

Several towns may tap into fiber line to run along I-88 Batavia

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As Fiber For Our Future hopes to bring high-speed Internet access to the home and business community, several Illinois municipalities may tap into the tollway's technology for the benefit of public schools, park districts, libraries and city halls.

The Illinois Municipal Broadband Community Association, a nonprofit broadband organization, plans to construct a fiber optics network along 80 miles of I-88 from Rock Falls to Naperville. The association plans to approve the network at its Oct. 20 meeting.

Although the concept has been on the books for a while, Northern Illinois University's more recent desire for a high-speed connection to Fermilab has pushed the plan ahead, said Randy Wielgos, association president and **Batavia** city senior project engineer.

"Northern Illinois University has a need and a desire to interconnect with Fermilab for educational research," Wielgos said at Monday's **Batavia** Public Utilities meeting.

According to Wielgos, university officials have offered to share the cost to build a fiber optics extension from Fabyan down to I-88.

Batavia aldermen on Public Utilities gave unanimous preliminary approval to a pair of resolutions that work hand-in-hand. First, officials agreed to an intergovernmental agreement between **Batavia** and Northern Illinois University.

Committee members also endorsed a 20-year lease between the city of **Batavia** and the association for the fiber. The committee will pass the recommendations onto the Oct. 18 **Batavia** City Council meeting.

The cost of the fiber lease is dependent upon the number of participants. Rock Falls and Rochelle have already signed on to the agreement, and **Batavia** could be the third community, Weilgos said. Geneva and St. Charles are expected to follow. Kane County and Naperville also may participate.

With Naperville's participation, it would provide connectivity between Fermilab and Argonne National Laboratory, both Department of Energy facilities as well as Northern Illinois University and North Central College.

City governments may exchange information and resources for economic development and emergency management services. Furthermore, it will assist the municipalities with online power supply monitoring and purchasing for the future, Wielgos said. In the future, **Batavia** officials also could decide to lease the fiber out to commercial businesses.

With NIU in tow, the schools will have access to the Illinois Century Network for distance learning and video conferencing.

Batavia's share of leasing the fiber will range between \$20,000 and \$31,000 for a one-time fee and \$1,150 and \$3,200 annually, Weilgos said.

To construct poles and tap into the fiber that's buried underground, which belongs to the Illinois Toll Highway Authority, the cost is estimated at \$175,000 - a price Northern Illinois University is willing to split.

The life of fiber lasts 50 or more years, **Batavia** Public Works Director Gary Larsen said, and requires little maintenance.