

MARIN GENERAL SERVICES AUTHORITY
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 5, 2009
TO: MGSA Board of Directors
FROM: Paul Berlant, Executive Officer
SUBJECT: AGENDA ITEM **D**: REPORT ON TASK 2 OF WIRELESS BROADBAND SYSTEM PROJECT

Recommendation: Receive the report from CBG Communications regarding the Task Two and make the determination that the Wireless Marin project has provided the background necessary for the Board to decide whether to move forward with task 3 or bring the wireless Marin effort to a close.

Background:

At the March 2008 MGSA Board meeting, CBG Communications was authorized to commence Task 2 of the "Wireless Broadband System Project." This task was to conduct a Pilot Project, in conjunction with the Golden Gate Bridge District to determine if broadband access would enhance ridership on Golden Gate's commuter lines and provide a model for internet access in more remote locations where cellular service is available, but where broadband is not. CBG provided three interim reports detailing the methodologies of the project and interim findings. CBG has now submitted its final report on the Pilot Project.

Discussion: The report findings indicate that, through use of a cellular based network and WiFi technology on the buses, Internet access was achieved from downtown San Francisco through Marin County to Downtown Santa Rosa along Highway 101. Internet speeds were sufficient to access network files, do web research, read email, conduct on-line commerce and read on-line news. The results also suggested that multiple user Internet access could be achieved at remote locations where cellular service is available, but where broadband is not ubiquitous. Two surveys were conducted to obtain demographics of users and their opinions of the service. Riders' overall satisfaction with the network is very favorable with approximately 75% of respondents indicating that Internet access aboard the buses is important or very important. The final report on the Pilot project provides a complete compilation of the Pilot Project findings and suggests consideration for similar future use of similar technology by such agencies as public safety and public works as well as at large scale events. The report also suggests that telecommunication policy makers, such as the MTA, take the lead in broadband development in the Marin County as part of a "network" of wireless and wire line networks.

Completion of the Pilot Project takes us to the end of Task 2. Tasks 3 and 4 contemplate development, dissemination and evaluation of an RFP process that leads to a full-scale implementation of the pilot concept. However, given the nature of broadband technology and the ever changing economic and business environment in which broadband exists, it may be more appropriate to let MGSA's sponsorship of the Wireless Broadband System Project end at this point. MTA has expressed a possible interest in picking up the project at this time since the concept better fits their mandate in the field of countywide communications. Thus, the staff recommendation is to accept the final Task 2 report and not proceed with Task 3, but rather let MTA or other interested parties take the information and knowledge developed thus far and pursue solutions that might utilize what has been learned.