

Hi, this is Gregg Foster with a community comment.

So, time for some old news. And by old I mean a week old.

By now you've probably heard about the completion of the second fiber optic line into Humboldt County. This line, with a diameter only slightly larger than my little finger, has 72 tiny strands of glass and runs 131 miles from Humboldt County to Cottonwood, in Shasta County. Attached to PG&E poles, this thin strand can provide for the telecommunications needs of Humboldt County for years to come. Unserved communities along the Highway 36 corridor can now get broadband access. And the community can be protected from the telecommunications outages we have experienced five times since 2006.

When I say "can" I don't mean "will." The mere existence of this second line does not mean you are necessarily protected from a disruption in service. Of course, there is always the potential that both lines can go down, though I suspect that if that happened, it would be the result of some catastrophic disaster.

But now it's up to you to make sure that you are protected from a disruption in service. The way you do this is by asking your telecommunications carrier, the company that provides you with your phone and internet service, whether or not they have access to both lines. Two companies have announced publicly that they will. One is 101 Netlink, a local company that provides wireless broadband service. The second is Suddenlink Communications, which was an early supporter of this project. Others have or will connect, but have not yet announced publicly their plans to do so. So, it's up to the consumer to do their homework. This includes cellular telephone service too.

I want to also thank and congratulate all of the community partners who helped with this project. What started as a relatively simple idea back in 2004 mushroomed into a full blown public-private effort that I bet many believed could never get done here. The County of Humboldt funded the original route concept study in 2005. This study was prepared by Susan Estrada and Tina Nerat to whom we owe much gratitude. Rob Arkley and Security National Servicing Corporation then made a grant to the Redwood Technology Consortium, who hired Tina and Susan to present the idea to potential customers. Using the results of that effort, Patrick Cleary of Lost Coast Communications and I approached Pacific Gas and Electric in 2007. They, in turn introduced us to IP Networks, who ultimately built the line. Supervisor Mark Lovelace and Connie Stewart from the California Center for Rural Policy worked diligently to support IP's application for partial funding from the Public Utilities Commission. This, of course, is only a partial list of folks who helped with this project. But this list shows what we can do when we set aside our differences and focus on a task.

Finally, I want to recognize two friends who, sadly, passed away before the completion of the line. The first is Chris Crawford, one of the first to advocate for this important project. The second is Gary George, the President of IP Networks who enthusiastically embraced the idea, but passed away suddenly last February. This project is a tribute to their memories.

This has been Gregg Foster with a community comment.