

County To Consider Fiber Optics

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The speed limit on county highways could go from three to 100. Megabytes per second, that is.

The county is considering a state program that would expand fiber optic Internet service to all 13 of the county's schools, and the service could be available to residents and businesses along the route, officials said.

Current service in schools allows speeds around three to four mbps, but with fiber optics, that would jump to 100 mbps.

The county has until Feb. 7 to join the program, which would cost about \$100,000 each year.

County officials from both the County Commission and Board of Education will hear a presentation from AT&T representatives on the issue at 6 p.m. Jan. 24 at the county courthouse in Ashland City.

The County Commission would have to take action at its Jan. 28 meeting, although the money would come out of next year's budget. They meet at 7 p.m. at the county courthouse in Ashland City.

Classrooms in Cheatham County, which all have Internet, would stand to benefit, Board of Education technology director Priscilla Enters said. The county subscribes to an educational streaming video service. Now, teachers have to download videos and burn them to discs.

One class streaming a video can slow down the entire network, she said.

"It's really an excellent deal for this county," Enters said. "We're a small district, and we don't have \$100,000 laying around in the technology budget to spend on that."

County Mayor Bill Orange likened the project to providing sewer, a deal-breaker for businesses looking for a new site.

"There are businesses that will not come here without this," he said. "This is a crucial time."

The county could plan the routes according to the county's growth needs, said Joint Economic and Community Development Board Director James Fenton. The could mean the fiber optic lines would follow Highways 12, 49 and 70, and Interstate 24 Exit 31 could be covered too.

That exit, less than 20 miles from downtown Nashville, has been targeted by the county for development. The commission approved in December \$800,000 to bring sewer there and development officials have met with residents to create design standards.

Allen Kemp, vice president of information technology for R.E. West, said fiber optics would open up new possibilities for the logistics company.

Located in Ashland City's industrial park on Highway 12, the company could utilize voiceover IT assistance and host its Web server there, he said.

"That set of pipe out there would give us more robustness in that connection to that server," Kemp said. "Something like this makes it a lot easier, having an affordable fiber option."

Currently, the schools' broadband is provided by ENA at no cost to the county, officials said. Director of Schools Lynn Seifert said regardless of the commission's decision, they would likely change to AT&T without upgrading service at no additional cost.

Aside from the county's portion, funding would come from the state through the E-Rate program, a federal program that provides telecommunications funds to schools. The money is distributed based on a school district's free and reduced lunch rate.