

# **United Counties of Leeds and Grenville Rural Broadband Expansion Project Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)**

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND**

### **1) What is the objective of the project?**

The main objective of the project is to leverage government funding to accelerate the provision of broadband coverage to identified rural areas where high-speed Internet service has been previously unavailable. These underserved or un-served rural areas are known as the “broadband gap” areas. The project will also ensure that the internet experience of rural residents with regard to quality, speed, and affordability is comparable to that enjoyed in urban areas.

### **2) Who are the parties involved in the project?**

Due to the ongoing focus the County has placed upon broadband, The United Counties of Leeds and Grenville was one of eighteen municipalities approved in August 2007 for one-time funding under the Government of Ontario’s Rural Connections ...The Ontario Municipal Rural Broadband Partnership Program. This program is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) with support from the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services and the Ministry of Small Business and Entrepreneurship. The United Counties will receive up to \$259,000 in funding from OMAFRA. Xplornet, a division of Barrett Xplore Inc. (BXI), was chosen at the conclusion of a rigorous, technology neutral, competitive bidding process in October 2007 to be the United Counties vendor of choice to construct, own and operate a fixed wireless network which will provide the additional coverage. The formal agreement with BXI was approved by Council on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

### **3) What is “broadband?”**

“Broadband” or high-speed Internet is currently defined as a high-capacity, two-way link between an individual user and the Internet that has a minimum download speed of 1.5 Mbps. This minimum (asymmetrical) speed is required to support today’s technology and applications – such as full-motion interactive video.

## **TIMING**

### **4) When will the project be completed?**

The project is scheduled to be completed by the end of June 2008. The network has been designed and the deployment process has already begun. Only a few fixed wireless tower locations remain to be finalized. Construction of a number of the new towers has already been completed and these towers are currently providing service to some of the broadband gap areas.

## **TECHNOLOGY & COVERAGE**

**5) What type of technology will be used? Will everyone within the project area be able to access the network?**

Xplornet will primarily use unlicensed fixed-point wireless technology. Currently, Xplornet has a significant number of fixed wireless towers serving the United Counties. Under the terms of the partnership agreement, the existing network will be supplemented with approximately twelve additional broadcast locations to serve the broadband gap areas.

Fixed wireless does have some coverage limitations as it is a line-of-sight technology. Therefore, a small percentage of homes or businesses may not be able to receive a fixed wireless signal due to obstructions or topography. Xplornet will offer its satellite broadband solution to residents who are unable to access the fixed wireless network. Both technologies deliver urban-like quality and speeds with no phone line required.

**6) Will the project provide high-speed Internet coverage to all of the broadband gap areas of the County?**

The project will substantially reduce the underserved and un-served areas of the County but it will not eliminate the entire gap. Once construction of the new network is completed by the summer of 2008, it is anticipated that 83% of the dwellings within the current broadband gap will be within the new fixed wireless coverage footprint. This means that approximately 15,000 additional residents will have access to broadband. The County is hoping to continue to phase in additional coverage in the future if more funding is made available from other levels of government. Under the terms of the partnership agreement with BXI, special incentives for United Counties residents have been negotiated and Xplornet will offer its satellite solution at a reduced price to those residents who are unable to access the fixed wireless network.

**7) How will I know if I am within the planned new fixed wireless coverage area?**

To confirm the availability of Xplornet's fixed wireless service, you may:

1. Provide your contact information to Xplornet by completing the no obligation sign-up form on the Xplornet Web site. Click on the Sign Up Now! link at [www.xplornet.com](http://www.xplornet.com).
2. Contact Xplornet Customer Care, available 24/7/365 at 1-866-841-6001.

Xplornet will use the contact information you provide to update you when service becomes available in your area.

Once construction of the entire network is completed, or if you are within the new coverage footprint of one of the recently constructed towers, a local Authorized Xplornet Dealer will be in the best position to assist you. The local Xplornet dealer partner can verify the availability of line-of-sight at your specific location and schedule the installation of the equipment needed to access the network. The Xplornet Web site has a Dealer Locator that will provide you with a map and

driving directions from your address to a dealer in your area. See also the listing attached of Authorized Xplornet Dealers who serve the United Counties.

**8) What is the difference between fixed wireless service and satellite service?**

Both Xplornet services use wireless technologies. Both require the installation of radio equipment at your home or business to communicate with either the wireless network radio towers or the satellite in space. Both technologies can deliver urban-like quality and speeds with no phone line required. However, fixed wireless transfer speeds can reach up to 5.0 Mbps while the maximum satellite transfer speed is 2.0 Mbps.

Most residents will prefer the fixed wireless alternative as currently the economics of this solution are such that the monthly service fees are less than for satellite service. Also, any signal you send from your computer via satellite has to travel over 22,000 miles to space and back again on both the forward and return trip in order to deliver your information. This typically creates a sub-second lag referred to as latency. For this reason, satellite service may not be ideal for any Internet activity requiring real-time data transfer (examples include online trading and gaming, or any other activity requiring the real-time exchange of information).

Nonetheless, satellite provides an alternative which is faster than dial-up. It is an affordable and attractive option for residents outside of the fixed wireless coverage area, or for the small percentage of residents within the coverage area who cannot obtain line-of-sight due to obstructions or topography.

**9) If I'm an existing Xplornet satellite customer and I'm located within the new fixed wireless coverage area can I switch services?**

Yes. You will qualify for a special conversion offer. Xplornet will contact you with further details once construction of the fixed wireless network is complete.

**SERVICE & PRICING INFORMATION**

**10) What equipment do I need and how much does it cost?**

For fixed wireless service, a local Authorized Xplornet Dealer will affix a compact subscriber module somewhere on your property, and supply an AC adaptor and an Ethernet cable which connects the subscriber module to your computer. There is a nominal subscriber module rental cost which is included in your monthly service fee. By virtue of Xplornet retaining ownership of the equipment the subscriber module carries a limited lifetime warranty.

Your local Xplornet Dealer can arrange for your subscriber module to be professionally installed for a one-time fee. Special incentives will be offered to United Counties residents for a limited time (see below).

In order to receive Xplornet's Ka-band satellite service, you must have a small satellite dish (67 cm) affixed somewhere on your premises, as well as a satellite modem, which is connected to your computer. The equipment can be purchased at a special price by United Counties residents for a limited time (see below). An Xplornet Authorized Dealer will provide and install this equipment for a one-time fee.

In some cases, both services may require additional hardware or cabling at the time of installation. Additional charges may apply in these circumstances.

**11) How much does the monthly service cost?**

Fixed wireless service packages start at \$29.99/month, and broadband packages (1.5 Mbps or above high-speed) from \$44.99/month. Satellite service plans start from \$54.99/month and satellite broadband plans (1.5 Mbps or above high-speed) from \$134.99/month. Additional details are available from Authorized Dealer partners, on Xplornet.com, or Customer Care.

**12) How fast is the service?**

Fixed wireless transfer speeds can reach up to 5.0 Mbps (where available), which is up to 185 times faster than dial-up. Satellite transfer speeds are as high as 2.0 Mbps which is equivalent to 75 times faster than dial-up.

**13) Do I have to sign a contract?**

A minimum term of one year is required for fixed wireless service. Incentives are offered on 2 and 3-year terms. No contract is required for satellite service, although various incentives are offered on 1, 2 and 3-year terms.

**14) Are there any special offers for United Counties residents?**

Yes, the County has negotiated with BXI for special offers to be made available to all residents of the United Counties – not only those living within the broadband gap areas. Commencing January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2008 new customers will receive free Xpress installation of their fixed wireless service if they subscribe to a 3-year service package. (\$29.99 Zip package excluded. Additional charges may apply in the small percentage of cases where an Enhanced installation requiring additional hardware or cabling is needed). The expiry date for this offer is unknown at this time, but this \$199 customer value will be available at least until March 31, 2009.

Residents who will be unable to access the completed fixed wireless network are entitled to purchase Ka-band satellite equipment at a special price. In addition to reduced pricing, the County has negotiated an additional \$100 instant rebate to be applied at point of sale. Currently, this means that United Counties residents can purchase the equipment for \$199. This represents a \$200 savings as compared to Xplornet's standard equipment price of \$399. (One-time installation fees and system access fees apply). This limited-time offer expires on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

Additional details concerning both of these offers are available from Authorized Xplornet Dealers or Xplornet Customer Care.

### **TO SUBSCRIBE OR OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION**

**15) How can I subscribe for service? How do I locate an Xplornet dealer in my area?**

To be referred to a local dealer so that you may subscribe for service, click on the Sign Up Now! link at [www.xplornet.com](http://www.xplornet.com) or call Xplornet Customer Care at 1-866-841-6001. Alternatively, The Xplornet Web site has a Dealer Locator that will provide you with a map and driving directions from your address to a dealer in your area. See also the listing attached of Authorized Xplornet Dealers who serve the United Counties.

**16) How can I obtain more information about the project?**

Periodic project updates will be available on both the United Counties and Xplornet Web sites. Click on the Leeds and Grenville link under the Community Partnership Updates section on the home page of [www.xplornet.com](http://www.xplornet.com). For more information on the United Counties participation in the project please click on the News and Events link at [www.uclg.ca](http://www.uclg.ca). You may also contact an Authorized Xplornet Dealer, or alternatively call Xplornet Customer Care at 1-866-841-6001.

**17) How can I obtain more information about the Province's Rural Connections (Rural Broadband Partnership) Program?**

For more information regarding the Rural Connections program please see the section beginning with Question 18 immediately below or visit:

- for program guidelines:  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/ruralconnections/guidelines.htm>
- for maps:  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/ruralconnections/mapeast.htm>
- for FAQ's:  
<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/ruralconnections/faq.htm>

### **CITIZEN CONCERNS, PROJECT FUNDING & OMAFRA PROGRAM DETAILS**

**18) How will the project be funded?**

Under the Provincial program, OMAFRA will contribute \$259,000 and the United Counties will match this contribution in-kind. Xplornet will invest approximately \$11 million in the United Counties during the first five years of the project.

**19) What are OMAFRA's Rural Connections program requirements for the project?**

The main requirements are:

- a) matching contributions from OMAFRA and the United Counties as mentioned above. Xplornet's contribution must meet or exceed the \$259,000 contributed by both OMAFRA and the County.
- b) the network must provide residents with access to a service package with a minimum download speed of 1.5 Mbps (high-speed)
- c) open access to the network (other service providers may have access to the network under certain terms and conditions)
- d) the network must be scalable
- e) public (Provincial and County) funds can only be used to provide coverage to identified broadband gap areas (not to provide an additional coverage option in areas already served by other Internet service providers or technology solutions).

**20) How was the broadband gap area determined?**

The Eastern Ontario Broadband Coalition (EOBC) working with the Eastern Ontario Warden's Caucus developed a coverage map for Eastern Ontario by surveying the local Internet Service Providers and documenting where their coverage was available. The Province requires that the public funds contributed to the project must be invested only where less than 75% of the area is within coverage as determined by the EOBC.

**21) Why is high-speed Internet access so important? Why are the Province and the County investing in improving coverage? Why are some of my tax dollars being used to subsidize this initiative?**

Today, all levels of government increasingly consider high-speed Internet access to be a virtual necessity – as important to a community's economic and social well-being as roads or electricity. In the absence of high-speed Internet access, economic development within the County and the provision of services to residents is seriously impaired. As the private and public sector increasingly move to more self-service, lower-cost solutions, and utilize quick response communication vehicles which provide easier and more transparent access to information, both the Internet and technology in general have become the cornerstone for such initiatives.

Examples of such developments within the past few years include:

- 1) eGovernment – access to government services from Web portals on the internet. It is increasingly difficult for businesses to bid on government contracts without access to high-speed internet.
- 2) eAgriculture – use of the Internet for research, collaboration, education, marketing, business development and crop and livestock management
- 3) eBusiness – to better service their customers everything from advertising to product fulfillment is being done by companies online. Consumers increasingly obtain information and then subsequently purchase goods and services via eCommerce enabled methods.
- 4) eLearning – delivery of training and course material online to students
- 5) Communications – the majority of communications to both organizations (businesses, non-profit and government) and individual users is now being

provided over the internet - for example via e-mail and through Web sites. Offices are now connected together through virtual private networks or wide-area networks enabling employees to telecommute. Virtual meetings, Internet-based telephone service, and file and information sharing through the use of Web portals is now commonplace.

- 6) Social Networking – interacting with others and sharing information through Web portals, video sharing, and sending pictures electronically to family and friends. Internet-based dating and social interaction Web sites such as Facebook or MySpace are becoming increasingly popular.
- 7) Entertainment – use of the internet to purchase and download multi-media material such as music, radio broadcasts, TV shows, movies, etc. on a permanent or temporary basis. The Internet also allows users to play games with others online for fun and entertainment.