



White River Connect News Release

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NEWS UPDATE

HISTORY OF WHITE RIVER VALLEY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S FIBER PROJECT

In 2021, based on member demand and economic vitality of the service territory, White River Valley Electric Cooperative (WRVEC) conducted a feasibility study to determine the need for rural internet. The robust study evaluated topics such as area terrain, population density, technology choices, and funding.

The Cooperative also conducted a survey of the WRVEC membership that produced nearly 8,000 respondents with 91% interested in WRVEC providing internet services to their areas. Up to 39% of members in some counties did not have any internet service available at all. Only 13% reported having reliable internet of speeds over 25 Mbps upload and 3Mbps download.

After many months of research and reviewing the feasibility study, the WRVEC Board cast an unanimous vote to extend fiber internet service through a subsidiary business—White River Technologies. Longtime WRVEC employee, Beau Jackson was named the CEO of the subsidiary.

The subsidiary company was branded White River Connect in early 2023.

WHITE RIVER CONNECT TIMELINE

White River Connect is currently in the design phase of the five-year build out. Contractors are currently assessing WRVEC's existing infrastructure. The field collection phase and design phase is underway. Then, the project areas will move into make-ready. During the make-ready phase, pole changeouts and other infrastructure needs are addressed to prepare for fiber construction. Construction of the White River Connect network is expected to begin by third quarter of 2023. High speed internet services are anticipated to be offered to customers in early 2024.

“This will be the largest investment that our co-op has made since its doors were opened in 1939. If we don't do this, no one will,” said White River Connect CEO, Beau Jackson.

PROJECT FUNDING

WRVEC applied for seven grants through the Broadband Infrastructure Grant Program of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The Cooperative received funding for all seven applications. The total awarded for WRVEC's broadband project was \$47.3 million. WRVEC was the largest recipient of the ARPA grants in the state of Missouri.

"White River Valley Electric Cooperative did a great job of laying out the *why* of why this funding was necessary to local communities," said Missouri Department of Economic Development's Director of Broadband Development BJ Tanksley. "There are 400,000 unserved and underserved locations in the State of Missouri. These grants were a down payment for changing broadband access for these Missourians."

Local community support will also assist in making sure high-speed internet becomes more available for our area. Realizing the economic impact on their communities - Ozark, Stone, and Taney Counties collectively committed \$9.3 million of county ARPA allocations to serve as a local match to secure the larger grants. The newly named fiber subsidiary is pursuing other grant funding options as well.

155th District House Representative Travis Smith, who represents a large portion of the co-op's service area said, "Internet used to be a luxury but now it is something we all must have. Our area's largest export for years has been people. We need to do what it takes to educate them and then keep them here and working."

For more information about White River Valley Electric Cooperative's fiber-to-the-home project, White River Connect, visit <https://www.whiteriverconnect.com>.

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[White River Valley Electric Cooperative](#) is a [Touchstone Energy Cooperative](#) dedicated to ensuring our members receive safe and reliable service in their homes and businesses across five southwest Missouri counties including Ozark, Taney, Stone, Christian and Douglas.