Oconee Focus broadband project

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THE JOURNAL

SENECA — The $14.3 million Oconee Focus broadband project is becoming more visible.

Pockets of workers could be seen Monday at different locations along the side of busy roads and highways.

Jet Commercial, a subcontractor on the project, had crews out with trucks and rolls of plastic conduit.

The first phase of the project calls for some 95 miles of fiber optic wire to be pulled through the conduit by the end of February. Oconee plans to establish a 270-mile broadband network in three phases.

County Administrator Scott Moulder said Monday that plans call for bidding out the second phase before the first phase is completed.

Oconee is paying Network Controls & Electric of Greer, a leading supplier of cabling and electrical infrastructure, $2.7 million to complete the first phase. The company hired Seneca-based Jet Commercial as a sub-contractor.

One of the challenges in getting the conduit and fiber in the ground is the meticulous work of making sure that other infrastructure already in the ground — such as water and sewer lines and other communications cable — is not disturbed.

Jet Commercial crews were working over the weekend, as well.

Moulder said he's confident the project already is having a positive economic impact in the county.

"I feel comfortable this is generating additional jobs now and is a job-generating project long term," Moulder said.

The ripple effect from the additional work force working on the Oconee Focus project also should

picks up speed

benefit local businesses such as gasoline stations and restaurants, Moulder added.

The project is made possible by a $9.6 million federal grant awarded Oconee in August 2010.

Matching funds required from the county would increase the total cost of the project to more than $14 million.

Once the Oconee Focus network is in place, more than 140 community anchor institutions, including schools, libraries, the local hospital, public safety agencies and emergency shelter facilities would be linked and have high-speed broadband capacity.

Internet service providers also would have the opportunity to lease space on Oconee's network trunk, which could help get broadband service to areas not being served.

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