

EORN wants to improve Internet

By Sarah Sobanski

The Eastern Ontario Regional Network has announced it wants provincial and federal governments to support a \$200 million project to bring Internet access to the region.

The project would cover 99 per cent of homes in the region. It would provide mobile access to 72,000 homes and businesses and the region's highways.

The announcement comes after the CRTC ruled mobile broadband and high-speed Internet services an essential service. Some companies, like [satellite internet now](#), already offer high-speed Internet services, but this upgrade could improve web access for more people.

"With this announcement and the funds that will be made available we think the time is right to act quickly on our project to improve cellular networks particularly in the rural areas of Eastern Ontario," said Renfrew County Reeve and Chair of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus Peter Emon.

According to EORN, a sixth of areas in rural Eastern Ontario are in cellular dead zones.

"When we made our submissions to the commission last April, EORN urged them help ensure that rural people and rural businesses get the same type of access to high-speed Internet services that our urban neighbours enjoy," said Reeve of Highlands East and Chair of the Eastern Ontario Regional Network Dave Burton. "We asked that the commission also develop an ongoing fund to help organizations like ours to continue to work with the telecommunications industry and that is exactly what they have done."

He added, "We need to build new towers, improve existing ones as well as add coverage and capacity and we are confident given our experience on the first EORN project that we can create another success partnership with private sector companies in our region."

The hunt for funding comes after the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Navdeep Bains announced a \$500 million program to bring broadband Internet access to 300 rural communities across Canada. Called Connect to Innovate, the program plans to invest the money by 2021.

Connect to Innovate will help address the digital divide by primarily supporting new high-capacity "backbone" networks, according to press release. It stated the new infrastructure will give rural and remote areas access to the digital economy and that it is the modern equivalent of building roads or railway spurs.

"I've heard time and again from constituents in Hastings-Lennox and Addington about the importance of better broadband Internet infrastructure," said Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Mike Bossio. "I'm proud that our government is making Canada's largest ever contribution to improving connectivity for rural communities. This will greatly enhance our ability to compete in an increasingly digital and globalized community, right here from Hastings-Lennox and Addington. To stay competitive globally, we need a goal of increasing speeds to at least ten times today's standard of five megabits per second."

Additional backbone capacity could be used to provide users with access to speeds well above five megabits per second.

Communities using new backbone infrastructure will see a transformative change in the speeds and services they can access.

"Our government is committed to ensuring that all Canadians, businesses and institutions have access to the opportunities and tools they need to grow and succeed in Canada and abroad," said Bains. "By increasing access to high-speed Internet, the Connect to Innovate program enhances our rural and remote communities' ability to innovate, participate in the digital economy and create jobs for middle-class families. This investment will improve the daily lives of Canadians."

Locations within Hastings County are eligible for the project including select areas in Hastings Highlands, Wollaston and Tudor and Cashel. The deadline for applications to the project is March 13. A map of eligible areas can be found [here](#).