

**ST. MARY'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF THE**  
**COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**  
Dr. Rebecca B. Bridgett, County Administrator



**Commissioners of St. Mary's County**

James Randy Guy, President  
Eric Colvin, Commissioner  
Michael L. Hewitt, Commissioner  
Todd B. Morgan, Commissioner  
John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

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**DEPARTMENTAL PLAN OF ACTION**

**Issue:** Broadband Plan of Action III

**Date of Report:** January 7, 2021

**Department:** Information Technology

**Director:** Robert Kelly

**SUMMARY:**

Our work for the 2020-2021 school year and the of COVID-19 community response have accelerated the multi-year Broadband efforts which allowed the cable plant buildout of wired internet service for public school students in underserved areas within St. Mary's County.

St. Mary's County has invested in the expansion of existing commercial Cable Providers networks to allow service to be extended to areas which may not be economically feasible for the vendors to perform alone. The infusion of government grant funding has expanded the Middle Mile service to several identified underserved areas in our community. The success of the collaboration efforts of federal, state, local Internet Service providers, and St. Mary's County Public Schools has resulted in excess of 280 public school student addresses access to wired broadband services in less than 5 months.

Significant investment has already been provided for public school students this school year with 500+ hotspots purchased, and connectivity established for student addresses within 1,600' of the existing cable plant through the Broadband for Unserved Students (BUS) grant. While plant extensions do have distance limitations staff believes we can extend the existing BUS Grant project to distances as current funding allows (approximately 30 more connections at 1,800') with the remaining funding (recently extended) in the BUS Grant.

Not addressed in the previous BUS Grant is the Non-Public School population in St. Mary's County. Estimates of 50-85 non-public school addresses would benefit from a BUS Grant similar project in the county which would leave a very small percentage (3-4%) of all school age students without wired broadband access in St. Mary's County.

While the above addition addresses the student locations to be able to provide uninterrupted student instruction as much as possible a similar rollout could be performed for teacher addresses and the remaining unserved addresses in St. Mary's County.

Additionally, when recently purchased hotspots are no longer required for SMPCS students, they can be repurposed to the St. Mary's County Libraries for distribution to address the short-term connectivity needs of addresses until wired services are installed.

If approved, preliminary work necessary to implement can begin right away which will allow early adoption if\when additional Federal Broadband funding becomes available.

**PROJECT PLAN OF ACTION:**

According to Federal Broadband Availability maps, St. Mary's County has greater than 90% broadband coverage within the county. County estimates indicate 94-95% broadband coverage. Expanding upon the original BUS Grant methodology staff will identify the following categories to determine the cost to provide broadband service as follows:

Students which have do not have access to wired broadband services – issue hotspots through the county library distribution system. Repurpose unused SMCPS hotspots to the libraries for issue to county students. Funding for monthly service would be required.

1. Students which have access to wired broadband (Serviceable) but, do not have service.
2. Confirm plant extension needs for students which are not currently Serviceable.
3. Students which are beyond existing Grant maximum distances.
4. Repeat the above process for teacher addresses.

Using the county's Geographical Information System (GIS) and student data provided by the schools, staff will compare the students which have been identified as not having broadband available with ComCast's and Atlantic Broadband's current service area.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

It is likely that to connect as many students as possible a combination of Middle Mile, Last Mile, and wireless solutions will be necessary. Middle and Last Mile efforts require more initial capital to construct but, allow ongoing connectivity costs funded by the government to be eliminated. Wireless solutions present several challenges including security, ongoing cost, and bandwidth capacity which while necessary at some locations could be reduced if the analysis is completed. Additionally, these areas could be addressed in future Middle\Last Mile construction efforts. Staff recommends utilizing a data driven response to address the connectivity needs for our community which incorporates all available options to provide as much Broadband Internet connectivity as possible.

**SIGNED:**

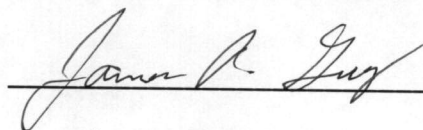
(Director/Department Head)

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County Administrator Use

CA/Director Meeting Held: \_\_\_\_\_

Plan Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Plan Not Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Plan Approved w/ Amendments \_\_\_\_\_

Follow -Up Requested: YES or NO TYPE: \_\_\_\_\_



James R. Guy