

Governor Steve Beshear and U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers announced that two requests for proposals (RFP) are being issued this month on a public-private partnership (P3) project to build critically-needed high-speed broadband Internet access to the farthest reaches of the Commonwealth.

An RFP was released today by the Commonwealth of Kentucky in conjunction with the Center for Rural Development seeking private partners to build, operate and maintain a statewide open-access, high-speed broadband network. A complementary RFP seeking equity partners for the project will be released next week. The Commonwealth may establish one contract using either the equity or concessionaire model.

The Next Generation Kentucky Information Highway will help Kentucky make tremendous strides toward being a leader both in terms of speed and presence of high-speed Internet connectivity, Gov. Beshear said.

“Infrastructure such as roads, sewers, water lines and classrooms are critical to our quality of life and economic vitality,” Gov. Beshear said. “Today, we also have to invest in another kind of infrastructure – the kind that will break down geographic and financial barriers to education and economic development.”

The initial phase of the project is expected to take two years to build and will include more than 3,000 miles of fiber infrastructure, often referred to as the “middle mile.”

Currently, Kentucky ranks 46th in high-speed broadband Internet availability. Nearly a quarter of the Commonwealth’s population – 23 percent – has no access to broadband.

The push for reliable, accessible high-speed broadband is one recommendation that emerged from “SOAR,” the “Shaping Our Appalachian Region” initiative that seeks to move Kentucky’s Appalachian region forward.

About the SOAR initiative

The SOAR initiative was launched by Gov. Beshear and Congressman Rogers in late 2013, after a stunning downturn in the coal market exacerbated historic challenges in eastern Kentucky related to unemployment and poverty. More than 1,700 Kentuckians attended a one-day SOAR summit in Pikeville in December. SOAR is intended to help the region develop and put into action new locally-oriented strategies to attack persistent challenges.