

This is KPTZ FM 91.9 in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Rachel Perkins, bringing you news and commentary from the Jefferson County *Beacon* for Wednesday, September 30, 2026.

Jefferson Public Utility District (PUD) has surpassed 1,000 active broadband connections in rural Jefferson County, a milestone the utility is calling a turning point after three years of construction. The customer count stood at 1,032 as of September 16, built on more than 400 miles of fiber optic infrastructure laid since 2023 and funded by over sixty five and a half million dollars in state and federal grants. The funding will bring internet service to more than 3,000 customers when the final grant-funded construction area is completed in 2028. The intent of the broadband grants is to connect rural and underserved areas with high-speed internet.

Jameson Hawn, PUD Community Outreach Coordinator said, "The influx of the grant funding allowed us to build a network that otherwise would have been cost-prohibitive for our region. Without the grant funding to help cover these distances, none of this would have been possible." Rural Jefferson County's low household density means that each mile of fiber reaches far fewer homes than a comparable urban or suburban build would.

PUD said that the actual cost to lay fiber per premise is approximately \$17,000 to \$20,000. The PUD's Broadband Department receives funds from the PUD delivery each year, with 80% going to broadband and 20% to water projects. Approximately \$600,000 is generated through property tax revenue. Not every household benefits from this round of construction. The PUD acknowledged hearing from residents just outside grant-funded boundaries who have, "very little-to-no-service" and no near-term path to fiber. More than 5,000 county residents have registered their desire to receive fiber broadband to their home.

Expansion beyond the current grant areas, the PUD said in an email, "will depend on board approval and a traditional business case – build where infrastructure already exists and customer interest is strong—rather than additional grant funding.

The PUD said that evidence of broader economic impact, such as new home-based businesses, relocations, or expanded local commerce tied to the new service, remains largely anecdotal at this stage, based on customer feedback. Officials said they hope to compile more systematic evidence of that impact once the current buildout phases are complete.

Broadband through fiber connection is widely regarded as far superior to cable, satellite, or fixed wireless. It is the most reliable, offers the most consistent performance, has the highest available speeds and the lowest latency, which matters for video calls, gaming and real-time applications. Additionally, a local government-owned system keeps the subscriber fees within the community and prevents subscriber data from being used by large telecommunications and satellite companies.

The structural difference is the business model: municipal and PUD networks are typically funded through rates and public financing rather than advertising or data-monetization revenue, so there's little financial incentive to build profiles for ad targeting.

Notably, Elon Musk-owned Starlink does not respond to Do Not Track browser signals. Its privacy policy was updated this year to explicitly permit using customer data to develop, train, and improve AI and machine learning models, applied automatically to all subscribers with no opt-out toggle – the only way to avoid it is to cancel the service. The policy also allows the data to be shared with other companies owned by Musk. Publicly owned fiber can act as economic development infrastructure as well as a utility.

Jefferson PUD's open-access model allows multiple Qualified Internet Service Providers to compete for subscribers, thereby lowering prices and enabling customers to find the best arrangement for them. Plus, customer service from local ISPs consistently gets much better reviews than national companies. Currently, the Qualified Internet Service Providers on the PUD network are North Olympic Data Center, Advance Stream, and the JNET (Jamestown Networks).

To register your desire for fiber broadband and for broadband construction updates, service information and installation resources, visit jeffpud.org/broadband.

Reporting on this story by Scott France.

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