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Project could bring high-speed Internet to rural areas

BARSTOW — First District Supervisor Robert Lovinggood was eager to hear the plans of a possible high-speed Internet line that would run from Barstow to the Nevada state line.

Lovinggood and 3rd District Supervisor James Ramos were on hand Tuesday morning as the California Emerging Technology Fund and Inland Empire Regional Broadband Consortium held a round table discussion with local stakeholders at the Harvey House.

According to Consortium Executive Director Martha van Rooijen, the discussion was the first effort to introduce the local community to a "valuable resource" that provides high-speed Internet to rural communities.

Digital 395, currently in operation, is a \$109 million project that spans 583 miles and consists of 432 fiber optic network strands. The project was paid for by federal stimulus funds and state public utilities funding.

"This is the treasure of the area," CEO of Praxis Associates Michael Ort said.

Praxis Associates constructed Digital 395. Ort introduced a future project that would provide fiber optic Internet connectivity along the Interstate 15 corridor.

Ort said the East Mojave Broadband Project would connect to Digital 395 to provide high-speed Internet connection to small communities, including Yermo, Daggett, Newberry Springs and Baker.

"We hope to get something like that going because it would make a big difference for the communities who are in need of high-speed Internet," Ort said. "The idea is to bring in pipelines into these areas, so it can be distributed into homes. It's just like bringing water out to the community, except that it's the Internet. These are very expensive projects to do but they are going to last over 100 years."

Ort said the next steps in the process are to finalize a scope of the project, build project support, promote the network for economic development and leverage assets for sustainability before submitting an application.

Lovinggood said he is on board with the idea.

"Not having connectivity is a common problem when you're in the smaller communities," Lovinggood said. "The fact that they would be building the backbone of the area and allow people connectivity would really bring everyone in the county up to the 21st century. A lot of good things can come from this because it would not impact just households, but this would impact education and public safety."

The consortium was established through California Public Utilities Commission funds to provide collaborative broadband planning for San Bernardino County, van Rooijen said. The overall goal is to make the San Bernardino County a "smart region" by improving broadband speed, reliability and throughout the county, she said.



First District Supervisor Robert Lovinggood speaks during a round table discussion at the Harvey House Tuesday morning held by the California Emerging Technology Fund and Inland Empire Regional Broadband Consortium. Jose Quintero, Desert Dispatch