



NEWS RELEASE

# Broadband Internet Pilot to Support Access to Healthcare, Jobs and Education for Thousands in Rural Virginia

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RICHMOND, Va., Oct. 9, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- Residents in rural parts of Virginia could gain access to broadband internet critical for jobs, healthcare and education under three pilot projects proposed Oct. 1 by Dominion Energy Virginia.

Thanks to support from the Virginia General Assembly and collaboration with electric cooperatives and Internet Service Providers, the proposed Rural Broadband Pilot projects would extend broadband internet to citizens in Surry County, Botetourt County and the Northern Neck, if approved by the State Corporation Commission. The proposal includes nearly 300 miles of middle-mile fiber and would cost approximately \$29 million to construct.

"With so many Virginians working and learning from home due to COVID-19, access to reliable internet is an absolute necessity," said Ed Baine, president of Dominion Energy Virginia. "We hope these partnerships are the first of many, and we're optimistic about how much these efforts could help communities here in our home state."

More than 500,000 Virginians still live without easy access to high-speed internet. Extending broadband internet access would support economic development, social equity, public safety, educational opportunities, and healthcare services for citizens of the Commonwealth.

In rural areas, it's not cost effective for Internet Service Providers to lay the fiber necessary to reach less-populated communities with broadband internet. Dominion Energy is in a unique position to help bridge the digital gap. The company is installing new infrastructure as it moves forward with efforts to transform Virginia's energy grid. In the

pilots, Dominion Energy Virginia is leveraging this pathway value and enabling Internet Service Providers to create broadband access for currently unserved rural communities in Virginia.

A recent State Council for Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) report showed nearly 20 percent of rural students lack broadband at home, compared to less than 10 percent of students living in urban areas. If approved, the pilot projects will help provide reliable internet for students learning virtually due to COVID-19. The pilots also will help enable access to telemedicine and other healthcare services for those in need.

"Access to high-speed broadband provides opportunities for our community to attract new businesses, create jobs, and increase the number of citizens with work-from-home capabilities," said Melissa Rollins, County Administrator – Surry County. "This initiative is critical to setting up future generations for success."

The three proposed pilot projects are the first the company has brought forward under the Grid Transformation & Security Act of 2018 and legislation patroned by Del. Israel O'Quinn in 2019. They also align with Governor Northam's \$85 million proposal to expand access to broadband for unserved communities.

- Surry County: Dominion Energy proposes to install 43 miles of middle-mile fiber infrastructure. The company **has entered into a partnership** with Prince George Electric Cooperative (PGECE)'s Internet Service Provider subsidiary, RURALBAND, to provide high-speed internet access to unserved residents in rural areas of Surry County.
- Botetourt County: Dominion Energy proposes to install 34 miles of middle-mile fiber infrastructure, partnering with BARC Electric Cooperative and their BARC Connects Internet Service Provider to create access in unserved areas of Botetourt County.
- Northern Neck: Dominion Energy proposes to install approximately 217 miles of middle-mile fiber infrastructure. All Points Broadband, Dominion Energy Virginia, Northern Neck Electric Cooperative and the counties of King George, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland **have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding** to advance a regional broadband partnership providing access to unserved households and business in the Northern Neck.

## About Dominion Energy

More than **7 million customers in 20 states** energize their homes and businesses with electricity or natural gas from Dominion Energy (NYSE: D), headquartered in Richmond, Va. The company is **committed to sustainable, reliable, affordable and safe energy** and to achieving net zero carbon dioxide and methane emissions from its power generation and gas infrastructure operations by 2050. Please visit **DominionEnergy.com** to learn more.

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