

## Re-building Internet Access Services in Georgia's Public Libraries

**Public Internet access is now an essential, foundational service of public libraries.**

### The Library in the Networked World

We've moved from the information age to the networked age. We've moved so quickly, that the digital divide has grown wider as the demand for more/faster/more ubiquitous information becomes more urgent.

Libraries are the most frequent sites of broadband access outside the home. As employers and government agencies automate services online, public libraries play an even more important role in ensuring access to the Internet, as well as training and support in using these resources."

—John B. Horrigan, Ph.D., Federal Communications Commission

### 2010 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2009-2010

- 70% of libraries report increased use of public access workstations and 75% report increased use in Wi-Fi over last year
- 67% of libraries report staff members helped patrons in completing online job applications in the past year
- Only 13% of libraries currently plan to increase broadband speed/capability in the forthcoming year.
- ***Cost, not availability, of higher speed bandwidth is the primary constraint to improving broadband. This may be true for most public library services, but because of the pre-existing state-wide network model, cost is not the primary constraint for Georgia. The biggest hurdle to providing a 21<sup>st</sup>-Century network is changing our business model.***

### Current state of Georgia's Library Network

***In Georgia, 58 percent of public libraries report being the only free access to computers and Internet in their communities.***

"Staff at a few of the libraries noted that in addition to the community at large, this access has proven to be critical for students at colleges in their region. For example, the library at a community college in the Southwest Georgia Regional Library service area closes at Noon on Friday and is only open for four hours on Saturday, and the students depend on the public library for computers, Internet access, and research resources and assistance.

"Public access technology has maintained a priority position in the suppressed budgets of the interviewed libraries, with the greatest impact to collections, open hours and staffing levels. The need for basic level computer training still is very high, and many libraries reported having trouble meeting the demand due to staff shortages and lack of dedicated computers for training

and... providing assistance for e-government services and job search.” (2011-2012 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, Georgia Report.)

“Even after system upgrades in 2011, due to the broadband demands of online video and social media, 70 percent of Georgia’s libraries experience network saturation on a daily basis. (GPLS newsletter, February 2012.)

### Samples from Wireless Usage & Traffic Study in GA Public Libraries 2010

71.0% of respondents reported that the patron use of public access computers has gone **up** since the introduction of wireless service.

#### Traffic

We took representative samples of traffic growth from the following categories:

- An entire LATA --- Augusta
- A large system --- DeKalb
- A large library --- South Columbus
- A medium library --- Richmond Hill
- A small library --- Lucy Maddox

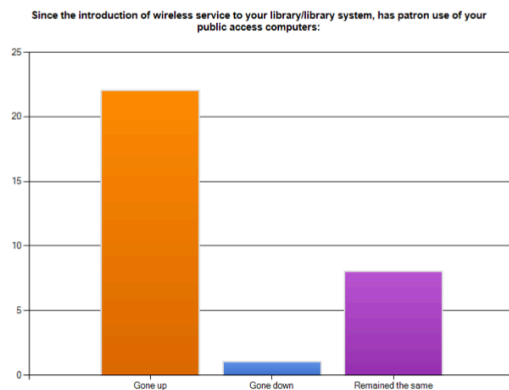
Dekalb County System:

2010: **16% Increase** in Traffic

2009: 33% Increase in Traffic

South Columbus, Lucy Maddox & Richmond Hill:

2010: total saturation on a daily basis – maximum traffic the network will allow.



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## **Current state of Georgia's Library Network - Business Model**

*GPLS has been expending about **\$1.933 Million annually**, for an average of 4-6 megabits per second (Mbps) to each library facility. This means that **78% of Georgia's Public Libraries are falling short of what the FCC defines as broadband.***

The state funding represents approximately 20% of the total network cost. The remaining 80% is funded from the Federal Communications Commission Universal Service Fund E-Rate Program and paid directly to the Internet Service Providers (ISPs). (This \$1.933M serves as a substantial portion of the required state match for Federal Library Services and Technology Act annual grant funding.)

The existing statewide Enterprise library network model was implemented in the 1990's. This model was cutting edge at a time when there was very limited Internet availability in much of Georgia and when most of the Internet traffic was library business related. The demand today in public libraries is for high capacity consumer grade Internet connectivity for the public's access to digital information.

## **Strategic Plan**

Recognizing that affordable, local commercial bandwidth is increasingly available in most communities, GPLS has initiated a voluntary migration of Internet access for the library systems from the statewide network to local vendor-provided broadband. Even prior to this GPLS decision, a few library systems had already begun moving in this direction. They began achieving **5-10 times the bandwidth capacity for less than 50% of the current statewide network costs.**

As of this date, 126 Georgia public library facilities have been approved by the FCC E-Rate program to receive discount consumer broadband services from local providers.

GPLS provides assistance to the library systems in these migrations. Helping to identify and negotiate with local vendors, providing technical support, and E-Rate application assistance is part of the GPLS service. Funding-wise, the \$1.933M of state network support is being made available to the library systems to pay the non-E-Rated portion of their ongoing broadband cost.

Without the E-Rate program, the majority of Georgia's libraries would be unable to provide Internet connectivity as a service to our patrons.