

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS RELATING TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Port of Clarkston is excited that its planning and fiber investments, which began in 2011, are reaching a broader population through three new Fiber-to-the-Home projects in 2022-2023. This is intended to help constituents understand the topic and how the Port's roll out may benefit them. (Many businesses, the local school districts, medical facilities, the library, and people who receive services from Asotin County are already beneficiaries.) This connectivity is frequently referred to as "broadband."

What is fiber?

The connection to high speed internet using a strand of glass the size of a human hair is one of the swiftest conduits for electronic data transmission. It is referred to as fiber optic cable. Data is transmitted by sending light through the glass fibers in cables that hold multiple strands. Before fiber became so common, data was sent using electricity via copper wire. That was much slower.

What fiber investments is the Port of Clarkston making?

The Port has built a strategically-placed backbone of high count fiber optic cable. Construction firms place them on utility poles or in roadway rights-of-way. Some of the first connections off this backbone were for telecommunications towers. That way, a broad group of users had access to faster calls and frequently also internet through cellular phone companies. Remember a time when you had to go to one corner of your house, asking over and over, "Can you hear me now?" Have you noticed you don't have to do that so much any more? Perhaps you experience fewer dropped calls. Having the right kind of connectivity can make a world of difference in how you interact with the outside world.

But, why is the Port of Clarkston investing? Why not someone else?

Washington State Port Districts were created for economic development. In 2011, when the Port of Clarkston was deciding its role in providing connectivity, it determined that its tradition of investing in infrastructure (roads, water, sewer, natural gas) included providing connections so that families and businesses in rural areas could prosper. The Port was considering construction of an industrial park on the west, less-connected side of the community. To get just one company to provide phone service to the industrial park was going to cost nearly as much as laying down one conduit and placing a 96-strand cable in the conduit. The difference was if the Port owned the conduit and the cable, it could lease the other 95 strands to other service providers and the whole area could be lit up. Customers could have choices, and hopefully, their costs would be lower due to the competition.

So, you're saying the Port of Clarkston partners with others to make high-speed connections?

Yes. To date, the Port does not light the fiber, and thereby does not provide the actual connection. Instead, it prefers to partner with for-profit internet service providers who then compete make the kinds of connections desired by the customers. Presently, ten different internet service providers are leasing fiber from the Port. The Port believes this model (frequently referred to as the "dark fiber model" because no electronics are sending light to transmit data), where the right-of-way is only dug up once, but all companies benefit, is an efficient way to go. Imagine if there was an interstate highway for each business that wanted to move freight. We all benefit from a public highway system. In the same way, our community

benefits from publicly owned fiber which can be leased for business purposes by any internet service provider approved to operate in Washington.

Okay, what's this Fiber-to-the-Home thing?

The Port of Clarkston's investments started out small—biting off what it could chew, so to speak. So for many years, the Port invested in “backbone”—the strategic investments from which it could grow. In 2020, the Port celebrated connecting the two incorporated cities in Asotin County, which are Clarkston and Asotin. Now the Port is filling in the gaps.

When people had to work, learn and even get medical care from their homes during the early periods of Covid-19, it became abundantly clear that reliable high-speed connections were essential. Part of the federal Covid recovery funds encouraged construction of broadband infrastructure. The Port of Clarkston competed and was awarded funding for three different fiber-to-the-home projects. To view maps of this projects, please go to: portofclarkston.com/land/telecommunications/ and select the Port of Clarkston's Fiber System Map. It shows the backbone and also each of the three projects--in the order in which they will be rolled out. The first one, northwest Clarkston Heights, is expected to be fully connected Spring 2023.

How do I know what the choices are with regard to Internet Service Providers?

The Asotin County Library keeps an active list of Internet Service Providers operating in Asotin County. Call 509-758-5454 during open hours.

What if I need advice on computers or other smart devices for access?

The Asotin County Library has on staff Digital Navigators who can assist you in making these decisions. Use the same number above to reach a Digital Navigator.