

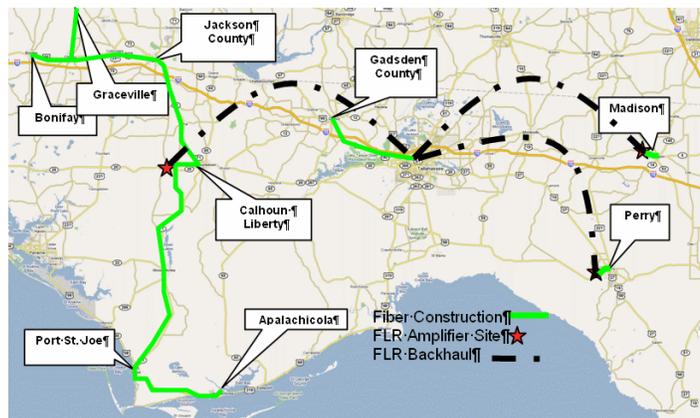
## FCC Rural Health Care Pilot to Provide Broadband Telecommunications to Hospitals in the Florida Panhandle

In November 2007 the Federal Communication Commission awarded \$9.6 million to the Big Bend Regional Healthcare Information Organization, in partnership with the Agency for Health Care Administration, to build a gigabit fiber network to nine rural hospitals and surrounding clinics in the Florida Panhandle. The funding was provided as part of a nationwide program to connect rural hospitals to a broadband telecommunication backbone. The program provides funding for up to 85% of the cost of deploying a dedicated broadband network connecting health care providers in rural and urban areas within a state or region. It also provides funding for up to 85% of an applicant's costs of connecting the state or regional networks to the Internet2 or LambdaRail, the dedicated nationwide telecommunication backbones.

Big Bend RHIO will construct gigabit fiber facilities from Florida LambdaRail interface points, to a constructed point of presence in each of the eight counties, and then run broadband last mile connections to the nine rural hospitals in the project. Once the network connections are complete, the hospitals will be online with the Big Bend RHIO, which will provide secure messaging services and facilitate the transmission of large imaging files such as x-rays, MRIs, CAT scans from fixed or mobile imaging units and other digital files between the rural and urban specialty providers in their network.

This initial connection will be followed by building out a wireless broadband system to connect physicians and clinics in the local communities. Each provider connected to the broadband network will receive health information exchange services from the Big Bend RHIO. Implementing the broadband wireless network will expand the number of telehealth services available to rural physicians, and should result in better quality of care for their rural patients. Once the network is complete, additional commercial services can be added to generate revenue and to subsidize the rate for the rural hospitals.

**FCC Rural Broadband Pilot Project**  
Connecting Nine Rural Hospitals in the Florida Panhandle



Project assets include Big Bend RHIO services and applications that can immediately leverage the broadband network; capital resources that will be utilized to benefit the communities and all their stakeholders, not a traditional telecommunications carrier; the Florida LambdaRail and ElectroNet have the experience in building dedicated networks to fill the gaps in existing telecommunication infrastructure; and the project will be needs driven rather than profit driven. A key objective of the project is to establish a self-sustaining operational model that balances the

benefits and costs of the network on all participants including urban providers, rural providers and the private sector. The network will be sustained by the revenues generated by user fees for services which will be established by the Big Bend RHIO.

The hospitals taking part in the pilot project include:

- Calhoun County – Calhoun-Liberty Hospital, Blountstown
- Franklin – County George Weems Memorial Hospital, Apalachicola
- Gadsden – County Gadsden Community Hospital, Quincy
- Gulf County – Sacred Heart Hospital, Port St Joe
- Holmes County – Doctor’s Memorial Hospital, Bonifay
- Jackson County – Campbellton-Graceville Hospital, Graceville
- Jackson County – Jackson Hospital, Marianna
- Madison County – Madison County Memorial Hospital, Madison
- Taylor County – Doctor’s Memorial, Perry

While the FCC will pay for 85% of the cost of construction, the remaining 15% must be raised from other sources. There are several ways that private sector business can help out.

For-profit businesses that donate time, dollars, equipment or products to the Big Bend RHIO can get tax credits. The Big Bend RHIO can apply to become a certified participant in the Enterprise Zone Community Contribution Tax Credit program. The EDC administers the Leon Enterprise Zone and can assist with such an application. Most of the counties where infrastructure will be improved have Enterprise Zones, so this program will assist with recouping some of the administrative costs of the grant. Any business in Florida can take a tax credit of up to 50% of the value of donations up to \$200,000 to an approved community development project. Credit can be taken against the FL Corporate Income Tax, Insurance Premium Tax or the Sales and Use Tax.

Vendors who buy poles, cable/fiber and other supplies to install new poles or retrofit existing infrastructure can apply for a one time Enterprise Zone Building Materials Sales Tax Refund. This will give them a refund of 6% state sales tax up to \$10,000 and a refund on building materials purchased for new construction or renovation.

The Rural Infrastructure Fund offers three types of grants, which are determined by the degree to which expenses are minimized and the application meets the criteria of the program:

- **Total Project Participation Grants.** Grants for up to 30 percent of the total infrastructure project costs related to specific job-creating opportunities may be awarded to applicants who have applied for the maximum available under other state or federal infrastructure funding programs.
- **Feasibility Grants.** To facilitate the location or expansion of specific job-creating opportunities, grants may be awarded for infrastructure feasibility studies, design and engineering, or other planning and preparation activities.
- **Preclearance Review Grants.** To facilitate the access of rural communities to the resources available under the Expedited Permitting – Preclearance Review Process grants may be awarded for surveys, feasibility studies and other activities related to the identification and preclearance review of potential land use modifications.

