four counties that ultimately made the scope of the VATI project significantly more feasible to accomplish. Baldwin thanked U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, Congressman Morgan Griffith, former Congressman Rick Boucher, as well as the Virginia Tobacco Commission and the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority (VCEDA) for the financial support that spurred the initial U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) and National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)-funded project.

“Without that work having already been done in our region, this project would not have been possible,” Baldwin added. “We look forward to working alongside Point Broadband to build upon that foundation for the benefit of our residential and business communities.”