The Upper Shore Regional Council (USRC) was created in October 2003 (Chapter 100, Acts of 2003) by the Maryland General Assembly. The Council is a regional planning and development agency for Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's counties on the Eastern Shore of the State of Maryland. It exists to foster the physical, economic and social development of the region. The Council is comprised of twenty-seven (27) members. These include the County Commissioners of our three Maryland Counties (13 members); one municipal elected official, appointed by their municipal corporations, from each of Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's counties (3 members); and members of the Maryland General Assembly whose legislative election district encompasses any or all of the region (8 members). In addition, the County Administrators of Cecil, Kent, and Queen Anne’s County serve on the Council (3 members). The USRC maintains standing Committees comprised of Council members and representatives of business, government and communities for Sustainable Agriculture and Economic Development. Within the Economic Development Committee, a sub-committee for Broadband Development and Resource Sharing includes representatives of education (both K-12 and colleges), rural health officials and hospitals, internet service providers, business and government economic development and information technology representatives. Since its inception, the USRC has utilized innovative methods to bring Broadband access to this rural region where small populations scattered in and outside of small towns has made it economically infeasible for private sector internet service providers to build the necessary infrastructure and realize a sufficient client base to return a profit. The USRC's Legislative Executive Board Representative, Senator E. J. Pipkin, introduced legislation which led to the formation of the Task Force on Broadband Communications Deployment in Underserved Rural Areas of Maryland. The Task Force, under the Chairmanship of Senator Pipkin, commissioned studies including The Maryland Eastern Shore Broadband Network Strategic Plan Final Report prepared by TLA Associates of Alexandria, Virginia which documented the absence of Broadband access in most areas of the upper shore region and the lack of affordable access or sufficient capacity in all areas of the region. Following the research of the Task Force, Senator Pipkin introduced legislation that provided $10 million in state funding to leverage additional funds and to begin building a fiber optic Broadband infrastructure throughout the rural areas of Maryland that would enable private sector internet service providers to provide last mile Broadband access to our residents, government agencies and businesses. United States Senator Barbara Mikulski joined the effort and brought federal agencies, including NASA and the PAX River Naval Air Station, also having Broadband infrastructure needs into the partnership. The USRC, in partnership with Maryland’s other Regional and Tri-County Councils on the Eastern Shore created the Maryland Broadband Cooperative (MdBC) and began to build a major highway network that would provide the infrastructure
to allow middle mile and eventually last mile connectivity. Under the leadership of the USRC’s Executive Director John Dillman, who served as the Founding Chairman of the Maryland Broadband Cooperative and the continued involvement of the USRC’s legislative members who led the rural broadband issue through the Maryland General Assembly, the MdBC, in a period of three years, has constructed 259 route miles of a fiber backbone in rural Maryland. This network will provide 29,232 fiber miles of infrastructure connected to major networks when it is completed within the current year. However, the rural nature of the upper shore region, coupled with a dispersed business sector that has agriculture as the number one industry, followed by such spread out industries including the marine industry around the Chesapeake Bay and its scattered tributaries, small businesses and tourism related activities, requires a middle mile infrastructure to enable private internet service providers (ISP’s) to reach the majority of our population, businesses, and educational resources. This grant request is for the purpose of building the middle mile connections from the major fiber highway to the points of presence of internet service providers, wireless internet service providers, tower sites, and other points that will enable these providers to economically provide broadband service to the citizens and businesses of the upper shore region of Maryland including Cecil County, Kent County, and Queen Anne’s County, Maryland. The 2010 estimated population for this area is 172,800 residents. In accordance with the 2000 census, the project will pass 54,204 households. In accordance with the 1997 Economic Census of the U.S. Census Bureau, the region had 11,786 businesses of which 3,786 are women and minority owned. Inasmuch as Cecil County has been the fastest growing county in the State of Maryland and the population of Queen Anne’s County has increased by over 20%, the above numbers have increased respectively. The completed network will pass through and provide broadband accessibility to twenty-one (21) incorporated municipalities, three colleges, five (5) campuses with affiliations with five universities, seven (7) nursing homes, forty (40) assisting living facilities, three (3) hospitals and numerous medical offices and complexes. Each of the upper shore counties will use the network to provide emergency services, public school operations, public government operations and public notification, library services, and other activities for their only means of internet access, for redundancy and/or for increasing capacity to necessary levels. This middle mile component will consist of a 48 count or less, depending on the population and potential number of users at the end point, of fiber optic laterals off of the MdBC network providing redundant rings or terminating at an end point with access for connecting to private internet service providers to deliver the last mile to customers. Once constructed, the fiber will be resource shared to the Maryland Broadband Cooperative and then made available to the private internet service providers who are members of the Cooperative at favorable rates. This will enable these private ISP’s to create a profitable return on the last mile connection to the existing demand market. The relationship between the USRC and the MdBC provides a common link to share resources and the common goal of bringing ubiquitous access to Broadband service to the region. All three Maryland Counties covered are committed to this project bringing the personnel expertise and other county resources in combination with the resources and expertise of the MdBC and the USRC. Providing Broadband deployment to Maryland’s Eastern Shore was estimated to provide a total output of $2.4 billion over a ten year period. It was estimated that it would provide a 7.2% increase in employment with 15,242 new direct jobs, 25,956 total jobs providing a $790 million payroll. $20.5 million in direct state sales and income tax, $5.8 million in direct local income tax; $32 million in total (direct and indirect) state taxes and $9 million in local income tax were projected as a result of having
Broadband capabilities throughout the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Beyond revenue generation, however, the Upper Shore Regional Council has the ability to improve the lives of our citizens, the health of our community, the preservation of our most precious natural resources and maintain the rural heritage and nature of Maryland’s upper eastern shore by bringing the resources of Broadband throughout the region.