

**MARIN TELECOMMUNICATIONS AGENCY**

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**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 11, 2009

**TO:** MTA Board of Directors

**FROM:** Barbara Thornton, Executive Officer

**SUBJECT:** AGENDA ITEM H: MARIN WIRELESS PROJECT UPDATE

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Recommended Action: Receive the attached Marin Wireless Project Update as presented to the MGSA meeting on March 5<sup>th</sup> and provide direction to staff.

Background:

In late 2006 and early 2007, the MGSA and its consultant, CBG Communications, Inc., conducted a wide-ranging Wireless Broadband Needs Assessment Study. The results indicated tremendous interest among Marin County residents and businesses in the development of a comprehensive, advanced wireless broadband network that would serve the various communities of interest (residential, commercial, nonprofit, educational, public agencies, and community groups) within the member jurisdictions of the MSGA. For example, the study found that a majority of residents believe individual access to a wireless network is very important or important and also say that they would pay between \$10 and \$20 a month for this access. Additionally, both residents and governmental entities strongly agree that it is important for public safety to have access to a wireless network. On behalf of the MGSA, CBG, in conjunction with the Golden Gate Bridge and Transit District has undertaken a pilot study to determine if Internet access aboard its busses may increase ridership, specifically on longer routes and potentially all of its routes (and Marin Transit routes as well). The busses utilized for the routes 72X and 75 are outfitted with cellular-based equipment, which utilizes Sprint's cellular network and a WiFi gateway providing network accessibility to riders on the bus. Early results show riders' overall satisfaction with the network. Riders report utilizing the network to perform tasks such as banking, research, purchasing or selling merchandise, e-mailing, file sharing and obtaining news and information. The demographics of the users varies and although preliminary, the results to this point indicate users are more often middle aged males who are traveling to or from work.

Tom Robinson, CBG Communications Inc., reported to the MGSA in their March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting regarding the outcome of the Marin Wireless Pilot with the Golden Gate Bridge and Transit District. The MGSA Staff Report, Tom Robinson's presentation and the written Report on Wireless Broadband Pilot Project for the MGSA are attached for review.

The MGSA Board at their March 5<sup>th</sup> meeting accepted the Report as the completion of Phase 2 of the Wireless Marin Project. In addition the MGSA Board approved that Phase 2 was the end of the MGSA's leadership and sponsorship of the project. They recommended that telecommunications policy makers, such as the MTA, take the lead in broadband development in Marin County as part of a "network" of wireless and wire line networks. The information and knowledge developed thus far will be useful to MTA and other parties in pursuing solutions that might utilize what has been learned. MGSA also recommended that the Marin Wireless Project Joint Advisory Committee meet to review and consider the recommendation.

The information about the Wireless Marin Project is being shared with the MTA at this point since it is pertinent information as the MTA and Marin cities and agencies consider projects that may qualify for Federal Economic Stimulus monies related to Broadband, wire line and wireless.

Staff recommends that consideration of the Marin Wireless Project beyond the role it may play in projects submitted for Federal Economic Stimulus monies be incorporated into MTA's Work Plan for FY 2009-2010.