

## FHMS regional broadband FAQ

### About the network

**Q: What is the FHMS project?**

**A:** FHMS is a 4-town regional fixed wireless project designed to deliver affordable broadband to households and businesses in Florida, Hawley, Monroe, and Savoy at no additional cost to our towns.

**Q: Why fixed wireless instead of fiber?**

**A:** A: Construction is 100% covered by state grants, whereas the grants would have covered only an estimated 16-30% of the all-fiber alternatives. These additional funds have to come in some form, such as higher taxes, customer financing of fiber drops, higher subscriber signup charges and/or higher monthly fees. Equipment upgrade or replacement costs low.

**Q: What are companies involved?**

**A:** To optimize efficiency and minimize costs, two companies are employed:

- ✓ Construction & operation: **WiValley**, a leading regional provider bringing affordable broadband to 50+ communities in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont.
- ✓ Internet/phone service provider: **OTELCO Inc.**, among the top 25 local exchange carriers in the US, with customers in Alabama, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, Vermont and West Virginia.

**Q: What are project particulars?**

**A:** Our project to design, build, maintain, and operate the regional network is:

- ✓ 100% funded via state broadband grants
- ✓ No town tax support, funding authorization or financial risk
- ✓ No initial signup or installation fees\*
- ✓ No subscriber financing or hidden costs
- ✓ Affordable rates
- ✓ Min 12/3 Mbps\*\* service; 25/5 Mbps+ to nearly all homes within 5 years

*\*Within one-year of service rollout.*

*\*\*Mbps = Megabits per second download/upload*

**Q: Do the towns own the network?**

**A:**As the network is 100% publicly funded, the public has 100% control of the infrastructure:

- ✓ Our four towns jointly own the network poles and towers.
- ✓ It is connected to the Internet backbone via the state-owned MassBroadband 123 fiber network.
- ✓ Our towns have a public option to buy the entire network after 3 years.

**Q: What technologies will be employed?**

**A:** Services will be provided via the deployment of several technologies:

- 5 GHz (U-NII) for locations where path conditions (line of sight or close to it) permit, including point to point backhaul and point to multipoint subscriber access. This band provides the greatest bandwidth (data carrying capacity) at lowest cost.
- 3.5 GHz (CBRS) band for locations where near-line-of-sight paths permit. This offers the quietest spectrum and higher power levels on a licensed-by-rule basis, and became generally available in 2020.
- 2.4 GHz for moderately obstructed paths in low-density locations. Medium bandwidth.
- 900 MHz or TV white space (TVWS) for the most cluttered paths. Best non-line-of-sight coverage but least bandwidth. Some initial installations on the 900 MHz band will be transitioned to CBRS as the network is completed.

**Q: Can the network eliminate the “dead zones” in our emergency communications?**

**A:** Yes. Wireless towers and poles can be used to enhance the emergency network:

- ✓ Emergency antennas can co-exist with broadband.
- ✓ There is room in base pedestals for emergency gear.
- ✓ Public safety radio connections can be relayed back to base stations.

**Q: What are the monthly fees?**

**A:** The monthly fees per household are as follows:

- ✓ 12/3 Mbps\*: \$44.95
- ✓ 25/5 Mbps: \$54.95
- ✓ 50/10 Mbps (limited availability): \$79.95\*
- ✓ Phone: \$24.95 (includes unlimited domestic calling)

*\*Wireless speeds depend on foliage & terrain.*

**Q: What does the installation entail?**

**A:** Wireless installation entails a radio-antenna combination, typically resembling a satellite dish but smaller or a TV antenna, mounted on the outside of the house, and a wire will be brought inside. The service is then usable via Ethernet or across the house via Wi-Fi.

**Note:** Signal strength – Many initial installations will be at their full capacity of service and some will be at limited capacity as they have temporary setups until their designated pole is set up or new equipment arrives. Additional technologies and equipment are being brought into the mix to bring more customers online and upgrade others. The vital Borden Mountain hub is slated to be brought online by December 2020.

**Q: Who do I call for Installation or service?**

**A:** For a new installation, go to the Otelco FHMS page (<https://www.otelco.com/fhms/>) or call 1-833-OTELCO-1. You can also call Wi - Valley at 866-946-2999.

Note: Existing customers should contact Otelco for questions about billing or service, *not* Wi - Valley.

**Q: I thought the project would be done by now, what's taking so long?**

**A:** Several unanticipated events have thrown off our schedule. One was major flooding down south at the start of the project that delayed pole deliveries by 6 months. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused quarantines and continued work related disruptions.

**Q: What is estimated completion date?**

**A:** The **estimated** completion date is for the network infrastructure is currently December 15, 2020. Customer installations will be continuing during and after that date into the spring checking for service with foliage on trees.

**Q: Will everyone receive 25/3 Mbps service?**

**A:** State funding requires that at least 70 percent of potential customers can receive 25/3 service. The additional federal CAF-II grant will up that required 25/3 percentage to 95%.

**Q: Are there data caps, as there are with cellular or satellite service?**

**A:** No.

**Q: Can I keep my current internet and/or phone service?**

**A:** Yes, nobody is required to sign up.

**Q: Wireless might be fine on a sunny day, but what happens when there's rain, snow, or worse yet, ice?**

**A:** In general, there should be minimal impact. The radio frequencies we will use are too low to suffer from meaningful rain fade. Snow does not impact radio reception. Under some unusual circumstances, melting transition ice may have a minor impact on service, but this is short and rare.

**Q: What happens in a hurricane, when trees come crashing down?**

**A:** Wireless fares much better in this case than fiber, cable or copper lines, which can break when trees fall anywhere along the route. If a tree crashes onto one of our poles, it may knock out an antenna or, under extreme circumstances, the pole, though many of the poles are taller than the surrounding trees. A repair crew will then be dispatched. System has redundant internet backup.

**Q: Won't I lose service when the power goes out?**

**A:** All of our tower and pole equipment has battery backup. The equipment at your home can be configured with an uninterruptible power supply if necessary. For customers who use our service as their primary telephone service, battery backup is included.