

EAGLE-Net offers interstate for data and information

Written by Chris Lee

The company looking to build an infrastructure of fiber optics into Holyoke as well as across the entire state of Colorado says it acts very similar to an interstate for information, or data.

“We’re a middle mile network,” said Gretchen Dirks, vice president of public relations and communications for EAGLE-Net. “What makes us different in that case is we are the interstate. We are the highway system. We’re the I-70 or I-76.” She said they aren’t the many off-roads. They are the highway system that pumps a lot of traffic through in a hurry on a very consistent basis.

“Instead of being a three- or four-lane highway system, we can be 10,000 plus lanes wide,” she added. “We can pump a lot of traffic through very quickly.”

Dirks said they rely upon the local providers, like PC Telcom, to be what is called the last mile, or off-ramps into the communities. “That’s where we partner up with the local providers,” she said.

As an intergovernmental entity, they can’t under state law, offer services to the residences or businesses—purely governmental entities.

Dirks said they were on the road from late January through May doing a government road show as part of their communications effort. They were in Holyoke Tuesday, Aug. 7 for the City Council meeting and sat down with the Enterprise prior to the meeting.

EAGLE-Net Alliance formed as an offshoot of the Centennial Board of Cooperative Educational Services (CBOCES) in 2008, and became an independent entity in early 2011. As an intergovernmental entity, EAGLE-Net operates a cost-sharing cooperative to provide access to a secure, high-speed broadband network.

EAGLE-Net is governed by a board of directors comprised of members statewide representing educational, state and local government entities.

EAGLE-Net was awarded a \$100.6 million Broadband Technology Opportunities Program

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(BTOP) infrastructure grant in September 2010, the only one in the country, from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to build a sustainable statewide middle mile network by Aug. 21, 2013.

According to Dale Briggs, executive vice president of operations, the grant was put together to take the model that was developed at Centennial BOCES statewide.

“The model is really an interconnection model between entities that work together,” Briggs said.

While internet is a portion of the model, it is really set up to say, “let’s allow these entities to interact together.”

Briggs and Dirks said the difference with EAGLE-Net is they are focused on the network and not on providing the services through the network.

“We refer to it as an intrastate network,” Briggs said. It’s a network that allows for entities to connect with one another without the use of the internet, regardless of the corner of the state they are in.

Dirks used the example of internet within a corporation is like the network they are putting together.

She also used the term peering ring. “If you think of a hub on a wheel, it’s really that hub,” Dirks said. “If it was to get compromised or a line to get cut or something happen, it can recirculate and redirect the information around the opposite directions.”

Briggs said EAGLE-Net can partner with other providers because not everything can be redundant or resilient. He used the example of Moffat County where one company (Century Link) is single threaded into the area. “Not that it’s bad,” he noted. But if something happens, it isolates those customers not only with internet but phone service and everything. Briggs said by

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EAGLE-Net coming up the west side from Rifle, they can offer the vendor an alternate path in the event something does happen.

EAGLE-Net, however, does have a limit. The grant is a middle mile infrastructure grant. They have definite limitations of where they can start and stop.

“It is all choice,” Chip White, vice president of business development said. “It’s not a mandate, it’s not a requirement, it’s not forced upon anybody.”

Briggs added EAGLE-Net by any stretch of the imagination is not demanding access into any of the towns. He noted so far, all towns have been receptive to EAGLE-Net. In many instances they have been able to work with the towns to utilize some of their governmental existing infrastructure and in some cases help them lace a few things together.

The choice is from an intranet standpoint. There may be things the government, schools and even some of the providers may want access to that the giant highway can take them to, say in Denver, Durango or Grand Junction.

“We just facilitate the inbound and outbound traffic patterns to get them to and from,” White said.

“We’re not a telecommunications network in the sense of the term,” Briggs said. “We’re really an Ethernet network, or a data network.”

He said a provider can come to them and ask for a connectivity from Point A to Point B. “I basically build a wire for them that points from one point to another and they use it for whatever they want,” Briggs said. “They operate it, they manage it, they maintain it. I’m just giving them a pipe. They’re passing whatever water they want down that pipe.”

EAGLE-Net will connect 234 community anchor institutions through the grant:

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—178 K-12 school districts.

—26 libraries.

—15 community colleges.

—12 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services.

—3 higher education institutions.

EAGLE-Net is working to connect the dots and bring in the missing links to improve the service state wide. They are leveling costs across the state to use the grant money the best they can to build the best infrastructure possible.

The BTOP infrastructure grant provides capital funding to deploy the network, but does not cover costs to manage and maintain the network. Eligible grant expenditures can include new construction, fiber purchases, equipment purchases and long-term capital leases of infrastructure (dark fiber, conduit, towers, etc.).

EAGLE-Net is utilizing a design-build construction process that facilitates multiple activities to be managed simultaneously across the state. This allows EAGLE-Net to accommodate and modify construction schedules based on weather, terrain, environmental conditions and other factors.

After the grant period, EAGLE-Net will be sustainable by generating revenue through services provided to members of the cost-sharing cooperative.

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In the event of problems or issues with the infrastructure in the area, EAGLE-Net will use a regional representative out of Sterling to carry out all locates and repairs.

“The future that EAGLE-Net really holds for the state of Colorado is huge,” Dirks said. She said it opens up the availability and capacity of bandwidth to equalize things a little bit.

Dirks said as a youngster growing up in Holyoke, she would’ve liked to be given the option to have a strong video conferencing connection with a teacher elsewhere to learn Swedish prior to becoming an exchange student. This network would make that possible.

Other uses that would prove beneficial include data storage, accounting systems or time tracking systems for smaller counties. It is also offering a different pathway for redundancy, meaning it is offering a different way out. “That doesn’t mean what’s there isn’t substantial or significant enough, it just says there is another way in and out,” Dirks said.

“We’re an enabler of a great resource. But we’re not the provider of the resource,” White said. “We just say, ‘A to B, go.’”

“We bring a different value to the table,” Dirks said. “It’s an additional value that a community can choose to use and choose to use in a way that makes sense for their governmental entities.”

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