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PRESS RELEASE**



Media Contact:

Ron Townley
Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments
Planning and Development Services Director
rtownley@ucpcog.org
(252)-234-5965

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments and its Broadband Task Force
Receive EDA Funding for Five-County Broadband Study**

EDGECOMBE, HALIFAX, NASH, NORTHAMPTON, WILSON, NC,

The Upper Coastal Plain Council of Governments (UCPCOG) and its regional Broadband Task Force have received a \$72,000 grant from the US Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) to conduct a project with partners to better understand and address broadband challenges and opportunities for underserved communities in the Upper Coastal Plain five-county region.

UCPCOG Board of Directors Chairman and Broadband Task Force member Doug Hughes emphasized key issues that this broadband study seeks to address, “Broadband infrastructure is crucial to the overall economic health of a rural community in today’s technology-centered world and economy. Adequate connectivity is a critical component in attracting and retaining businesses and citizens. Without it, businesses, students, and residents of our region have less ability to work, play, and prosper in their hometowns.”

The study’s scope of work includes developing public surveys to better document regional broadband needs, testing broadband connectivity speeds throughout the region, identifying and mapping existing public broadband resources and assets, improving local government understanding of broadband infrastructure, and taking steps to attract new, affordable, and reliable high-speed broadband providers to the region.

With local member governments represented, UCPCOG’s Broadband Task Force has been meeting to share ideas, learn from industry experts, and identify opportunities to connect rural and underserved areas of the region to affordable high-speed broadband. The Task Force is open to all local governments in the UCPCOG region.

UCPCOG Executive Director Robert Hiatt stated, “The great news of this funding announcement from EDA is thanks to the hard work and dedication of our Broadband Task Force members. Their continued work on this project will expand broadband resources and attract quality services to the region. It will also ensure that the region is more resilient in the face of natural disasters and national emergencies. High-speed internet is a critical element for long-term recovery from past economic shocks and will be critical in recovering from the economic impacts of the emerging COVID-19 pandemic.” This project was funded through EDA Disaster Supplemental Funding aimed at helping regions recover from economic harm and distress resulting from natural disasters including Hurricanes Matthew and Florence.

Several economic impacts are expected as a result of this effort. By working to improve high speed connectivity throughout the region, more employers can utilize workforce training tools, more residents can work remotely including those who face transportation challenges, and more local businesses and farmers can connect to international markets. Additionally, with improved rural broadband connectivity, more residents can access telemedicine and more students can complete online homework assignments.

Halifax County Senior Management Analyst and UCPCOG Broadband Task Force member, Ian Bumgarner stated, "this EDA funding will allow the Broadband Task Force to further act on our ideas to address our collective broadband challenges. The presence of adequate, affordable, and reliable broadband in every corner of Halifax County and the entire Upper Coastal Plain region will strengthen our communities and better connect them with 21st century solutions."

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The UCPCOG, established in 1971 under NC General Statute 160A-47, is the regional council of governments for the local governments located within Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson Counties. UCPCOG is also the lead organization for the region's Economic Development District, established through the United States Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration. For more information about UCPCOG, visit ucpcog.org. For more information about the regional broadband study, please contact Ron Townley, rtownley@ucpcog.org or (252)-234-5965.

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