

Oakland closer to being a hot spot

Wireless project deal almost done

BY KATHLEEN GRAY
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

May 16, 2006

Despite a two-month delay, Oakland County's ambitious plan to blanket the county's 910 square miles with a wireless cloud should begin in the next two weeks.

MichTel, the Pontiac firm selected to spearhead the Wireless Oakland project, has been delayed while negotiating with DTE Energy to use the company's electricity poles to install wireless-access boxes. The two companies are in the final stages of reaching an agreement, Scott Simons, spokesman for DTE, said Monday.

MichTel's goal is to be up and running later this summer in portions of seven pilot communities -- Troy, Birmingham, Royal Oak, Madison Heights Pontiac, Oak Park and Wixom.

By the end of 2007, the entire county is expected to be wired, allowing residents free or low-cost Internet access without the need to be hooked to a phone line or high-speed Internet line.

MichTel has ordered all the equipment it needs to begin the project, "So it's just a matter of getting up on the poles as soon as the agreement is signed," Phil Bertolini, deputy county executive, said Monday.

Nearly all of Oakland's 61 communities have told the county they want to participate in the program, which County Executive L. Brooks Patterson announced last year. Some of the more rural townships haven't jumped in yet, said Bertolini, but they are expected to as other communities are hooked into the network of wireless access.

All communities were sent a standard inter-local agreement last week, and the county has been getting calls back "fast and furious," ever since, he said.

MichTel needs 10 to 20 access points -- light or electricity poles, buildings or radio towers -- per square mile to adequately cover the entire county. DTE will be allowing access, for an undisclosed fee, to 25,000 poles.

The service to residents will be free or cost a monthly or daily fee. The free service will be slower than DSL hookups, but about four times faster than dial-up, said MichTel spokesman Tony Vitale. Those paying a fee will get faster service. The fee hasn't been set yet.

MichTel plans to make money on the project from those fees and from advertising on the wireless-access home pages, Vitale said.

*For information on the Wireless Oakland project, go to www.oakgov.com/wireless. Contact **KATHLEEN GRAY** at 313-223-4407 or gray@freepress.com.*

Copyright © 2006 Detroit Free Press Inc.