



Iowa's state fiber network is no 'white elephant'



13 HOURS AGO • [DAVID LINGREN, IOWA COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, DES MOINES](#)

The 'white elephant' phrase was recently used to describe the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) in the Quad-City Times' Jan. 22 editorial headlined, "Broadband bill takes baby step."

It's long past time that Iowans understand the truly important and critical infrastructure that Iowa has in the ICN.

The statement 'ending the futile attempts to sell the ICN' was included in the editorial. During the 2011 legislative session, legislation directed that an attempt be made to sell or lease the ICN. In 2013, Gov. Branstad rejected the two offers received, stating the Network is worth many times

more than the offers made.

The Network is 100 percent fiber, which is state-of-the-art infrastructure; not a 'cable system' as stated in the editorial. Fiber optic technology is the leading technology for telecommunications networks everywhere in the world. Recent enhancements increased bandwidth to all 99 counties with a 10 GB capable backbone. The Network can currently operate at 100 GB, and has an upgrade path of up to 400 GB for future growth, a level of capacity far beyond what is currently available from any other network in the state. The Network can meet the needs of our users today, and is positioned to meet their future needs.

The ICN continues its dedication to education, and provides high speed internet to schools where the Network is connected. An example of that commitment is the Iowa City school district, which was the first gigabit school in the state to subscribe to a full 1 GB of bandwidth for internet through the ICN. There are numerous school districts in Iowa with 1 GB of high speed internet access available, if they choose to subscribe at that level.

With all of the enhancements, ICN leaders are aware that the traditional video classroom equipment has aged, but that equipment is owned by the schools or other authorized users, not the ICN. The ICN is diligently working with school districts to move from the traditional video platform to a more cost-effective internet-based video experience that will free up those outdated dedicated classrooms for other uses.

The value of the Network has evolved into providing critical communications to hospitals, public safety, state/federal government entities, and for the statewide Next Generation 911 system. The ICN is designed as a secure data network, having the ability to survive a cyber-terrorist attack or natural disaster to protect the public. The National Homeland Security Office has identified Iowa as being one of the top states prepared for such an event by having the ICN as a private, secure, and functional Network for Iowa.

As an example, the ICN was used in 2008 and 2010 during the floods when critical infrastructure (utility companies) needed high speed connectivity on dry land. This is just one of the reasons why many states continue to look at the ICN as a model. In the coming weeks, ICN leaders will be hosting cabinet members from the Commonwealth of Kentucky, as they look to the ICN as the premier state-owned network in the country.

Lastly, the ICN has provided nearly \$200 million of income to the private sector in the 25 years of operation. With this kind of valuable operational and financial asset that Iowa has, it surely shouldn't be considered a 'white elephant', but more like a Golden Goose.

Why the ICN was not sold

The ICN's 2013 annual report explains why Iowa rejected purchase bids.

- The proposals were less than the \$25 million invested in Network upgrades under the federal Broadband Technology Opportunities Program. The project was completed June 30, and maintains the ICN as a state-of-the-art network.
- ICN operates with a positive net cash annually and has no losses. ICN receives appropriations (currently \$2.2M) for Capitol Complex/State agency communications (not part of sale) and the required investment for federal e-rate funding. Remaining network costs are covered through existing fee structure.
- There would be significant risks to public safety with a sale of the ICN, given that the ICN currently provides a secure network for E-911 traffic, and the anticipated involvement with the State's Public Safety Radio Interoperability Network.

Excerpt from Times Jan. 22 editorial

The entire state broadband effort proposed in this bill will consume about a third of what Iowa spent to improve Interstate 74 ramps at 53rd Street in Davenport.

We encourage the legislature to think bigger.

The biggest change we see in the bill so far involves ending the futile attempts to sell the Iowa Communication Network, the pioneering cable system Gov. Terry Branstad inspired the first time he was governor. Now the network is a white elephant. This bill would open access to private developers intending to lease it to improve broadband access in rural areas.