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Tom Gabos has seen how thieves steal electricity. They bypass their own electric meter, snag power from a neighbor or tap in at the pole. Thefts were rare when Gabos started as an electrician, a trade he learned from his father, but the incidents are growing more common in Hazleton. “I’ve been doing this 36 years, but in the last 10 years, I’ve seen a ton of it,” Gabos said.



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They also are the kind of thefts of which Hazleton’s acting police Chief Jerry Speziale has seen enough. Speziale figures that people stealing services also might participate in other crimes or belong to gangs that he wants to pressure. “That’s what we go after the group for, mostly cable, mostly small crimes. They’re stealing the power, they’re stealing the electric,” Speziale said Friday when adding that police work with power, cable and satellite companies to find violations. “Look at some of the houses that have 16 different antennas on it. You can’t tell me that everybody’s paying for the cable or the antenna in the house.”

Most commonly, people steal electricity or cable television to avoid paying for the service. “The biggest thing is in apartment buildings. One guy can’t pay his bill and goes to the basement and sneaks power off another guy’s panel,” Gabos said. Sometimes, the

theft is part of a larger crime.

On Feb. 18, 2015, when police raided a house converted for growing marijuana in the Beech Mountain development of Butler Township, they found the grower also pilfered electricity. PPL Electric Utilities estimated the value of the electricity stolen at the home on

[young](#)

[Delaware County Daily Times Editorial: The Wolf at the door in Pa. budget war](#)

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Mink Springs Court at \$37,000. Nationwide, the International Revenue Protection Association estimates that the theft of electricity totals \$6 billion annually.

Customers who pay their bills absorb the cost of stolen electricity, but thefts cause other consequences to innocent victims by triggering blackouts or power surges that damage appliances, Molly Hall, executive director of the Energy Education Council in Springfield, Illinois, said. Growing marijuana indoors requires vast amounts of power to run fans, air conditioners, filters and heat lamps the size of coffee tables. One grower in Denver pays a monthly electric bill of \$12,000, Colorado Public Radio reported on July 10, 2015. People growing marijuana in Pennsylvania might bypass electric meters to avoid alerting authorities to their illegal horticulture.

PPL can disclose personal information about customers when cooperating with “security-related or law enforcement investigations,” a privacy policy that the company adopted on April 20, 2015, says. If PPL suspects theft, the company gives the evidence to police, PPL spokesman Kurt Blumenau said by email. Theft of electricity violates state law and is classed as a felony for amounts exceeding \$2,000. Smart meters that PPL plans to start installing for \$450 million this year and expects all customers to have by 2019 provide real-time readouts of power use. They can help prevent theft by sending signals if the meter is moved, removed or tampered with, Blumenau said. PPL can read smart meters remotely, but transmissions will be encrypted to protect privacy, he said.

In the cable television industry, a switch to digital, encrypted signals reduced theft, Tim Trently, the division manager of Service Electric Cablevision in Hazleton, said. Prior to the swap, thefts commonly occurred between neighbors. “They put a splitter on a downstairs neighbor or a house very close,” Trently said. “Since (we have) gone all digital, that kind of theft greatly decreased.” He advised people who use routers to distribute Internet service throughout their home or office to protect their systems with a password to prevent theft of signals and personal information.

If Service Electric discovers a theft, the company would warn a customer to disconnect illegal connections but take other action if the customer refused or re-connected the service illegally later. Federal law provides penalties of \$1,000 or six months in jail for stealing cable service and cable companies can seek damages for theft in civil lawsuits. People stealing electricity risk criminal penalties and worse. Illegal or improper wiring can create a fire or shock hazard to service technicians, firefighters and neighbors as well as the thieves themselves. “If you don’t know what you’re doing,” Gabos said, “you’re going to get electrocuted.” – *Hazleton Standard-Speaker*

On the western shore of the Hudson River on Thursday, executives of an emerging York telecom company soaked in a moment they say is a big step toward changing how the Internet works for businesses and residents along the East Coast. That change, they say, will happen through 864 strands of fiber-optic cable slated to run through York, from New York City to Ashburn, Virginia.

United Fiber & Data employees and executives crowded around two open manholes in Weehawken, New Jersey, barely big enough for a human to enter, watching workers unreel a spool of a plastic-covered tube into a steel pipe. Above ground, contractors used an air compressor to blow that tube through a slightly larger one that traveled 5,000 feet under the Hudson River to Midtown Manhattan.

Once completed, data customers in York and elsewhere around rural [Pennsylvania could have access to Internet speeds 100 times faster than they have now](#). And, company officials say, businesses would be attracted by the ultra high-speed Internet. [The fiber optic project has been in the works since 2009](#), when the company began securing rights of way and legal approvals to become a public utility in five states. And the project hasn’t been without its challenges.

Patrick Dahlheimer, bassist for the band Live and one of UFD's co-investors, joined his

bandmates Chad Taylor and Chad Gracey, company executives and employees in Weehawken on Thursday to watch Hylan Datacom & Electrical feed the fiber line from New Jersey to New York, connecting to the nearly 25 miles of operational fiber in Manhattan.

As fiber traveled under the river, a roughly two-hour process, some of those gathered shook hands and patted each other on the back. Some held up cellphones to photograph and record the event described by one as the company's version of a groundbreaking. "It came to us as a business investment," Dahlheimer said. "We vetted it and it seemed risky. But here we are. We took a big bite out of this."

After walking away from the work site, Bill Hynes, UFD chief executive and founder, fired up his Mercedes Benz and turned on his satellite radio. Live's hit, "Selling the Drama," was playing. "Can you believe this?" he yelled to Taylor, guitarist for the band, and Dahlheimer after he rolled down his windows and cranked the volume. Businesses in Manhattan could someday have offices in York, Hynes said during the fiber installation. And that's what he is most excited about. "It's a cold day, but it's a bright day for York," he said.

Slated to pass through a 16-inch pipe owned by Hudson River Crossing LLC, work on the fiber line was delayed when UFD had to catch up on its lease payments. [The New Jersey company filed a civil claim](#) to get the money. The two companies settled out of court, and Hudson River Crossing member Robert Cannon joined UFD officials at the site Thursday. If there had still been a problem, Cannon said, he would not have been smiling on the job site.

UFD is one of several telecom companies leasing space in Hudson River Crossing's pipe, which runs 55 feet below the river channel's surface, Cannon said. The pipe can accommodate 37 fiber lines, he said. Hynes insisted the civil claim is in the past. It involved a minor misunderstanding, said Hudson River Crossing sales and marketing director Richard Coghlan on Friday. And Hynes shrugged off a civil suit with PEG Bandwidth -- a financial dispute that was settled with undisclosed terms in York County Court of Common Pleas. Hynes said he is prohibited from discussing specifics about a current customer, saying only that UFD and PEG Bandwidth have a great relationship after they "agreed to disagree and then agreed on other terms." "We've had hiccups, we made our mistakes," Hynes said. "But we're past that. That's just business in America."

Hynes pointed over a snow bank and toward the Empire State Building and Freedom Tower, pillars of the New York City skyline. The fiber line being installed near the Lincoln Tunnel, he said, will ultimately [connect the financial epicenter of the world to York](#). Even though thousands of fiber lines exist between New York City and Ashburn, they run primarily along the I-95 corridor. And those fiber lines can fail, which makes for slower-than-desired Internet connectivity. Most Internet providers have fiber lines starting in major cities, such as New York, and eventually wind up in the back of your router at home. Some still use coaxial lines, which are thicker, heavier and less reliable. Think of a car's obsolete cassette deck.

When you're sitting at work and complaining about lagging Internet speeds, it's often the fault of a failure along a major fiber line, Taylor explained. Borrowing a pen and tablet, Taylor quickly drew a makeshift map, depicting how a data failure between New York and Virginia lags. Information is re-routed from New York City through Canada, around to Pittsburgh and down to Ashburn. Most of the East Coast's Internet, as it is provided to customers, exists in New York and Ashburn, but overcrowded pathways on a similar route slow things down. A disaster, such as Hurricane Sandy or the Sept. 11 attacks, could cripple companies' data storage.

Data transmission is much like water flowing from garden hoses, said Christopher Lodge, UFD president and chief operating officer. Sixteen garden hoses flowing into one hose would get backed up compared to flowing those 16 hoses into a 24-inch water main. Or, think of emails as millions of data packets going from one device to another, Lodge said. The packets need to be sent quickly because data networks don't want traffic

jams. They pass the packets like hot potatoes.

UFD's fiber is expected to pull a substantial amount of Internet traffic from the I-95 corridor to its alternate route, which would also serve as a backup data connection when other lines fail. When it reaches Virginia, the data line that UFD is still building would connect the two East Coast Internet hotbeds. UFD's fiber will head south in a few weeks, toward Jersey City, Lodge said. It is expected to cross the Delaware River in August, said Hynes of the next big river crossing that is "not as sexy." Crossing the Hudson had more significance because it announces to the world that UFD is on the march, he said. A full build-out is anticipated by the end of the year. The line will connect smaller cities in Pennsylvania, offering potential connections to boost Internet speeds in rural areas.

Major cities in the United States were established because of their proximity to river ports, Taylor said. This data line will make York a "river port," he said, by connecting it to faster, more reliable Internet. People think they have Internet, and they are connected, Hynes explained. But compared to what would be available on this line, today's typical data speeds are like dial-up speeds, he said. After his diagram-backed explanation, Taylor said building stronger Internet can help businesses in York to flourish. "I'm just a hometown guy trying to build jobs in York," he said "York is set up to go, it just needs an accelerant." – ***York Daily Record***

The future of wireless used to rest on selling bigger data packages. Now that is being turned on its head. Video has clearly become the next frontier for mobile services. Consumers want to watch movies and shows wherever and whenever, and most major wireless carriers are scrambling to keep up with that demand, while touting their own offerings. But one thing is common to all of their video strategies: the need to offset the cost of data.

In the latest example, Verizon Communications said earlier this month that subscribers wouldn't have to pay for data consumed while using its go90 mobile video app. That came after AT&T's announcement last month that it would begin offering unlimited data to wireless subscribers who sign up for DirecTV, enabling them to watch as much as they want on devices outside the home. T-Mobile US launched its Binge On offering last November, allowing subscribers to stream video from participating streaming services without it cutting into their data usage.

Indeed, heightened competition has made it difficult to pursue the industry's prior strategy of driving growth in average revenue per user by selling more expensive data plans. Success now rests on companies' ability to win over more subscribers by offering integrated video and wireless services and free data for their own video services, while making up the difference by selling mobile advertising and sponsored data, according to UBS.

The need to delve further into mobile advertising helps explain Verizon's acquisition of AOL last June and its potential interest in making a bid for Yahoo's core business. Prospects for such a sale may have picked up with Yahoo's announcement Friday that it had hired bankers and formed a committee to explore strategic options.

For wireless carriers, the video about face likely means lower margins short term than under the old growth model, especially given they will be competing with the likes of Google and Facebook for mobile-video attention and ad dollars. But in a future where most TV is watched over the Internet, it could give nationwide providers like Verizon and AT&T an edge over cable. The reach of Comcast's Stream TV online offering also doesn't count against data-usage thresholds. But this is constrained by the cable system's regional footprint, which is limited to Comcast broadband customers.

This may help explain why Comcast is testing a wireless service using Verizon's network and will "take a paddle" in the government's upcoming auction for wireless spectrum. Charter Communications has said it needs clarity on regulatory approval for its deal to buy

Time Warner Cable to participate in the auction. Granted, the Federal Communications Commission will likely take a close look at Verizon's go90 offering, as it did with Binge On, to ensure it doesn't violate net neutrality rules. Verizon says it doesn't because any company can sponsor data through its FreeBee program. Investors banking on high-cost wireless data plans should look at video and start getting used to the idea of free. – **Wall Street Journal**



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