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Atlantic Broadband is joining a growing number of service providers to push ahead with a premium whole-home WiFi mesh offering that utilizes access points and smart networking software from AirTies.

The new product, to be offered to residential and small-business customers, will be based on AirTies's Air 4920 802.11 ac "video grade" mesh access points and the vendor's dual-band client steering technology. The platform will also enable field techs and network engineers to tap into AirTies' cloud-based Remote View performance monitoring platform. They said Atlantic Broadband will provide additional information about its service launch and pricing later this month. – **Multichannel**

The Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce announced Monday that it will award \$569,204 to Somerset County to expand the county's fiber-optic communications infrastructure.

That award, combined with a similar \$948,673 Appalachian Regional Commission grant that Somerset County received in January, will make a total of more than \$1.5 million available to improve internet speeds throughout the county.

At their meeting Tuesday, the Somerset County Commissioners applauded the news of the EDA's grant and said that having widely available high-speed broadband internet service has become an economic necessity in recent years. "As we move forward, it just becomes more and more important to be able to connect with everyone instantly," Commissioner Gerald Walker said. Commissioner John Vatauvuk agreed: "We've got to get with the 21st century here," he said.

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Broadband internet speeds are needed for videoconferencing – an increasingly popular tool for schools that offer online classes and businesses whose employees work remotely, Vatauvuk said. The

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EDA's grant will fund the extension of fiber-optic cables to what the agency described as "key countywide industrial areas," including the Somerset Industrial Park, Laurel Highlands Business Park, Meyersdale Borough and the North Star Industrial Park.

That project is expected to create 42 new jobs, retain 20 existing jobs and generate \$25 million in private investment, according to a news release. "We commend Somerset

County for working to spur economic opportunities through infrastructure improvements," Dennis Alvord, the EDA's deputy assistant secretary for regional affairs, said in the statement.

In January, the Appalachian Regional Commission awarded \$948,673 to be used to install 22 miles of fiber-optic cable on existing pole lines in areas of Somerset County that currently have no cable broadband service and little DSL service. That project is expected to bring broadband internet to 1,094 businesses and 3,962 households and "will act as an economic and tourism driver in the county," Appalachian Regional Commission officials said in announcing the grant.

The grant was one of 31 awards, totaling about \$26 million, that the Appalachian Regional Commission announced in January as part of its effort "to expand and diversify the economy in coal-impacted communities." "These investments capitalize on the growing momentum for a diverse economy in Appalachia," Appalachian Regional Commission Federal Co-Chair Earl F. Gohl said in a January statement. On Tuesday, the commissioners began planning for the next step of the projects. "We have to move forward now with finding a company to write the (specifications) and get us a biddable project," Walker said, "so we can get it out and, hopefully, move this ahead as quick as we can." – *Johnstown Tribune-Democrat*

Phase 1 of residential hookups began Monday for LanCity Connect, Lancaster's fiber-optic broadband network. The first 10 installations were completed, MAW Communications President Frank

Wiczkowski said: Customers were connected to the network “backbone” and can expect to be operational in a few days.

MAW Communications is building and operating LanCity Connect through a public-private partnership with the city. Phase 1 covers neighborhoods in the northwest and southeast and will run through the fall, **with future phases** reaching the rest of the city. MAW cautions that residents who miss the phase for their neighborhood won't have another opportunity to connect until all phases are complete. – **lancasteronline.com**

Missouri needs to build a bridge. Gov. Eric Greitens is working to lay the foundation.

The gap to be bridged isn't physical. It's digital. Fast internet access is essential to education and more. We need to find a way to make that access widely available, particularly in rural and low-income areas. Greitens recently announced a push to put broadband internet in every school in the state. His plan is to work with the Legislature to appropriate \$9 million in state funding to unlock \$39 million in federal funds through the Federal Communications Commission's E-Rate program. The governor is also working with nonprofit partners Education Superhighway and MOREnet on the initiative.

Today's students work with interactive media in learning programs that require high-speed broadband access. Students complete and submit a majority of their work online. Connectivity is key. A report from the National Conference of State Legislatures sums up the situation: "Access to high-speed internet in schools is particularly important for rural and low-income communities. "When internet connections in schools are too slow, and students don't have access at home, students miss the benefits of educational technologies altogether."

More than 100 Missouri schools lack quality internet access, according to a release from Greitens' office. The project is a great start. But it is just the beginning. In his announcement, Greitens said, "We got to work and developed a long-term plan to bring quality internet access to Missouri's small towns. This is an important first step on that mission and a big achievement."

The governor is correct. This is a first step. But rural and impoverished communities lack access at home, leaving students unable to complete homework without trekking to school or a library. This puts those students at a deep disadvantage. Companies are reluctant to go to the expense of running fiber optic lines to rural areas, where miles of cable will serve small pools of customers.

As we did with highway, electricity and telephone systems, we must find a way to push next-generation internet access into rural areas. This may require co-ops, subsidies, tax breaks or some combination to encourage providers to cross the gap. Internet access has become essential to not only education, but to multiple aspects of our daily lives. That trend will only accelerate. Finding a way across the digital divide to provide all Missouri residents access to broadband should be our goal. – **Joplin (MO) Globe editorial**

Minnesota started 2017 with a significant commitment to expanding the state's economy through innovation. The state announced a \$34 million promise to expand broadband internet service across the state. This decision will give 16,000 households and 2,200 businesses high-speed internet access that will boost economic growth through everything from online education to e-commerce.

Ironically, Minnesota policymakers are simultaneously reversing course on this commitment by considering two bills — HF4 and SF2255 — that would stifle online commerce through heavy-handed taxation. Online sellers drive small-business growth throughout the country. This legislation puts the onus on the online marketplaces operating in Minnesota to collect and remit sales taxes. There are real constitutional questions associated with this concept that will cost Minnesota taxpayers a great deal of money to litigate in the long term. And in the immediate term, online marketplaces will look to other states for their investment and job creation.

This proposal would completely disrupt business across Minnesota's economy, creating new requirements for companies collecting and remitting taxes on the sales of products and services even when they are not the seller. The plan, in brief, would force “marketplace providers” to collect sales tax for sellers in their marketplaces — an unreasonable burden, to say the least.

Would it make sense for the owners of a shopping mall to be required to collect and remit sales tax for the food court or any other store in the mall? Would you support requiring telephone companies to collect and remit use taxes on purchases made over the phone? Of course not. Yet, the new proposal calls for exactly that. As the examples above demonstrate, if the bill were to pass as written, the

inevitable effect would be a discriminatory set of regulations that would only apply to internet companies.

Undermining the internet — which contributes significantly to Minnesota's economy — only weakens the state economy and makes it harder for businesses to grow and thrive. Minnesota's residents recognize the importance of the internet, and 79 percent of Minnesotans oppose this proposed bill. It is both unfortunate and ironic that the very growth that makes the internet such a powerful force for Minnesota's economic advancement is simultaneously the factor making it an attractive target for lawmakers looking for new methods of tax collection. Responsible policymaking must recognize the critical balance at play here and avoid creating an atmosphere that undermines the internet economy's ability to create jobs and opportunity for Minnesota's residents.

Minnesota is poised to capitalize on internet-enabled business, but only if its public policies support the internet economy. Policymakers, regulators and business leaders must look to boost Minnesota's economic growth. The internet sector is an ever-growing area of opportunity unless legislators create barriers to business and anticompetitive regulations that prevent future growth. The federal government made the decision long ago to encourage continued innovation and foster a vibrant digital economy, and these policies have allowed the internet to develop into the economic engine it is today. Members of the internet community encourage leaders in St. Paul and across the state to continue this tradition. — *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

A federal appeals court has said it will not rehear a landmark case looking to overturn the government's rules on net neutrality, the regulations that forbid internet providers from blocking or slowing internet traffic.

Monday's decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit allows its previous ruling upholding the regulations to stand — and paves the way for opponents of the rules to appeal to the Supreme Court. "I'm super excited," said Daniel Berninger, one of the critics who in 2015 sued the Federal Communications Commission, which wrote the rules. "When we get to the Supreme Court, we want to be saying (to a largely conservative bench) this is a severe case of government overreach."

If the Supreme Court agrees to take the case, it could hear oral arguments next spring, said Berninger, who intends to file his appeal within 90 days. A spokesperson for USTelecom — a trade association supporting internet providers that also sued the FCC in 2015 — did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The D.C. Circuit's decision comes days after the FCC's Republican chairman, Ajit Pai, unveiled a separate plan to undo his Democratic predecessor's net neutrality regulations. Pai argued the rules have discouraged internet providers from upgrading their networks, and that repealing the net neutrality rules will create jobs.

Supporters of the regulations argue they are a vital consumer protection that prevents internet providers from abusing their strategic position between internet users and the rest of the Web. Without strong regulations, they say, internet providers will be free to raise costs for consumers and website owners, and determine what apps and services may flourish.

In a statement Monday, Pai said that he was not surprised to see the D.C. Circuit's decision in light of his impending bid to rewrite or repeal the rules. "Their opinion is important going forward, however," he said, "because it makes clear that the FCC has the authority to classify broadband ... as (a more lightly regulated) information service, as I have proposed to do."

Andrew Schwartzman, a public interest lawyer at Georgetown University, said the Supreme Court may take a pass on the case. "The likelihood that Chairman Pai will seek to abandon the Commission's 2015 decision greatly diminishes the already low likelihood that the Supreme Court would want to hear the case," said Schwartzman. — *Washington Post*



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