

Editorial Contact

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MCNC and Facebook to Bring High-Speed Internet to Western North Carolina

North Carolina nonprofit and global technology company team up to help close the digital divide in rural areas of the state by working to ensure communities have affordable broadband to successfully learn, work, and live in the 21st century

FOREST CITY and RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, N.C. (Jan. 28, 2020) – [MCNC](#), the non-profit operator of the North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCREN), today announced a collaboration with Facebook to make high-speed broadband available to nearly 30 Community Anchor Institutions (CAIs) in the western North Carolina counties of Rutherford, Burke, Caldwell, Wilkes, and Surry.

These North Carolina communities will access high-speed broadband at the CAIs throughout the five counties. These institutions include education, health care and non-profit facilities such as community colleges, charter schools, treatment facilities and government offices where residents will be able to access high-speed connectivity.

“MCNC is excited about this project with Facebook as it will allow us to improve connectivity, redundancy and resiliency of the MCNC network in western North Carolina,” said MCNC President and CEO Jean Davis. “Facebook’s efforts to utilize their assets to help the local community is a great model for collaboration.”

Facebook is constructing a new, high-capacity fiber route from Forest City to Dobson that will be completed in 2020. The intended CAIs initially to be connected include four local education agencies (Burke, Elkin, Rutherford and Wilkes County Schools), four community colleges, three charter schools, the N.C. School for the Deaf, five health care sites including two not-for-profit mental health/substance abuse treatment facilities, five agricultural extension offices, four public safety locations, and the new western campus of the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics set to open in 2021 in Morganton.

“Facebook is looking forward to working with MCNC in this innovative way to connect important institutions that serve western North Carolina,” said Kevin Salvadori, Director, Network Investments at Facebook. “From health care to education, it is thrilling to think of more North Carolina residents living in rural communities benefiting from this connectivity.”

Driven by Facebook’s co-investment to leverage NCREN, the CAIs impacted in this area will have significantly higher speeds due to direct fiber connections to the internet. Additionally, each connection also will be able to leverage other value-added services that MCNC now offers on the network.

“Without a doubt, improving the fiber backbone of the region will enhance the learning experience for hundreds who enroll in the residential program at our new Morganton campus,” said Kevin Baxter, Director of Western Campus Planning for the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics, a member institution of the UNC System that serves academically-talented high school students. “It will also have far reaching implications for connectivity and STEM education opportunities for several thousand additional students served online and through summer learning opportunities.”

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"Being a smaller school system in North Carolina, currently serving about 1,200 students, Elkin City Schools aims to provide a more individualized learning experience to develop and prepare our students for the future," said Elkin City Schools Chief Technology Officer Britt Shaw. "The work Facebook and MCNC are doing to bring affordable, high-speed broadband connectivity and technologies into our area will provide excellent educational opportunities that will help advance our students as well as our small-town economy."

In 2013, MCNC completed a \$144 million expansion of NCREN through the Golden LEAF Rural Broadband Initiative, which saw more than 1,600 new miles of construction added and boosted the overall network footprint to almost 2,600 fiber miles. In the last six years, the network has continued to grow. With the addition of this new route, NCREN total operated fiber miles in North Carolina will now surpass 4,000 miles. Being much more than an ISP or network operator, MCNC also has been steadfast in growing their service catalog to include additional technologies, security and value-added services to layer within their network connections.

Facebook broke ground for the data center in Forest City in November 2010; it later opened in 2012. The data center, located about 75 miles west of Charlotte, was later expanded in 2015. The North Carolina site is Facebook's second data center, and features many of the designs used in the company's first custom-built facility in Oregon.

"High-speed internet is crucial to the success of every community and one of the biggest needs in rural North Carolina. This commitment to bring high-speed broadband to Rutherford, Burke, Caldwell, Wilkes, and Surry Counties will improve quality of life, expand businesses, and aid in economic development in the region. I want to thank Facebook for their investment in our great state and for helping families and businesses get the broadband access they need." – U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC).

"Expanding high-speed broadband access to rural communities is essential if we want to continue North Carolina's economic competitiveness and growth. A resilient, high bandwidth telecom infrastructure that stretches beyond just the cities and suburbs helps health care providers and teachers across the state carry out their work. I'm glad this collaboration will help meet this long-standing need and help North Carolinians stay connected to the digital world." – U.S. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC).

"I am pleased to hear about this partnership to bring high speed internet to several Western North Carolina counties. The internet has become critical for businesses, hospitals, schools, and the government to provide effective services to their communities. Giving rural areas access to broadband internet is critical to ensure these communities do not fall behind. Hopefully this is the beginning of a long, sustained effort to continue bringing reliable internet to underserved areas across North Carolina." – U.S. Rep. Mark Meadows (R-Buncombe).

"Increasing access to high-speed internet is necessary for the survival and prosperity of our rural communities. This partnership will help people in western North Carolina grow their local businesses, further their education and find more affordable options for health care." – North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper

"We appreciate these collaborative investments by Facebook and MCNC's community partners to expand access to rural broadband connectivity in western North Carolina. This project will benefit a number of public sectors in our region with cutting-edge opportunities including a broad network of education institutions, our growing economy, healthcare, agriculture, public safety systems, and more." – North Carolina Speaker of the House Tim Moore (R-Cleveland).

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“This is great news for our area. Access to high-speed Internet will improve the lives of families, make it easier to educate students, and help grow small businesses throughout western North Carolina. I look forward to seeing the positive impact these investments will have on our community in the years ahead.” – U.S. Rep. Patrick McHenry (R-Lincoln).

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About MCNC

MCNC is a technology nonprofit that builds, owns and operates the North Carolina Research and Education Network (NCREN), which has successfully served research, education, nonprofit health care, public safety, libraries, and other community institutions with Internet connectivity and services for 40 years. NCREN is the fundamental broadband infrastructure for 750 of these institutions including all K-20 education in North Carolina. As one of the nation's premier middle-mile fiber networks, MCNC leverages NCREN to customize Internet services and related applications for each customer while supporting private service providers in bringing cost-efficient connectivity to rural and underserved communities in North Carolina. Visit www.mcnc.org. MCNC Social: [Facebook](#), Twitter [@MCNC](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#).

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Resources and Assets

[Download](#) the updated Western NCREN Fiber Expansion Map.

Keywords and Tags

MCNC, NCREN, Facebook, Networking, Broadband, North Carolina, Technology, Social Media, News