

San Juan Development Association
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I am writing to support the effort to bring fiber optic service to the Silverton/ San Juan area, as part of the MNT project that was proposed by the state of Colorado in 2000.

The goal of this project was to help level the playing field across the state by providing a minimum floor of internet service which would allow rural Colorado counties to develop their economies, regardless of how isolated they were geographically.

The State of Colorado made compromises with Quest for the benefit of the company in return for a promise to directly link every County in the State with a fiber optic connection. Qwest benefited from this agreement as did all of the Counties in Colorado except for San Juan County. Concerns by citizens from San Juan County were publicly expressed that such an outcome would come to fruition throughout the implementation process at public meetings held by State officials and Quest representatives. Representatives from Quest and state officials during the MNT implementation period continued to assert that such concerns were unfounded and that every county would receive a fiber optic connection. Considering the time that has passed, it now appears that these promises were empty and that an alternate solution was chosen for San Juan County.

It appears that the "solution" proposed by Qwest for Silverton and San Juan county is to offer "just enough" bandwidth to provide, what are in Qwest's opinion, our current needs. While the concept of "just-in-time" may be a good idea for controlling inventory in manufacturing processes, it is not a good idea for long-term economic planning and development.

Infrastructure needs to be placed well in advance of when it is needed so planning can occur. One could look, for example, at the infrastructure of the interstate highway system where construction began in the 1950s with the goal of providing multi-lane divided highways throughout the country, not just in areas of high population density.

The same is true of fiber-optic infrastructure. According to the International Economic Development Council, a community will not feel the full impact of infrastructure installation for 6 – 10 years. To argue, as Qwest does, that there is enough bandwidth available to meet our current needs, totally misses the point – as stated in the original proposal -- to provide a minimal amount which would provide a more level playing field for future economic development.

James Carlini of the Wisconsin Technology Network makes the following points in a 2006 article. Broadband is defined as 1 gigabit and beyond. And that is the amount that should be the goal for delivery to the doorstep for systems not yet built. There is an increased use of bandwidth by gamers and all consumers. "Put the bandwidth out there and people will use it." "The old real estate adage of 'location, location, location' has to be updated to 'location, location, connectivity'."

How can we quantify the loss that our community has already incurred from not having fiber optic service delivered as promised several years ago? It's difficult to measure how many businesses have passed over Silverton due to our limited bandwidth. One can look, however, to places like Utah, Two Rivers, WI; Jacksonville, FL; Butler County, OH and Cortez, CO to see that when investment is made in fiber optic infrastructure, economic development does increase dramatically.

Sincerely,

Greg Swanson
President