

State introduces Third Frontier

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Youngstown State University will not be connected to the system at first.

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COLUMBUS — State officials unveiled Tuesday the \$19 million Third Frontier Network, a fiber-optics link-up that they say will help speed innovation among Ohio's colleges, universities, businesses and research laboratories.

"The Third Frontier Network is a strong partnership," Gov. Bob Taft said before joining other officials on the campus of Ohio State University to officially start up the network.

"Our students will benefit," the Republican governor said. The network was part of Taft's Third Frontier plan to boost high technology in this state.

State officials tout the Third Frontier Network as the nation's leading statewide advanced fiber-optic network dedicated to education and development.

Connections

The network connects Ohio's universities and colleges with one another, their business partners as well as federal laboratories, hospitals and even primary and secondary schools, creating in effect a virtual statewide information clearinghouse.

"It provides a mechanism for great bandwidth at a fairly minimum cost," said Paul Schopis, director of network engineering at OARnet, one of the designers of the Third Frontier Network. OARnet is an Ohio-based Internet service provider affiliated with the Ohio Supercomputer Center.

Today, 11 colleges and universities are connected to the network, including Ohio State, Wright State University near Dayton, Ohio University in Athens and Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Two other universities — Kent State University and the Northeast Ohio Universities College of Medicine — are to be connected to the network by the first quarter of next year.

Youngstown State University is to have a shared connection that should be active next year, state officials said.

Additional campuses, their industry research partners, federal research facilities and other institutions are to be connected next summer as finances and logistics permit, state officials said.

Schopis said the network is 2 1/2 years in the planning and that the ultimate goal is to connect all colleges and universities in the state.

The regents committed \$19 million to the construction of the network and will fund the operations through OARnet at \$3 million per year, state officials said. Funding for the project has come through federal, state and foundation sources, state officials said.

"It's collaboration and connectivity," said Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Roderick Chu.

Through the network, classrooms in one location will be able to be linked to professors or instructors in another location, Chu said.

The network could also be used to link schoolchildren in one location with scientific or other experts in other locations to create learning possibilities in math and science that otherwise might not be possible, Chu said.

"We have to excite kids in critical areas like math and science," he said.