



Extending fiber optic cable to meet demand for broadband a balancing act

By Amy Linzey

CEO/General Manager

Consumer demand for internet bandwidth is rising exponentially every year. Our industry is undergoing technological change. Only fiber optic cable will meet growing consumer demand for broadband internet.

We are accelerating fiber deployment in the Cooperative network per our Five Year Plan. This plan, updated annually, was initially required by the FCC. Updates are filed with the FCC annually to track our progress in fiber deployment.

The Plan gives essential direction, making fiber deployment by the Construction Team more efficient.

Prior to February, 2012, WTRT's service network—1,700 miles of copper facilities covering a 2,300 square mile area in Parmer, Deaf Smith, portions of Oldham, Bailey and Castro Counties—had not been upgraded in many years. Along with 1,400 similar companies across the nation, WTRT was founded in the 1950s to provide voice communications to rural Texas. Note—the FCC did not mandate fiber-to-the-premise. While FTTP is a long term goal, we are currently targeting a minimum of 10

mbps down/1 mbps up to reach as many customers as soon as possible. Customers residing close to the fiber route may receive FTTP, but it is not promised at this time.

Our Construction Team is currently working in the Oklahoma Lane exchange and has completed a 14.2-mile installation that will give customers along this route at least 10 mbps down/1 mbps up. We anticipate many customers will receive much more, depending on the distance from their residence to a node or Central Office. The Construction Team will focus on other areas of Oklahoma Lane prior to moving to another exchange.

Additionally, we have hired a contractor to install fiber to the Hereford Airport and several other businesses operating at the airport and have extended the installation along Hwy 60 to a business customer, Gayland Ward Seed. Residential customers in this area south of the Dawn Central Office will be served with Fiber. Fiber installation to the businesses along Hwy 60 should have been done when WTRT was taking fiber to the businesses across Hwy 60. Competitors have installed fiber along Hwy 60, so it became necessary to install fiber to these busi-

nesses or risk losing them. We are looking at other areas at risk to competitors.

Understandably, customers demand residential fiber service, but we simply can't move our Construction Team off 5YP projects to satisfy the demands of individuals. The 5YP guides us in efficiently deploying fiber for the betterment of WTRT and the entire customer base. We must balance our funds and fiber deployment, without financial harm to the Cooperative.

During 2012 and 2013, we installed electronics in Central Offices and Nodes that allowed turning up the bandwidth or internet "speed" over existing copper depending on the customer's distance from these facilities. The customer should be able to receive 15 to 20 mbps down/1 mbps up if they are close to these facilities. This bandwidth diminishes at 18,000 feet from these facilities, where customers may receive 2 mbps down. We were able to turn up bandwidth for approximately 35 percent of the Cooperative customers.

We recognize installing fiber takes time. Building WTRT 60+ years ago was time consuming as well. We're moving

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BROADBAND

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MAINTAINING SPEED

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BALANCING ACT
WITH FIBER

Two-Way radios offer great advantages over cellular telephones

Digital two-way radios are a stellar communications offering of WT Services radio shops in Hereford and Amarillo. Customers can go to wtstx.com to browse merchandise and services offered. Digital two-ways provide an exceptional choice and have advantages over cellular phones, particularly in remote areas and in business settings.

Hereford and Amarillo radio shops sell, install, and repair Motorola radio communications equipment, and design radio systems and repeaters. Contact the WT Services Radio Shop in Hereford at 364-7311 or in Amarillo at 372-6765.

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forward, balancing the financials of the Cooperative. Fiber Installation can cost on average \$15 - \$30 a foot — \$1.2 million for 8 miles. — Will the customer pay to aid construction? Not likely. At an average revenue per user of \$75 (or even \$100), we'll all be in the afterlife before the payback is achieved. A new FCC Order changes Universal Service Funding we receive. By opting into this new plan, we could gain \$1.9 million in funding each year over a 10-year period. We are studying the Order's requirements to determine whether these terms will benefit our Cooperative. If we elect the terms and conditions of the new plan, we hope to augment our Construction Team with contractors, and increase our deployment rate.

The FCC has targeted census blocks for deployment of fiber at 10 mbps down/1 up, and also almost 700 census blocks in our service area for 25 mbps down/3 up. There are benchmarks—and penalties for not reaching the benchmarks. We are working with our engineering consultant to revise our 5YP to meet these benchmarks.

Whenever we install fiber, we are able to remove old equipment, such as the Conklin's (copper carrier devices) that are at the end of their useful service life. With installation of fiber in Oklahoma Lane, we have removed 6 Conklin's. This should also help our customer experience.

Our Manager-I&R/Construc-

tion, Billy Seiver, has asked his I&R Team to go through the network in the Cooperative and make revisions or repair existing facilities to improve service to our customers. As a result, our customers should be having a better experience.

We have been growing WTRT's subsidiary, WT Services to increase our customer base and revenues.

By doing so, we reduce our reliance on Universal Service funding. These funds are

continuously under fire from regulators and legislators and have become an unstable revenue stream. It makes good business sense to build reliable revenue sources for now and the future.

We have installed new email servers, increased bandwidth along our transport fiber rings, removed old equipment from our transport network, installed a spam filter, installed a speed test that tests on our network, and ensured redundancy by partnering with

neighboring communications providers. We are striving to make our network better.

With the growing demand placed on the availability of fiber, other equipment, as well as contractors by the FCC's order, prices will jump. It is a simple matter of supply vs. demand. We are working to stay ahead of this jump by ordering supplies sooner than later. The additional \$1.9 million per year sounds like a lot, but in reality, it may not be enough.

Failing to maintain computers properly may lead to frustrating service problems

**By Amy Linzey
CEO/General Manager**

Computer problems are frustrating and raise questions about whether the issue "is on my end, or the provider's." Slow speed may result from customer miscues.

Our repairmen often see customer computers with multiple screens open at once. Available bandwidth to the modem checks out per customer records, so a simple issue such as too many screens open results in the slowdown.

Customer's computers are not WTRT or WTS equipment. We are not responsible for the performance of the customer's computer, only for the best effort bandwidth to the customer's modem. Our best effort is dependent on the technology used to

provide the service, and the customer's distance from our Central Office, Node or Electronics.

If customers don't maintain their computer properly, (i.e., defragging, using an anti-virus software, running scans frequently, avoiding leaving too many screens open, keeping software up-to-date; or, if they are using a lower end computer without needed memory or capacity for downloading or streaming videos, photos, large documents, gaming, etc.) we cannot be held responsible for their "slow internet speed".

As a customer, have you updated software or installed an anti-virus software and run scans? Not doing so can mean slow bandwidth or speed.

WTRT/WT Services has a computer support team that

will repair customer computers brought to our office at 3425 US Highway 385. Repair rates are reasonable. We are also considering hosting computer classes periodically.

In the past decade, I have had service from ATT (DSL), Time Warner (Cable TV and internet), and Suddenlink (Cable TV, internet, phone). Prior to moving into my current residence, I had a problem with my Suddenlink video/internet. When they couldn't repair the problem over the telephone, I was given the option of going to their nearest office (35 miles away) and picking up a new DVR and Modem or they would bring the new equipment in 10 days. These companies would never even look at my computer — their service was only to the modem.