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## **BI-COUNTY INTERNET PROVIDER PANEL EVENT A SUCCESS**

**IOSCO, MICH.** — Community Leaders from Alcona and Iosco Counties participated in a Broadband Provider Panel presentation on Thursday, September 29, 2022. Coordinated by the office of Sen. Gary Peters and Connected Michigan, the event brought together communities seeking to increase internet access to residents and the providers who are interested in expanding services. “Access to affordable, high-speed internet is critical to ensuring that our communities can be successful in a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy and world,” said Senator Peters, a member of the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee. “My office was pleased to help put on this event to connect local leaders and residents with providers to both expand and improve the quality of internet services available to families in Northeast Michigan.”

Internet Service Providers (ISP) panel presenters included Marilyn Passmore from Charter Communications; Tom Sobeck and Ruthanne Largent of PIE&G Connect; Rich Castle of Consumers Energy; and Matthew Sams of Mercury Broadband. The panel was facilitated by Tom Stephenson, Northern Michigan coordinator for Connected Michigan.

Nearly two dozen community leaders, business owners and residents attended the meeting at the Warrior Pavilion in Oscoda. Questions for panelists included the timeframe of implementation for previously awarded Rural Development Opportunity Funds (RDOF) to expand internet and wireless access. Sams shared that Mercury Broadband has been providing services in Michigan since 2019. Their tentative timeline is to build out the internet infrastructure by the end of 2023 and begin offering services by the end of 2024. Sams also said that Mercury is leveraging its extensive capital investments to build out the network for the areas it was awarded in the RDOF grant.

Passmore from Charter Communications stated that their service offers a 300 MPS starting point. Charter is also involved with the FCC program to offer free literacy programs to consumers as well as internet subsidies for income-based families. Castle from Consumers Energy stated that while Consumers has no plans to enter the internet service provider business, they are collaborating with other ISPs such as Presque Isle Connect to share access to poles.

Chris Scharrer, CEO of DCS Technology Design LLC and project consultant for Iosco County’s Broadband Advisory Committee, reminded attendees that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for communities to access state and federal funding to expand internet access. He also stated that wireless technologies are subject to 3-to-5-year generational changes, similar to cellular technology.

Sobeck from PIE&G Connect stated that their cost to build out internet services is approximately \$25,000 per mile as compared to other companies who may spend up to \$70,000 per mile. Sobeck reminded the group that PIE&G is a nonprofit organization and is invested in bringing internet access to rural communities including farms.

The outcome of the panel presentation was to build relationships between counties and potential vendors. Gloria Brooks, President of Develop Iosco, said “Our Broadband Advisory Committee was well represented at the event. We believe that the information and connections from this meeting will allow us to submit a competitive proposal for funding and ultimately bring improved quality internet services to our residents”.



For more information about Develop Iosco, visit [www.develop-iosco.org](http://www.develop-iosco.org)

*DI is a 501-c-3 nonprofit volunteer organization serving as a convener and facilitator for economic development activities within Iosco County related to business development, community connectivity access and housing. As an economic development organization, DI promotes Iosco County as a place for business growth to improve the quality of life for current and new residents.*

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