

Three Ring Binder

The Three Ring Binder Project is a 1,100 mile fiberoptic network that was funded through a Dept. of Commerce “BTOP” grant. It is a \$32 million dollar project, \$24 million from federal funds, the remainder from the Maine Fiber Company (MFC). MFC’s mission is to enhance ‘middle mile’ fiber access for carriers looking to provide quality broadband services to customers in many areas of Maine, including some of the most rural areas of the State.

The network is built in “three rings”, one in the Downeast Region, one in Aroostook County, and one in Central to Southern Maine. The Three Ring Binder is an “open access” network and is available to all qualified broadband providers on an equal basis. No single entity can use more than 20% of any segment of the network.

The Three Ring Binder is considered the “highway”. Once a highway is built, off-ramps are next, then primary roads, then secondary roads and so forth. The 3RB is the super highway and that highway cost \$32 million dollars for just 1,100 miles. From the highway, we can start the process to bring fiber or a “fiber-like” connection to everyone, one house at a time. Broadband providers all across the State are working toward this goal.

The next step will be to build fiber “rings within the rings”. Fiber costs approximately \$20,000 per mile.

Business Sectors

The State of Maine is #43 in broadband adoption. Increasing the computer skills of our workforce and adopting technology in the workplace is critical. Often, we “think” an employee is computer literate because they use a computer at work. However, the software program may be proprietary. For instance, if you work at a medical practice, the employee will log into an electronic medical record, and may not use any other function of the computer. Typically, we are driven to “learn” because of a “want” or “need”. iPads and data phones are a good example of this. We “want” to learn how to download an App or play a game, or do FaceTime with our grandchildren. Excel is another good example. We might use Excel every day, but likely are only using a small portion of the program. If we “have” to do something new, maybe create a graph, then we will figure out how to do it.

In addition, many businesses are just now getting connected to broadband. Once that happens, the computers and software that they have been using are no longer adequate. Business owners often don’t even know what to ask for or who to ask for help. The average business owner is between 40 and 60 years old, and those of us that are within that age range have learned computer technology mostly on our own or we have asked someone for help. High school graduates today have been using a computer for most of their school years. Business owners need to be computer literate at least to the level of the average high school graduate.

Unserved Homes and Businesses

There are 49,000 homes and businesses in the State of Maine without broadband connectivity today. These unserved homes are throughout the entire State of Maine. The ConnectME Authority works with multiple broadband providers and municipalities to continue to find solutions for broadband connectivity. It is getting more and more expensive to reach these “last-mile” homes and businesses. Broadband providers throughout the State continue to build out their networks and find solutions to ensure that every home and business in the State has a broadband connection.

In addition, broadband providers are increasing the capacity of their networks. In one home, you often have multiple users and multiple devices. Movies are being downloaded, YouTube videos are watched, music is being played, emailing, web surfing may all be going on at the same time. Increasing bandwidth to broadband subscribers is necessary, and more importantly at affordable prices.