



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bolivar, Tenn. – Feb 14th, 2022 - Bolivar Energy Authority (BEA) has announced that it is exploring the opportunity to build a gigabit fiber optic network to bring high speed broadband internet and communication services to all the customers within the BEA service area. With the lack of availability to Broadband for many people, and with it being such a vital element in our daily lives, this project aims to close the digital divide here in West Tennessee.

BEA is currently seeking grant funding for this project under the \$500 Million Tennessee Emergency Broadband Fund – American Rescue Plan program announced by the State of Tennessee. To provide these next generation services, BEA has selected Irby Utilities to build out and support the fiber network over the next few years and is working with Aeneas Internet and Telephone to provide the installation and services within the home or business.

During this exploratory phase, BEA and Aeneas are seeking support from the community to determine the financial feasibility of the project. BEA and Aeneas will be conducting an online survey that can be found at <https://fiber.aeneas.com/>. All BEA customers are encouraged to take this survey. Information from the survey will also help in the grant funding process. If you do not have access to the internet, you may also pick up and fill out a survey at the BEA main office located at 815 Tennessee St, Bolivar, TN. Letters are also being sent to all BEA customers regarding this survey.

“The overwhelming demand for Broadband in our communities today is incredible!”, said Tony Kirk President / CEO of Bolivar Energy Authority. “Today we are announcing that BEA is planning to fulfill that demand, by partnering with Irby Utilities to build a completely fiber-optic Smart Grid Communications Network capable of bringing affordable, reliable, fiber optic Broadband internet to all of BEA’s service territory. Far too long our rural customers and neighbors alike have lived with little to no internet access, and we are looking to remedy that! We are excited to continue our great working relationship with Aeneas Internet and Telephone to aid in this fiber project and to get our customers connected. I would like to thank BEA’s Board of Directors, Mr. Todd Lowe, Ms. Margaret Whitenton, Mr. Earnest Jones, Mr. Elmer Cobb and Dr. Frank Wilhite for all their support. Also, Bea’s staff, Randy Plunk, Steve Herriman and Mike McKinnie are due a big thank you for all their tireless work on the decision to move forward. It is going to take a lot of hard work and a lot of patience from the community to get this project finished, but from all of us at BEA, we are committed 100%.

“We are very excited for the opportunity to bring Broadband services to more of our West Tennessee neighbors,” said Stephen Thorpe, CEO of Aeneas Internet and Telephone. “For many years now, we have worked on various fiber projects with BEA providing internet services to commercial locations in and around Bolivar. This project would expand those services to include both residential and business customers alike. Access to Broadband is such a necessity today, we’ve all been reminded of that the past two years. Lots of people need high speed internet to

attend school or work from home and can't do so because there is no option or it's too expensive. This project will help solve that problem and bridge the digital divide here in West Tennessee!"

"Over the last few years, we have worked with Aeneas to bring Broadband services to West Tennessee, and we look forward to continuing those efforts with Boliver Energy Authority" says Geff Smith, VP of Technology and Communications at Irby Utilities. "By utilizing Irby's Turnkey Solution, Boliver will be able to succinctly analyze the financial impact of providing broadband to their underserved communities and deploy a best-in-class fiber network."

About Bolivar Energy Authority

Bolivar Energy Authority serves Hardeman County and parts of Fayette, Chester, Madison counties (TN) and Benton County (MS). Total electric customers: 11,221. Residential customers; 9,010. General Power customers under 50KW demand; 2,093. General Power customers between 51 and 4,999KW demand; 118. The Bolivar Energy Authority covers 1,350 miles of power line with an average of 8 customers per mile.

About Aeneas Internet and Telephone

Headquartered in Jackson, Tennessee, Aeneas Internet and Telephone has been named to Entrepreneur magazine's Hot 500 list of fastest growing businesses in the United States, as well as BusinessTN magazine's Hot100 and Inc. Magazine's Inc 5,000. Founded in 1995, Aeneas offers a myriad of services including gigabit fiber broadband, local and long distance, VoIP, office phone systems, commercial web hosting and corporate e-mail, network security, off-site file storage, data center services, managed networking, and more.

About Irby Utilities

Irby was founded in 1926 and is based in Jackson, Mississippi. The company has evolved into two distinct operations, of which Irby Utilities is an industry leader with 57 locations supporting activity in 47 states. The employees of Irby Utilities serve customers with innovative products and services through its diverse portfolio in four major business channels: electric, broadband, gas and capital project services. To find out more, visit www.irbyutilities.com.

If you would like more information about Bolivar Energy Authority, please call Tony Kirk at 731-658-5257, or email tonyk@bea-tn.com.

If you would like more information about Aeneas Internet and Telephone, please call Stephen Thorpe at 731-554-9200 or email sthorpe@corp.aeneas.com.



If you would like more information about Irby Utilities, please call Geff Smith at 217-259-3157 or email gsmith@irby.com.

BROADBAND – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

It is important to remember the “WHY” that fuels this project. BEA is a service oriented and community focused organization. BEA customers have asked us to consider this large project because the “for profit” companies will not step up to properly serve them. To BEA customers, this isn’t just an “internet” issue – it’s a “quality of life” issue. In addition to broadband access, BEA will use the communications network to further increase electric reliability for its customers. This project is a win-win for BEA customers – access to affordable high-speed internet while modernizing the electric grid to reduce outage times and operating expenses.

What is Broadband?

Essentially access to the internet. But not merely a connection, a very fast and highly reliable connection.

Is BEA getting into the internet/broadband business?

BEA is building a fiber-optic Smart Grid communications network for operation of its electric system. Additional fibers will be installed that will allow BEA customers to have access to the internet. That internet access will be provided by BEA’s partner, Aeneas Internet and Telephone.

Can’t you get grants to help fund this?

Yes, there are numerous opportunities for grants. Currently, BEA is seeking community support for a grant through the State of TN. Community support is required for grant scoring so it’s important that the community be behind our project.

In which areas did you apply for grant funding?

BEA will be applying for all its electric service area that is grant-eligible in the State of TN.

Why are you planning to build into some areas that already have a provider?

The rural areas are so rural, it is difficult for them to financially stand on their own. That’s why no other service provider has built there yet. The density in the more populated areas will help offset that cost, as well as any grants if we are fortunate enough to obtain any.

When do you think you’ll start construction?

BEA is hopeful for construction to begin by July 1. Engineering is being completed now and we are about to begin Field Validating pole locations where equipment is going to be installed. Some poles will need to be changed out to hold the new equipment.

How long will the project take?

It is anticipated that the entire project will take two (2) years to construct and maybe another year after that to finish connecting all the customers. That is, so long as the project continues to meet its goals regarding construction budget and customer take-rate. Grant funding will significantly impact the “green light” for this project to move forward. Patience is a virtue.

Will Broadband be deployed to all BEA customers?

BROADBAND – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

So long as customers continue to support the project by signing up, construction will eventually lead to every BEA customer having access to fiber-internet. Without customers, there is no business. So, grass roots support will be crucial to the success of our project.

How expensive will it be?

At this time, we are anticipating speeds and Residential pricing from Aeneas to be:

250MB - \$59.95

500MB - \$79.95

1GB – \$99.95

Phone - \$24.95, includes nationwide long distance

Aeneas will provide in-home WiFi so you won't have the added expense of purchasing and setting up a wireless router. There may be additional, optional costs for larger homes to make sure the WiFi signal covers the entire home. Whole home WiFi will come at a cost of \$14.95 and Managed WiFi will cost \$8.95.

There will be no data caps, no speed restrictions, no contracts, no lease fees for equipment and no installation cost.

Is Aeneas going to offer Cable-TV?

With so many options to stream TV over the internet now, it does not look likely that Aeneas will offer TV services. You may have heard of products like Sling, Hulu, YouTube TV, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, AppleTV, Disney +. The subscriptions are much cheaper and offer a wider variety of options. Aeneas would be glad to demonstrate how these products work.

Is Aeneas going to offer phone?

Yes, phone service will be offered as well. The cost from Aeneas will be \$24.95 per month which includes nationwide long distance in the continental US.

Will there be any contracts or promotional offers?

There will not be any contracts and no introductory price that goes up after 12-months. No bait-and-switch where you must call and haggle for a better price after 12-months.

How is this going to affect existing BEA employees?

Construction

Construction will be performed by contractors. That includes the in-home installation. Damage and repairs (car wrecks, trees, squirrels) will more than likely be repaired by the contractors since they will already be in the area, etc.

Maintenance

BROADBAND – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

After construction contractors are gone, BEA may need to hire additional staff and equipment (small bucket trucks and pickups) to maintain the fiber. The BEA line crew would need to help on large repairs to damaged areas. Aeneas will perform any new home installs.

Customer Technical Support

Technical calls received can be forwarded to the Aeneas “support desk” to help resolve their internet or phone issues.

Are employees going to be expected to be salespeople for the service?

Employees are not going to be required to sell. However, if a customer asks about service, as an employee is performing their work, take note of the name and address. We will have a way for that referral to be passed along to Aeneas to follow up on.

This is a great opportunity for our community, and we hope you take every opportunity to let BEA customers know about the important service.

Why did BEA seek a partner in Aeneas?

Aeneas was founded in 1995 offering basic dial-up Internet services. From the outset, Aeneas sought to serve its surrounding rural communities in Tennessee. It was the first broadband provider to rural Tennessee, and the Aeneas also became the largest Internet provider in West Tennessee. In 2014, they went live with fiber optics in Henderson TN. The focus of Aeneas continues to be local customer service to the rural communities of West Tennessee.

Aeneas brings to the table expertise in areas of network engineering, sales, and technical support. Their vast knowledge and similar mission are a great fit for BEA and its customers. Additionally, they have helped Southwest Tennessee Electric Membership Corporation (STEMC) the past two years with their broadband project – so they have lots of experience in both building and supporting projects like this.

As a CSR, am I going to have to help a customer troubleshoot their internet problems?

No, the technical staff at Aeneas will manage that portion. You will soft-transfer those members to the technical staff at Aeneas to resolve the problem.

What if a customer comes into the office to sign up for service?

There will be a simple webpage where you’ll just need to take the member’s name and address and someone from the Aeneas sales team will follow up with them. During construction, that map will let you know if services are available there yet or not. There will also be an email address where leads can be sent and a phone number directly to the Aeneas sales team so services can be setup.