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Office of the Governor - Press Office

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OWENS ANNOUNCES \$37 MILLION STATE CONTRACT FOR U S WEST TO BUILD HIGH-SPEED COMPUTER NETWORK LINKING ALL OF COLORADO

DENVER – Governor Bill Owens announced today at a news conference that the State of Colorado has awarded U S WEST a \$37 million, ten-year contract to build a digital voice, video and data network that will provide high-speed links to state offices and schools in all 64 counties across Colorado.

"This new statewide network will help Colorado bridge the digital divide between rural and urban communities," said Gov. Owens. "It will be a key tool in helping to foster economic development and accelerate Colorado's high-tech growth."

The Multi-Use Network (MNT) is the fiber-optic backbone connecting all state government offices and educational institutions across the state. Through this public/private partnership, many rural communities will have access, for the first time, to advanced, high-speed broadband services for a variety of multi-use applications including distance learning, tele-medicine, electronic commerce, Internet access, and tele-working or commuting.

Colorado residents will be able to use the MNT backbone network to access applications that might include a parent being able to check online their child's homework assignments or a patient conferring with their doctor via the Internet.

The business-base in rural Colorado has not been developed to the point where it can support high-speed, broadband digital services. The MNT will help to close this gap between rural and urban Colorado. U S WEST, Cisco Systems and independent telco partners CenturyTel, Phillips County Telephone Company, and Eastern Slope Telephone Company will invest more than \$60 million to build out the state-wide network. The MNT will consolidate existing, but disparate, networks into one seamless backbone network to provide an array of advanced telecommunications services.

"We are committed along with our partners to helping Governor Owens realize his vision of making Colorado a thriving technology capital – not just of the West, but of the world," said Sue Parks, vice president and general manager of U S WEST's Large Business and Government Solutions group.

"Cisco believes the MNT will place Colorado at the forefront of states in providing Internet access that will change the way Coloradans work, live, play, and learn," said Dave O'Callaghan, director of operations for Cisco Systems.

Last year, the Governor signed into law legislation (Beanpole bill) that provides approximately \$4.8 million dollars for the aggregation of rural telecommunications purchases by state and local governments and non-profit organizations to encourage private sector providers to extend modern telecommunications services to under-served areas of Colorado. The MNT serves as the backbone to this legislation.

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