

# **NEK Broadband**

High-Speed Internet for Northeastern Vermont

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## **NEK Broadband Begins Fiber-Optic Network Construction in Concord**

By the end of 2021, more than 300 homes and other locations in Concord and Lunenburg will be able to sign up for high-speed fiber-optic internet service from NEK Broadband. 45 towns have joined this municipal Communication Union District (CUD), established in 2020. Construction begins this week.

“We are ready to start fulfilling our mission to bring truly high-speed broadband to the parts of the Northeast Kingdom that have been left behind by the private communications industry,” said Evan Carlson, chair of NEK Broadband. “It is a big moment for our organization as well as the economic development of our region.”

Residents can check specific availability and pre-register now with no obligation to subscribe at <https://get.nekbroadband.org>. The current project covers some road segments on the western side of Concord, but the longest continuous section is on the eastern side (as shown in the attached map) along the Concord-Lunenburg border. Extensions in west Concord and into east Waterford will be built in spring 2022 funded by a USDA Rural Business Development Grant.

Within its member towns, NEK Broadband will bring fiber broadband to addresses with electric utility service and without a comparable high-speed option. Construction around the region is already being planned for 2022 and the entire project is currently scheduled to be completed over the course of five years. There are countless variables beyond local control, such as materials and construction crew availability, but the organization is doing everything it can to meet that time frame.

Residents in member towns can go to <https://get.nekbroadband.org> to pre-register for better broadband. While pre-registering, citizens can help improve the accuracy of federal and state data about internet service currently available at their locations by filling out a brief survey. More accurate information will then be used to further refine design and construction plans. As NEK Broadband develops future construction schedules throughout the region, they will provide ongoing updates.

The Concord-Lunenburg Pilot Project is funded with federal 2020 coronavirus emergency relief funds, also known as the CARES Act, awarded by the Vermont Department of Public Service. Grant funds must be utilized and the network construction completed by December 31, 2021.

The \$460,000 grant was designed to serve 104 hard-to-reach addresses. The project size was more than doubled thanks to a recent cooperative agreement with Lamoille FiberNet, a neighboring CUD, one of nine in the state.

Given the strict time constraints, Lamoille FiberNet was not able to use its allocation of CARES Act funds by the end of 2021. Through a sub-grant to NEK Broadband of \$399,000, 242 additional locations in Concord and Lunenburg will be reached by the new network.

“While the project does not serve Lamoille FiberNet residents, we are pleased to help our neighboring CUD bring 100/100 Mbps access to hundreds more locations,” said Lamoille FiberNet Executive Director Val Davis. “Any progress that can be made toward ensuring more Vermonters have access to high speed internet benefits all Vermonters.”

Building any new fiber-optic network requires extensive planning, funding and contract negotiations. November 3rd marked the kick-off meeting for construction along with the arrival of final materials and fiber-optic cable in Vermont.

“We are extremely excited to start building,” NEK Broadband Executive Director Christa Shute said. “Our partners and vendors have done incredible work at an accelerated pace over the last few months to meet our end-of-year deadline.”

Those partners include construction manager NRTC (National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative), Green Mountain Power, VELCO (Vermont Electric Power Company), Waitsfield and Champlain Valley Telecom, Kotecki ROW, Mission Broadband and a local construction contractor.

Looking toward 2022, NEK Broadband will soon apply for over five million dollars of grant funds from the Vermont Community Broadband Board to help complete detailed design and construction plans for the next phases.

“This pilot project is just the beginning,” said Christa Shute. “We are committed to bringing fiber-optic internet throughout our member communities.”





