

This article is in response to Mr. Robert Spencer's letter in the Readers Forum on 21 December 2009. Mr. Spencer is correct that the Cambria Connected Network is an advanced system that has not been extensively marketed.

Some background information will help. Three years ago, the Federal government issued an unfunded mandate that all 911 Emergency Systems can no longer use low band radios. The County Commissioners had to figure out how to meet this unfunded mandate, maintain superior 911 Emergency Services, and locally fund the project. Fortunately, Brian Feist, the Emergency Services Executive Director and Bob Dixon, a technical consultant were tasked to find a solution.

After months of research and review, one proposal stood above all others. Conxx Smart Technology Solutions (www.conxx.net) had a proven system currently used in Cumberland Maryland that provided a solution and had the added capability of rural broadband internet access. The Commissioners visited Cumberland Maryland to review the system's live operation. Cumberland's terrain is very much like Cambria's and seeing a system that had been operational since 1995 was enough of a proof source for the Commissioners to make a \$10M decision.

It would cost \$9.1M to maintain the same level of 911 Emergency Services. This cost would keep everything the same, no room for growth, additional features, or opportunities to provide economic development. The Commissioners were interested in using the system to provide rural broadband internet access to underserved areas. Therefore, the Commissioners opted to add broadband internet access. This new 911 System was the equivalent of a five lane internet super highway dedicated to emergency responders use. By adding the rural broadband option, the Commissioners added a sixth lane for use by the residents or businesses of Cambria County. This entire system is Cambria Connected.

Cambria Connected consists of 17 core towers (two more in the spring) and predominately uses line of sight radios. This means the radios must have a clear view to the tower, no obstructions. There are three types of radios; the standard radio provides 3Mb to 54Mb of bandwidth (up/down), the 900Mhz 1Mg mobile radio while primarily for emergency vehicles is an option for homes surrounded by trees, and the WiFi units providing wireless internet access at 27 hotspots throughout the county. WiFi will grow to 50 hotspots over the next year. Cambria Connected provides internet access to homes, businesses, schools and universities. Mount Aloysius University is the largest customer and has reduced their overall internet access fees. The system is HIPPA compliant (hospital use) and E Rate Certified (school use).

Several benefits of Cambria Connected are worth consideration. First, obtaining services from Cambria Connected keeps money in Cambria County. The Internet Service Providers (ISP's) are locally owned and operated, so in addition to creating jobs, customers receive personal service from local businesses (no calls to India). Therefore, supporting Cambria Connected supports local workers, helps create jobs, and utilizes the 911 system that is monitored 24 hours a day. The speeds for internet access are true as advertised and the fees for service are straightforward. The system is feature rich, comparable in price to other service providers, and is a continuously being expanded, upgraded, and supported. Additionally, a portion of the monthly service fee goes to the County to help maintain Cambria

Connected/911network, which reduces monthly operational costs with the goal to eliminate the debt burden from the loan.

There are four authorized ISP's providing Cambria Connected services. In the Stix (www.ITXBB.net) specializes in residential services, SkyPacket (www.sky-packet.net) specializes in commercial and educational services, Digital Razor (www.digitalrazor.net), and CamConn (www.camconn.net) both provide services for a broad customer base. The website www.CambriaConnected.net, is being upgraded in January with improved features and will be more user friendly. Once approved, an advertising campaign has been planned for the spring.

Cambria Connected is the only operational rural wireless broadband internet service in Pennsylvania. Representatives from California, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York have visited Cambria Connected and are now obtaining funds to install similar systems.

Mr. Spencer's letter is correct and the residents of Cambria County do have an advanced internet system that is part of the 911 Emergency Services Network but it will not go away in five years. Cambria Connected and 911 are one in the same and unless 911 is replaced with something new it is here to stay.

The County Commissioners have met the unfunded Federal mandate and their vision to provide rural broadband internet to the citizens of Cambria County has been realized.