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NEWS RELEASE

“Broadband Service Making Its Way to Rural Benton County” July 7, 2023

Rural broadband service in Benton County took another large step forward just recently with the announcement by the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development of a \$3 million “Border to Border” broadband grant to Benton Communications to extend fiber service to areas of the County to the South of Minnesota Highway 23. This comes after another Border to Border grant of \$1.5 million announced in February to bring broadband service to unserved and underserved areas to the North of Highway 23. Once both projects are completed, virtually every area of Benton County will have access to high speed internet service.

The latest South Benton County project will bring fiber service to 836 unserved or underserved addresses in Glendorado Township and portions of Gilmanton, Maywood, Minden and St. George Townships. Benton Communications plans to install 230 miles of fiber in the South project area, with completion expected by the end of 2026. Work is well underway on the North Benton County project areas, where Benton Communications will install an estimated 148 miles of fiber to 483 rural addresses.

Benton Communications will bring a minimum 100 Mbps upload and 100 Mbps download speeds to these addresses, with options up to 1 Gig upload/download. Benton Communications asks residents to watch your mailbox for a construction authorization form so that fiber can be run to your residence at no cost to you. Signing up for service is not required to get fiber run to your residence. Questions about service packages and fiber installation can be addressed to Benton Communications at 320.393.2115 and on the web at <https://www.bctelco.net/>.

Rural broadband was established as a primary goal of the Benton County Board when the County first received federal COVID relief funds, also known as the American Rescue Plan Act, or ARPA. The County has invested \$3.1 million of its ARPA funds into rural broadband. The County Board heard the concerns of residents about needing access to high speed internet - for running a business, for people working remotely or for students needing high speed internet for school. The COVID pandemic heightened the need for rural broadband, yet the County also believes this investment will make Benton County a more attractive place long term to live or start a business.

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Benton County is grateful for its partnership with Benton Communications. Combined, the North and South Benton County projects are estimated to cost \$12.8 million, with Benton Communications contributing \$5.3 million of its own capital.

The County urges residents to contact Benton Communications to determine if fiber service will be installed near your residence. Benton Communications can also help with questions about the timing of installation. While the County understands that most every address in the County will have fiber installed nearby, it is possible a few addresses may be excluded due to practical difficulties in getting fiber to the address. The County asks residents in those situations to contact the County to see what options might exist.

Benton County thanks the members of its Broadband Committee that first formed in early 2021 under the leadership of County Board member Jared Gapinski as its Chair. From the initial broadband feasibility study, to requests for proposals from broadband providers and then to the selection of a provider to serve our residents, this State grant award combined with provider and County investments is the culmination of over two years of work to bring rural broadband to Benton County.

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