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*The Honorable Phyllis Kilby, Chair
Stephen R McHenry, Executive Director*

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Rural Maryland Broadband Coordination Board Holds Inaugural Meeting

Annapolis (August 15, 2006).....A major step in the development of a statewide broadband network serving rural areas of Maryland occurred on August 14, 2006 at the Offices of the Maryland Rural Council in Annapolis when the Maryland Rural Broadband Coordination Board held its inaugural meeting. The Board was established by legislation enacted during the 2006 Maryland General Assembly session (Senate Bill 753) and signed into law by Governor Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr. This legislation also established the Rural Broadband Assistance Fund under the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development. The purpose of the Board is to assist in the deployment of broadband communications infrastructure in rural and underserved areas of the State and approve expenditures from the special rural broadband fund. The RMC has been charged with providing staff support to the Rural Broadband Coordination Board.

The members and affiliations of the Rural Broadband Coordination Board are:

Virgil Shockley, Worcester County Commissioner & Board Chair
Tri-County Council for Lower Eastern Shore
Ellis Kitchen, State Chief of Information Technology
Maryland Department of Budget & Management
R. Earl Lewis, Assistant Secretary
Maryland Department of Transportation
James Rzepkowski, Assistant Secretary
Maryland Department of Business & Economic Development
Stephen R. McHenry, Executive Director
Rural Maryland Council
Ellen Flowers-Fields, Director of Regional Economic Development
Tri-County Council for Southern Maryland
Hope Harrington, Talbot County Councilwoman & 2nd Vice Chair
Mid-Shore Regional Council
William Pickrum, Kent County Commissioner & Chair
Upper Shore Regional Council

In addition to discussing various organizational issues during its first meeting, the Board elected Worcester County Commissioner Virgil Shockley to be its chairman during the coming year. The Board also heard a proposed build-out report from the Maryland Broadband Cooperative, a nonprofit telecommunications transport provider recently established to deploy fiber-optic cable in underserved areas of Maryland. The federal and State governments have each committed \$2 million to the initial fiber deployment effort in rural areas of Maryland, with additional funds to follow in subsequent years.

A celebration of this effort will occur on Friday, August 18, 2006, beginning with a ground-breaking ceremony for the connection of the Pocomoke Industrial Park with NASA Wallops Island Flight Facility which is slated to be the first leg of the broadband network. Federal, State and local dignitaries will participate in the ceremony. Additional planned projects include crossing the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, as well as fiber installation in both Southern Maryland and on the Upper Eastern Shore.

For more information, contact John Dillman, President of the Maryland Broadband Cooperative (410-810-1375), or Mike Pennington, Executive Director of the Tri-County for the Lower Eastern Shore (410-632-4700).

“A Collective Voice for Rural Maryland”