

# County ponders \$2.3 million fiber optics 'investment'

By Mike Marturello

[mikem@kpcnews.net](mailto:mikem@kpcnews.net) | Posted: Wednesday, September 8, 2010 12:00 am

ANGOLA — Steuben County Commissioners are considering spending \$2.3 million in Major Moves Transportation fund money on expansion of a fiber optics system that is being developed in the county.

With about 20 supporters attending the Tuesday meeting of the commissioners, Bill Geiger of Indiana Metropolitan Area Network based in Angola requested the funding from the county.

Though he did not receive a commitment, officials said the project was the type of investment the county was looking to make with the spending of Major Moves money.

“We want to invest these funds,” said Commissioner F. Mayo Sanders, “and this is one of the ways we want to invest these funds.”

Steuben County Councilman Paul Sparks said the development of the iMAN network was one of the key components of the recently released Steuben County Economic Development Corp. strategic plan.

“Without (fiber optics broadband) we are not going to move the the direction we want to move,” Sparks said.

The firm iMAN is a non-profit organization that operates under the umbrella of the Steuben County Community Foundation. Profits from user fees from the system revert to the Community Foundation.

The money from Steuben County would help iMAN build the final 68 miles of the fiber optics network. This would connect all schools in the county with fiber optics. The system is currently centered in Angola. The network connects Angola government, all Metropolitan School District of Steuben County schools (except Pleasant Lake Elementary), Cameron Memorial Community Hospital and medical offices in the city.

The network is on its way to being extended to Fremont, which is to be completed this year. The plan is to connect the network to the north Emergency Medical Service station on S.R. 120 at C.R. 50W, the Fox Lake Road area, Pleasant Lake and Pleasant Lake to C.R. 700S.

Work would continue next year to take fiber to Hamilton, Ashley-Hudson, Orland and Prairie Heights Community Schools. In 2012 the network would expand to Clear Lake, York, Metz, Salem Center and Flint.

The goal is to then expand the network to neighboring counties, possibly working through their community foundations.

County attorney Don Stuckey said the project would have to be put out to bid in order to meet state guidelines.

Commissioners said they could commit to the funds then reimburse the project as bills come due, once the bidding process takes place.

Commissioners are supposed to take up the matter again at their Sept. 20 meeting at 9:45 a.m.