



**Submission for Town Annual Reports
Fiscal Year 2015: July 1, 2014 – June 30, 2015**

The following information represents a chronological timeline of the efforts undertaken by WiredWest between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015:

JULY 2014 - On Tuesday July 29, 2014, the state passed an IT bond bill with support funding for the Last-Mile build out. With the funding match from the state bond bill, towns have a unique opportunity to build a fiber network.

Securing local financial participation will not be an easy task. Close cooperation between WiredWest, MBI, elected officials and our citizens will be absolutely essential. Many town Select Boards wrote letters to the acting director of MBI urging that his organization work through WiredWest on behalf of their towns. We are ready to move forward and eager to work with all the parties to bring long-awaited high-speed broadband and its benefits to WiredWest member towns.

SEPTEMBER 2014 - In several meetings between WiredWest and MBI, we collectively agreed to convene in working groups on a regular schedule to accelerate planning and deployment. Of special mention was a meeting at the State House hosted by [Senator Stan Rosenberg](#) and the Western Massachusetts Legislative Delegation to discuss cooperative planning efforts on a last-mile solution. The meeting culminated in the Legislative Delegation issuing a [joint statement](#) announcing the collaboration on last-mile efforts between [WiredWest](#), the [MBI](#), and the [Franklin Regional Council of Governments](#).

DECEMBER 2014 - Organizational meetings were held over the fall and winter. By December 31, 2014, towns were requested by MBI to sign statements of interest to be included in the build of a last-mile regional fiber network designed and built by MBI in partnership with WiredWest.

FEBRUARY 2015 - Thirty-two of WiredWest's member towns moved ahead to create a regional fiber broadband network to deliver high-speed Internet, digital phone, TV and other services to homes and businesses. The network, estimated to cost \$79 million, will be constructed by MBI, which will contribute about 40% of the funding for the network and oversee its construction. WiredWest will own and operate it on behalf of the towns, which are being asked to contribute the majority of the necessary funds. Working through the cooperative structure of WiredWest, they will have oversight on how the network is built and control of its operations going forward.

Financial planning for the network has been extensive and thorough. WiredWest has worked with consultants to build and vet its financial plan. Additionally, nationally recognized experts consulting for the MBI have contributed to the financial modeling. Results indicate that the network cannot only sustain itself, but in time may generate enough revenues to pay back the town contributions in part or whole.

MARCH 2015 - WiredWest launched a major campaign this month to secure town commitments for the project. To qualify as a "Fiber Town" on the network, 40% of a town's households must sign-up for service and make a small refundable deposit. This is to assure that the network will be viable in that town. Subsequently, a town meeting authorization for the town's share of the financing must be approved by a 2/3 vote. The MBI's timeline calls for the construction process to begin in towns that qualify as soon as the summer of 2015.

MAY 2015 - The first nine town meetings voting on a warrant article to authorize town borrowing to support a regional broadband network were approved overwhelmingly. In one town, the vote was unanimous.

Cummington met on Friday night (5/1/15), followed by Plainfield and then Shutesbury on Saturday (5/2/15), and West Stockbridge, Blandford and Windsor on Monday (5/3/15). Egremont and Colrain followed on Tuesday (5/4/15) and Washington on Wednesday (5/5/15). Turnout by broadband supporters was so great that the crowds couldn't fit in the regular meeting rooms. In Cummington, people spilled into the hallway. In Shutesbury, voters packed the gym and overflow areas, even into the preschool playground. In Plainfield, the meeting had to recess and move to the church across the street. Voters approved warrant articles authorizing borrowing for a broadband network at Town Meetings in Egremont, Colrain, and Washington, followed by Monterey and Becket on May 8 and 9 – also passing with high margins – and Rowe, on Monday May 11, with unanimous approval.

On Saturday, May 16, the towns of Sandisfield and Leyden became the 13th and 14th consecutive communities to vote and pass their bond authorizations. New Ashford became the 15th town on May 21st, and Charlemont the 16th town on May 26th, bringing total funds authorized for fiber-optic broadband in unserved towns to \$26 million.

At this point, the project has enough critical mass to move forward with the planning work required (i.e., engineering, utility pole permitting). That work will be done in partnership with MBI. WiredWest continues meeting weekly with them on these and other critical network planning issues. Ultimately, the overwhelming votes so far are a resounding affirmation that the citizens, businesses and institutions of Western Mass towns are ready, willing and eager to move forward with the WiredWest regional fiber network.

JUNE 2015 - The Town of Goshen became the 20th town to authorize their funding with a record turnout of 240 voters on June 29. In fact, the meeting had to move from Town Hall to the nearby Congregational Church in order to accommodate everyone, which is the second meeting of a WiredWest town on the bond authorization that has had to do so.

According to WiredWest Delegate, Bob Labrie, *“Our family has lived in Goshen for almost 30 years. Over that time during town meetings, we’ve debated the costs of a fire truck, an ambulance, several highway trucks and police cruisers, capping our dump, building a new elementary school, an addition to the high school and now the construction of a regional broadband network. Never in the history of Goshen have we had to change the venue of the meeting because so many people turned out.”* All 240 voters were unanimous in their support. In Labrie’s words, *“In the end, history was made. Never before had the town been so galvanized on a topic like this. Never before had there been a unanimous vote in favor of a project of this magnitude. Some might call it divine intervention. I just think of it as the right thing to do for the future of our region.”*

The following evening, the towns of Chesterfield and Heath also passed their bond authorizations. By the end of June 2015, 22 towns authorized \$34.5M for fiber. Over 6,700 deposits have been received on service. As the town votes progressed, WiredWest continued work with MBI on pre-construction planning, including procurement of professional services, detailed network design and make ready work. Individual towns began investigating financing options for their individual debt authorizations with assistance from WiredWest.