# Rural Western Massachusetts Pioneers Municipal Broadband to Bridge Internet Gaps



In the early 2010s, Leverett, a small town in Western Massachusetts with about 2,000 residents, faced inadequate internet service. Tom Ewing, a resident, recalls unreliable and expensive satellite internet, pushing voters in 2012 to approve a $3.6 million investment in building a town-owned fiber optic network. This network, completed in 2015, provided high-speed internet outpacing that in many Boston homes for $72.40 a month.

This initiative was part of a broader trend in Western Massachusetts, where towns independently created municipal broadband networks to ensure high-speed internet, spurred by a lack of upgrades from larger providers. More than 10% of Massachusetts residents face significant obstacles to broadband access, primarily due to cost.

Westfield's Whip City Fiber, managed by the city's municipal utility company since its inception in 2015, exemplifies the success of municipal broadband. It services over 20 communities in Western Massachusetts without raising monthly rates, currently at $70.

Other towns like Colrain have also benefited economically from municipal broadband, facilitating smoother business operations, such as credit card processing at Pine Hill Orchards. Despite these successes, replicating the model in larger cities remains challenging due to higher costs, competition, and infrastructure control by established providers.

As municipal broadband networks in rural areas show viability, other regions in Massachusetts are exploring similar models. The Massachusetts Broadband Coalition, formed by about two dozen cities, considers shared, open-access networks. These efforts are seen as crucial for future-proofing communities against digital divides.