

**For Immediate Release
May 17, 2011**

**Contact: Tom Susman
(304) 345-1161 (office)
(304) 552-2064 (cell)**

Economic Development Leaders Say Broadband Crucial to West Virginia's Future

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Economic development leaders across West Virginia overwhelmingly point to aggressive, affordable broadband Internet policies as extremely important to the state's economic future, according to a survey sponsored by Citynet.

In the online survey of economic development professionals working in communities across West Virginia, 77 percent said such policies are "very important." In addition, 78 percent believe modern, reasonably priced broadband Internet infrastructure is "extremely important" or "very important" in competing against other locations for jobs.

On a 10-point scale, they even rate broadband Internet infrastructure (8.56) as slightly more important than road improvements (8.26) and water infrastructure (8.26).

"Seventy-eight percent of the respondents say it's been their experience that businesses considering locating in their areas place high priority on access to affordable, high-speed Internet when evaluating site selections," Jim Martin, president and chief executive officer of Citynet, said. "And 66 percent say cost and capacity of broadband service are factors more than half of the time when discussing new business prospects."

Although it was not designed to be a quantitative statistical analysis because of the small number of specialists in the field – 28 of 57 participated –

the results nonetheless point to the emergence of broadband Internet access as a crucial factor in today's economic developing, according to Jack Canfield, president of Jack Canfield, LLC, of Charleston, who conducted the survey. The list of economic development officials surveyed was obtained from the official website of the West Virginia Department of Commerce.

"The consensus is clear from volunteered comments," Canfield said. "Twice as many leaders familiar with programs in other states believe the cost of large capacity broadband service in West Virginia is more expensive than it is in adjoining states."

About 41 percent of respondents say broadband service in their areas is "not very good."

"West Virginia's technology infrastructure deficit must be addressed by our state's policymakers," Martin said. "As a West Virginia resident, I am concerned about future job creation if we do not aggressively deal with the lack of affordable broadband infrastructure suitable for economic development."

Some participants in the survey said they actually had lost business prospects in part due to lack of broadband capacity, speed or cost. Most of the professionals said they were "very familiar" or "somewhat familiar" with broadband expansion programs, such as middle-mile infrastructure, being implemented in adjoining states.

Among the written comments submitted by respondents were:

- "I have a project pending [and] will probably lose it based on costs of broadband."
- "The lack of high speed service in the rural areas totally extinguishes the possibility of new small business start-ups."

- “Prospects don’t look here because of the lack of high speed, affordable, reliable broadband.... Current speeds of up to 3 mb while may be suitable for residential use are not suitable for business.”
- “Not only do too many areas still not have broadband, but too many places where people live do not have it and that affects the quality of life issue when attracting a prospect to live, work and play in WV.”
- “We were looking at a possible location of a data center and the lack of affordable, large capacity broadband was a deciding factor in them not locating in WV.”
- “We need the middle-mile and trunk-line services in West Virginia to remain competitive for many of today’s industries. What good is it if we get high-speed to every place in West Virginia, when we can only reach each other and do not have the facilities to get out of the state and into the major lines?”
- “[We] lost a company that looked at an existing building located in an area that doesn’t have high-speed access. They ended up locating in another area.”
- “You are not in the game without it.”
- “What are we waiting for?”

###

(Survey information: The online survey was conducted between April 26 and May 3, 2011. The questionnaire was e-mailed to 57 West Virginia professionals who have economic development responsibilities across the state. The list of those professionals was obtained from the official website of the West Virginia Department of Commerce. Twenty-eight of the 57 responded by the May 3 deadline, a response rate of 49 percent. The survey was conducted by Jack Canfield, LLC, of Charleston using SurveyMonkey online computer survey program. Respondents were not identified individually, and only the cumulative results were totaled. The entire survey can be viewed at: www.westvirginia.com.)