

Florida's FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Project

Broadband Access for Rural Healthcare Providers in Florida's Panhandle

In November 2007 the Federal Communication Commission awarded \$9.6 million to Big Bend Health (a Florida RHIO) to build a rural health care network in the Florida Panhandle, consisting of a gigabit fiber optical network connecting nine rural hospitals and a broadband wireless network connecting not-for-profit clinics in rural counties of the Panhandle. This contract will allow the Big Bend Health to connect nine rural hospitals to the Tallahassee Private Medical Area Network (pMAN).

Project objectives address connectivity, health care services and sustainability by:

1. Building a dedicated optical fiber broadband network to connect health care facilities between Madison and Bonifay counties with hospitals in Tallahassee and Pensacola.
2. Building a broadband wireless network to connect not-for-profit clinics in these counties with an encrypted wireless system that provides high speed broadband communications.
3. Enabling rural hospitals and clinics the opportunity to be part of Big Bend Health's regional health information exchange.
4. Creating high speed connectivity to specialists via Florida LambdaRail connectivity.
5. Developing sustainability plan for providers in rural counties and underserved areas.

The FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Project provides 85% of the funding required for the costs of constructing the health care network in the Florida Panhandle. The remaining 15% comes from matching contributions. Big Bend Health is a certified participant in the *Community Contribution Tax Credit Program*. For-profit businesses can donate time, dollars, equipment or products for tax credits. Big Bend Health is also a certified participant in the *Enterprise Zone Community Contribution Tax Credit Program*.

Big Bend Health will construct gigabit fiber facilities from Florida LambdaRail interface points to a constructed Point of Presence (POP) in eight counties, and then run broadband connections to nine rural hospitals and one VA clinic in the project. The project will then connect the rural hospitals to urban hospitals in Tallahassee and Pensacola. If there is enough funding, fiber may be run into Gadsden and Jefferson Counties to connect the Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare Family clinics in Quincy and Monticello.

The rural hospitals and clinics to be connected are:

- Calhoun-Liberty Hospital, Blountstown, Calhoun County
- George Weems Memorial Hospital, Apalachicola, Franklin County
- Sacred Heart Hospital, Port St Joe, Gulf County
- Doctor's Memorial Hospital, Bonifay, Holmes County
- Campbellton-Graceville Hospital, Graceville, Jackson County

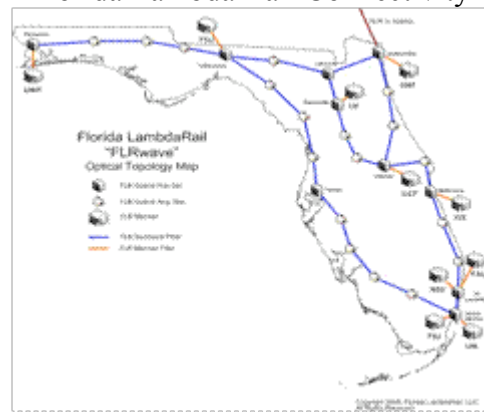
- Jackson Hospital, Marianna, Jackson County
- Marianna Veterans Clinic, Jackson County
- Madison County Memorial Hospital, Madison, Madison County
- Doctor's Memorial, Perry, Taylor County
- Northwest Florida Community Hospital Emergency Department, Washington County

The urban hospital connections include:

- Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, Tallahassee, Leon County
- Sacred Heart Hospital, Pensacola, Escambia County
- Baptist Hospital, Pensacola, Escambia County

Project Description: The FCC Rural Health Care Pilot Project will utilize an existing optical fiber network controlled by Florida LambdaRail as the broadband backbone to connect healthcare facilities to Big Bend Health. The Florida Lambda Rail runs throughout Florida, parallel with Interstate 10 and State Route 20 in North Florida, with capacity for up to 32 separate networks running at ten gigabits per second. Florida LambdaRail was created to facilitate research, education, and economic development in the state, utilizing next generation network technology and protocols. Construction of the Panhandle fiber network will be bid out. Optical fiber will be strung along utility pole routes from LambdaRail amplifier sites along Interstate 10 and State Route 20 to a point of presence in each local community close to the hospital. Ideally the point of presence will be located on city or county property. The project will seek waiver from utility pole fees for the pilot period to reduce the cost of providing connections.

Florida Lambda Rail Connectivity



Proposed Optical Fiber Network



Contact Dr. Christopher Sullivan at sullivac@ahca.myflorida.com for more information.