

[Listen Live](#) ▶[On Air Schedule](#)[Live Video](#)[Mobile](#)[Volunteer](#)[PLEDGE NOW](#)**Business**[Big Sponsors May Find It Hard To Break Up With The NFL](#)**The Salt**[Scientists Step Up Food Fraud Efforts Following Horse Meat Scandal](#)**Health**[Grieving But Grateful, Ebola Survivors In Liberia Give Back](#)**New England News****6:24 PM** MON JULY 14, 2014

# Mass. Broadband Institute Sees Collaboration As Key To Connectivity

By [JIM LEVULIS](#) (/PEOPLE/JIM-LEVULIS)Listen  
3:38

Representatives from the [Massachusetts Broadband Institute](#) (<http://broadband.masstech.org/>) were in Pittsfield Monday morning to update area leaders on the expansion of fiber-optic internet to the westernmost reaches of the Commonwealth.

The so-called Middle Mile of the [MassBroadband123](#)



([http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wamc/files/201407/mbi-conference\\_o.jpg](http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wamc/files/201407/mbi-conference_o.jpg))

Mass. State Sen. Ben Downing, right, speaking at the Massachusetts Broadband Institute conference at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Pittsfield Monday. Seated from left to right, MBI Deputy Dir. Ben Dobbs, Axia VP of sales & services Phil Roberts

(<http://www.massbroadband123.com/>)

and Berkshire Health Systems CIO Bill Young.  
*Credit Jim Levulis / WAMC*

initiative went live in January, bringing fiber-optic broadband to anchor institutions like schools, police stations and town halls in more than 120 communities. The 1,200-mile network is run on an open access basis by Axia. That means Axia provides bandwidth, which service providers purchase to then offer internet and other web services to customers like private businesses. So far 12 service providers have signed on, most having a specific expertise like education or public safety.

Phil Roberts is vice president of sales and services for Axia. He says the choice of internet providers has been limited in western Massachusetts because companies that produce their own content through other services like television, such as Time Warner, need a large population density to set up.

“When you get into the smaller areas the cost for them to invest is very high because they can’t just invest in one community, they have to invest in the whole infrastructure,” Roberts said. “What we do is we say well we’ve invested in the infrastructure. The infrastructure is there now let that content be the main driver of competition not the network. You don’t have to rent from Verizon, who is also competing with you in the network or in the market. So they can bundle, we unbundle it all is a way of looking at it.”

The question from community planners and representatives at the conference is when fiber-optic internet will reach beyond the anchor institutions to homes and businesses. Jim Lovejoy is a selectmen from [Mt. Washington](http://townofmtwashington.com/). (<http://townofmtwashington.com/>)

“We have people that line up in the parking lot in Mt. Washington with their devices so they can take advantage of the hot spot,” Lovejoy said. “But this isn’t really a satisfactory solution.”

The Mass Broadband Institute’s answer to that question is the Last Mile. [A nearly \\$1 billion information technology bond bill](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/188/House/H3770) (<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/188/House/H3770>) currently in a legislative conference committee contains \$50 million for the project. If the money is secured, it would take roughly three years to complete. In the meantime, small rural towns like Tyngham have already set up their own wireless internet

connections using towers, while others communities are using their own resources to develop plans for connectivity. There's a debate over what the best solution is because wireless service is not as reliable or powerful as wired service.

"To have an effective long-term regional solution we're going to need collaborate effectively," said Ben Dobbs, MBI's Deputy Director. "We're going to need to coordinate and communicate constantly to make sure that we are on the same page, we're not duplicating efforts and that we're ultimately together [and] building a sustainable solution that reaches the entirety of the region that is forward looking and sustainable."

As for the funding, [State Senator Ben Downing](http://www.senatordowning.com/) (<http://www.senatordowning.com/>) of Pittsfield says the biggest concern is having only a couple weeks to get the bill to [Governor Deval Patrick](http://www.mass.gov/governor/) (<http://www.mass.gov/governor/>)'s desk before the legislative session ends July 31. Beyond that, the Democrat says he will work to make sure the next governor doesn't halt progress after Patrick leaves office in January. Downing says the candidates have big shoes to fill in terms of Patrick's commitment to the project.

"They've all got a few more weeks, a few more months to get out here and make that case," Downing said. "I know that they are all saying the right things. Most importantly they are all out here listening to voters and I think the more they do that the more they'll realize just how important this project is."

Since 2008, roughly \$95 million in state and federal funding has been put into the Mass Broadband initiative.



(<http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wamc/files/201407/mbi-conferenccrowd.jpg>)

Community and business leaders questioned when fiber-optic internet would be available to homes and businesses.

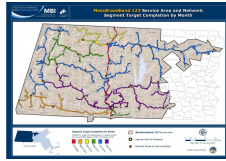
*Credit Jim Levulis / WAMC*

The event was organized by MBI, Sen. Downing's office and the [Berkshire Chamber of Commerce](http://www.berkshirechamber.com/) (<http://www.berkshirechamber.com/>).

**TAGS:** [massbroadband 123 \(/term/massbroadband-123\)](/term/massbroadband-123) [Massachusetts Broadband Institute \(/term/massachusetts-broadband-institute\)](/term/massachusetts-broadband-institute) [fiber optic internet \(/term/fiber-optic-internet\)](/term/fiber-optic-internet) [broadband internet \(/term/broadband-internet\)](/term/broadband-internet)

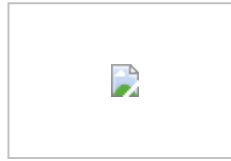
## Related Content:

[ding](#)



### New England News

[Complete Broadband Access a Ways Off in Berkshires](#)



### New England News

[Officials Celebrate Launch of Massachusetts](#)

Comments for this thread are now closed.



0 Comments

WAMC

 Login ▾

Sort by Best ▾

Share  Favorite ★

Be the first to comment.

 Subscribe

 Add Disqus to your site