

Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband (ESRB) Committee Receives ConnectME Broadband Planning Grant

We all have realized the need for the Internet during our recent Covid experience. We also learned the importance of access to a reliable connection to serve all ages and all needs in our community, including remote learning, telehealth services, working from home, video chats with family and friends, news, and emergency alert systems.

The coalition of seven Maine towns known as the Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband (ESRB) committee has been awarded a \$72,000 planning grant for developing options to bring fast and affordable broadband internet service to the Western Maine towns of Brownfield, Denmark, Fryeburg, Lovell, Stoneham, Stow, and Sweden.

In Jan '22 the towns committed to a joint planning process. The ConnectME grant will help cover a substantial part of the costs of determining the best options for improving/providing broadband services for the region's residents, businesses, and public facilities.

The committee will be seeking proposals from qualified consultants in early 2022 to help with survey work, network design, business models, and funding options including state, local, and federal grants. At the conclusion of the planning effort, the committee expects to provide options to the towns in the region for expanding or building the broadband internet connections for current and future broadband needs of ESRB towns.

The committee is excited to start this work. The first step, going on now, is gathering information from residents through an online survey and speed test that measures the range of service levels currently available in ESRB towns. Service levels vary from areas that are unserved, to underserved areas using DSL connections, to some who have satellite service, to those who have access to cable.

ESRB is encouraging participation in the Maine West Broadband Town Survey. All ESRB town residents can help. If you have already taken your town's survey, thank you! If not, please do so as soon as possible! Responses will provide an understanding of the future needs for broadband Internet service in the ESRB towns.

Residents of the ESRB towns should visit their town website or esrbroadband.org to frequently take the speed test.

Eastern Slopes Regional Broadband (ESRB) is a coalition serving the towns of MSAD#72, which includes Brownfield, Denmark, Fryeburg, Lovell, Stoneham, Stow, and Sweden in Maine, and Chatham, NH. The group was formed following an initial investigation into the challenges of upgrading broadband services by the town of Denmark. Research showed that providers would have better ability to offer efficient proposals for building infrastructure and providing services for a larger population and geographic area. The school district, with its existing connections and affinities between the municipalities, offers an easily defined territory that offers both proximity and common interests. ESRB has a committee made up of volunteers and municipal leaders from all of the member towns. Subcommittee work in communications, grant writing, community engagement, and other tasks is moving forward with representation from each town.

Take the speed test: esrbroadband.org. Please email info@esrbroadband.org for more information.