

Broadband

Chippewa County,
Minnesota



Upper Minnesota Valley
**REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
COMMISSION**

Helping Communities Prosper

“Quality, affordable fiber optic connections like the ones proposed by Farmers Mutual Telephone are vital to economic growth and development in the area. We view this infrastructure as a significant opportunity to create jobs and attract and retain talent that would not otherwise locate in rural Minnesota without reliable broadband service.”

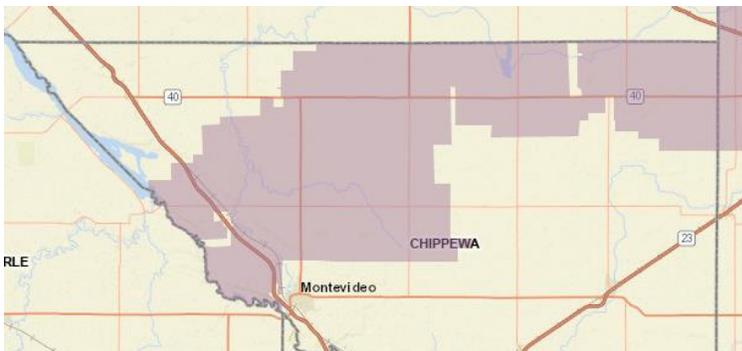
-Chippewa County Resident

In 2022, the UMVRDC partnered with Chippewa County and Farmers Mutual Telephone Company (FMTC) to prepare a MN Border to Border Broadband application. That application was funded by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) in December 2022. The total project cost was \$10,507,080 and the grant portion from DEED amounted to \$4,728,186. Local match for this project totals \$5,778,894 and was provided by the County, FMTC, and Rosewood and Louriston Townships.

This last mile project will provide fiber to the premise service to 636 unique locations across 10 townships in rural portions of north central Chippewa County in western Minnesota. 577 of these locations are unserved and 59 are underserved. The locations served include 15 community institutions like township halls, churches, or other public property; 10 rural businesses; 256 farms and 355 residential locations. It should be emphasized that a high number of locations are farms, rural residences, and rural businesses. This investment will provide 300

megabits per second symmetrical or 1G symmetrical service throughout the project area, exceeding Minnesota’s 2026 state speed goal.

The project area has little or no current access to consistent and reliable broadband. This lack of access prevents the locations in this grant area from participating in a digital economy, telehealth, e-learning, precision agriculture, integrating smart technologies into the homes and buildings, and participating in social, civic and recreational online activities. Broadband access will also help attract and retain residents and businesses in the county that support the local economy and tax base. Building a fiber-to-the-premise network that provides advanced, high-speed broadband services will position Chippewa County for the future.



This project has been a successful example of local entities working together to share costs, coming up with funds totaling over the 50% minimum local match amount.

FMTC - \$2,889,447 | Chippewa Co - \$2,814,447 | Rosewood Township - \$60,000 | Louriston Township - \$20,000





Foundational Work from Chippewa County

Chippewa County has identified broadband as an increasingly important issue for their residents for years. In 2016, the County worked with the UMVRDC and the Blandin Foundation to convene six community listening sessions with neighboring Yellow Medicine County. That effort recommended:

- Feasibility Study completion
- Determine County's involvement
- Continue to keep communication open with cities and neighboring counties
- Start conversations with providers
- Border to Border Grants

In 2017, they conducted a feasibility study with an engineering firm to assess the options and costs for deploying broadband to 1,046 locations in portions of the county without adequate access. The report estimated that a fiber network would cost \$9,429,095 and would not be financially feasible without external resources. That report made a number of recommendations similar to those from the prior years' work.

1. Find a partner
2. Be prepared to provide assistance to service providers
3. Educate and motivate the public
4. Be persistent
5. Consider the possibility of providing some county funding

In the years that followed, the County had a variety of discussions with providers and watched funding and policy discussions. In 2020, LTD Broadband proposed broadband improvements throughout Chippewa County as a recipient of a \$1.3 million dollar RDOF auction award. After continuing to hear from county residents unsatisfied with the broadband options or service, the County initiated a public awareness campaign to residents about the impact of the RDOF award and the increasing growth in interest from other broadband services in the county as well as options for residents to access COVID related internet subsidies.

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