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This organization is an equal-opportunity provider.



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## Broadband: Much sooner? Or much later?



**THE BLUE RIDGE ELECTRIC** Cooperative organization and our partners at West Carolina Rural Telephone Cooperative are both encouraged by the progress our Upcountry Fiber initiative is making. At a number of area locations, crews are putting in full work

weeks, installing cable and connecting members and others to the Upcountry Fiber network. The fiber-to-the-home approach we're employing offers ample evidence of our commitment to supply the best broadband service to be found.

In an earlier report, I noted that comparisons were being made between high-speed internet today and the coming of electricity to rural communities more than 80 years ago. I expect most would agree that electric power represents an essential service. People feel the same way today about broadband and the various conveniences and services that technology has to offer.

With the considerable advocacy high-speed internet receives, you might wonder what could possibly stymie our vision of delivering broadband to all who might want it. In my view, there are two main hindrances working against us. One is "Big Cable." Thus far, these entities have worked to muddy the waters in regard to attempts by cooperatives to secure funding that would support extending broadband to the rural areas. Essentially, their efforts have succeeded in blocking our access to certain available funds. What's ironic about these actions is that "Big Cable" in the past has shown little or no inclination to provide high-speed internet to unserved rural areas.

The other roadblock is there hasn't been enough movement at either the state or national level toward underwriting some of the massive expense associated with broadband extension. This issue ought to be cut and dry for lawmakers

in Columbia and Washington. Estimates indicate that investment in broadband infrastructure creates a positive return for local, state and national economies.

By and large, that monetary return would not flow to Blue Ridge and West Carolina. Instead, it would be the rural communities that would benefit. The availability of high-speed internet would serve as a strong incentive for bringing job-creating commercial and industrial development to the countryside. Blessings from economic development will inevitably flow to families, schools, churches, charitable agencies, local governments and a host of other worthy recipients.

I firmly believe that's just the kind of stimulus this northwestern corner of South Carolina needs. The question before us now is how quickly will Upcountry Fiber be able to provide its services across this entire vast region? With the resources we have, we're doing our best to provide quality internet to as many locations as possible. However, how long some folks are going to have to wait for their service is strictly a function of finances. Our sincere hope is that broadband will be accessible to everyone much sooner—rather than much later. Our leaders on the state and national levels possess the means to make it happen.

Moreover, you can help in this effort. Your contacts with elected officials statewide, nationally and even locally could do more good than you might imagine. I encourage you to voice your support for broadband to these folks, and I'd also be grateful. To learn more about Upcountry Fiber services or to register your interest, visit [upcountryfiber.com](http://upcountryfiber.com).

**JIM LOVINGGOOD**  
 President and CEO

## Cross Roads substation comes on line

**IN LATE APRIL**, the energizing of Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative's new Cross Roads substation in eastern Pickens County was cause for celebration. This event marked the completion of a project that had been delayed for nearly two decades. Difficulties with securing a route for the transmission line that would feed the planned substation were the main cause of the delay.

With the transmission issues resolved last year, work on the substation could begin. Within a few months, the substation, with its 15-KVA transformer capacity and four main three-phase distribution circuits, was completed.

Meanwhile, crews from Central Electric Power Cooperative, wholesale-energy provider for Blue Ridge, constructed the 1.7-mile transmission line to supply the substation.

The need for the new substation was created by growth in the Cross Roads community. Through alterations to the cooperative's distribution power lines in the vicinity, groups of members served by four existing substations—Dacusville, Easley, Enon and Pickens—were shifted onto the Cross Roads system.

Cross Roads currently provides power to 1,533 co-op members. However, some scheduled improvements to a nearby distribution line will add another 100 or more members from the Pickens substation system.



DENISE MCCORMICK

Vice President of Engineering Mark Waters and Vice President of Operations Sam McMillan review the circuit design at the new Cross Roads substation in Pickens County.

Blue Ridge President and CEO Jim Lovinggood expressed his gratitude in seeing the project come to a satisfying conclusion.

“There are any number of positives that are related to this undertaking, and I’ll cite just a couple of them,” says Lovinggood. “For one, these members are now closer to their source of central-station power. That should translate into an enhanced level of service reliability for them. Secondly, the reconfiguring of the affected power lines has created some added back-feeding capabilities to this part of our Blue Ridge grid.

Under certain circumstances such as storm-related destruction, back-feeding will enable co-op crews to restore service sooner to members, while proceeding with making repairs to any damaged facilities.”

Lovinggood also says the cooperative and its employee team have an ongoing commitment to keep getting better at what they do.

“This Cross Roads project is but one tangible symbol related to our goal of providing ever-improving quality service,” Lovinggood says. “During the next several years, both Blue Ridge and Central Electric will be making further major investments in our power-delivery network. We’ll take on these new projects with a view toward raising members’ satisfaction to new heights.”

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- Demands for immediate payment by wire transfer, cryptocurrency, gift cards or cash reload cards should immediately raise red flags.
- If you think you've been contacted by a scammer falsely representing the co-op, please let us know as soon as possible.