

Press Republican  
April 27, 2006

## **Regional broadband network continues to make progress**

by Dan Heath

PLATTSBURGH – Efforts to create the Adirondack Champlain Community Broadband Network continue to move forward, with \$545,000 in funding secured and creation of an advisory board.

U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and U.S. Rep. John McHugh worked together to secure the funding in the last federal budget, Plattsburgh State Technical Assistance Center Director of Economic Development Howard Lowe told Plattsburgh Noon Rotary members Wednesday.

“That money is secured. We just have to fill out the paperwork. It should be coming within a couple of months.”

### First Steps

The money will be used to prepare a business model, business plan and network-design concept for a 5-mile fiber-optic and wireless network, he said.

Additional funding could come from the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration, which has invited the partners to submit an application for \$5000,000 matching grant.

The 35-member Advisory Board brings together economic, business, healthcare and government leaders from the tri-county area. It will hold its first meeting Friday morning.

Lowe said construction of the network is expected to cost \$20 million. It will be a non-profit operation, with residents and businesses receiving service from telephone, cable and Internet-service providers, much like the way private airlines use public airports, he said.

### Key To Growth

Broadband access is a key to fostering economic development and innovation, Lowe said. It will create opportunities for distance learning, tele-medicine, electronic government services and other advances, while also providing a competitive edge for local businesses.

It will also help in efforts to keep young people from leaving the area after graduation.

“When they leave for the big city, one of the things they enjoy the most is the chance to enjoy Internet cafes or dependable wireless service,” Lowe said.

The tri-county area is falling behind, as networks are up and running to the east and west, Lowe said. The Development Authority of the North Country has created a 400-mile open-access network serving St. Lawrence, Jefferson and Lewis counties, while the City of Burlington also has an open-access network up and running.

Nationally, similar projects in Utah, Virginia, Ohio and Connecticut are being used to fill in the gaps in rural areas.

### Years- Long Project

The network has been in development for about five years, Lowes said, with the Technical Assistance Center asked in 2002 to coordinate the original efforts of the Town of Plattsburgh and the Industrial Development agencies of Clinton, Essex and Franklin counties.

The Research Foundation of Plattsburgh State is involved in administering grants and providing legal and accounting services.

Broadband availability, capability and cost is important to businesses considering whether they will locate here, Lowe said.

The private sector is the key to the project, he said. Discussions have been held with all of the cable and telephone companies in the area, many of whom have expresses support as they realize the potential to reach new customers through the network.

There is a handshake agreement to connect with the Development Authority of the North Country network. Lowe said it is too early to tell if that agreement will lead to a partnership, but he was certain those discussions would take place.

There is also a letter of intent for connection to the Quebec Scientific Research Network once the Adirondack-Champlain network is operational. That connection would also provide an opportunity to connect to the New York State Education and Research Network, based in New York City.