

Saco River Area Ascertainment Report

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Prepared by:

Copen & Lind

Cable Access Consultants

22 Ward St.

Amherst, Massachusetts 01002

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Introduction

The Telecommunications Bill of 1996 was both a product of, and has resulted in, increased attention to the importance of telecommunications. Municipalities all over the country are becoming aware that their communications infrastructure is, and will be in the near future, a determinant of economic well-being for business and a necessary and valuable resource for the community as a whole.

This community needs assessment reflects the cable-related needs and concerns expressed by public officials, institutional leaders, educators and citizens in the Towns of Buxton, Hollis, Limerick, Limington, Standish and Waterboro. This Ascertainment Report will serve to give guidance in determining the terms and provisions for franchise renewal.

The Saco River Area Environment

The six towns that make up the Saco River area cable system are generally rural in nature with approximately 6,000 cable subscribing households out of approximately 8,800 homes passed (67% penetration). In the past, each of these towns negotiated its individual Cable Franchise Agreement. Since all six of these towns are served by the same cable operator and the signals in each of these towns originate from a common cable system head-end located in Bar Mills, the towns have decided to work together to ascertain their needs and to negotiate the Cable Franchise Agreement(s).

The Saco River Cable Committee with representation from each of the towns has been appointed by each towns' select board or council in order to oversee and report on this process. The committee representatives have voiced concerns regarding system reliability, poor signal quality, and poor or slow service in the past by the cable company when responding to service complaints, the slow response to line extension requests, the delay in installing line extensions even when they met the requirements of the franchise, the desire for universal service, concern over length of contract, the need for more government, educational and public access channels and desire to increase the capacity of the system to provide interactive television for adult education.

Technical Profile

As part of the ascertainment, FrontierVision's current assessment of the technical, electronic and mechanical status and channel capacity, including currently occupied frequencies, of the Saco River cable plant was requested.

Among other things the company supplied documentation which contained the following information:

- 8,864 Homes passed by the cable
- There are 331.4 aerial miles and 8.6 underground miles equaling 340 miles of cable plant
- The plant is designed at 300 MHz with a channel capacity of 36 downstream channels. By equalizing the system to 330 MHz this channel capacity has been expanded to 42 channels, all of which are currently carrying programming. "This represents totally loaded channel capacity in all systems."¹

Of the 8,864 homes passed 5,951 are subscribers. This represents 67% penetration and indicates that there is potential for growth within the present system.

The bulk of the system is fifteen years old and is currently being operating at 30 MHz above its rated capacity. This is being done to extend the system channel capacity at the expense of overall signal quality. Given these factors the need for a system rebuild to provide greater channel capacity and signal quality on the system is clearly indicated.

Current Contract

History:

The current contracts, for all of the six towns, were for a term of 15 years and were signed in 1982 and 1983. This was before the Federal Cable Act of 1984, the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992, and the Telecommunications Act of 1996. The 15 year term did not anticipate the many changes that have taken place in communications technology over this period.

¹ 12/23/96 letter from Jim Romanelli at FrontierVision to Tony Vigure, Chairman of the Saco River Cable Committee.

All six contracts had scant provisions for community communications. There are no provisions for Institutional Loops and little or no capital grants for Access equipment and facilities. Additionally the franchise fees which go to the towns were based on: either no franchise fee at all (Limerick and Limington), or up to a maximum of three percent (3%), (Standish) of annual gross subscriber revenues² from basic services, rather than the 5% of total gross revenues allowed by the 1984 Act. There was only one channel for public use and that was to be shared between the six towns with no separate channels for government or the two regional school districts.

The provisions for the public, schools or government to access the cable system are listed under the Miscellaneous franchise provisions in each separate contract as follows:

“The Grantee agrees to provide a shared access channel for public use on the basic service. The Grantee shall provide after one year, capability and equipment to enable the Town to cablecast on the public access channel. Grantee shall have ownership of said equipment; shall be responsible for its maintenance and shall bear the risk of loss of such equipment for accident, act of God, negligence or otherwise. In this regard Grantee shall carry all insurance necessary to replace said equipment if damaged, lost or destroyed.” - Buxton, Hollis and Waterboro Franchises pg. 17 - section XI(B); Standish Franchise GPs 17-18 - section XI(B); Limington Franchise pg. 15 - Section X(B); and Limerick Franchise pg. 16 - Section X(B).

Periodically, over the life of the six franchises, each of the successive cable operators has donated some equipment and/or capital grants to the access efforts in Saco River area totaling approximately \$9,821.

- 1983 One camera, tripod, portable VHS deck and simple character generator (computer bulletin board) are purchased by Saco River Communications to provide minimal video recording functions for the towns. - approx. \$3,735
- 1985 Four microphones, one microphone stand and one VHS player deck are purchased by Saco River Communications to allow for

² Buxton, Hollis and Waterboro, 1% @ 55% penetration, 1.5% @ 60%, 2% @ 65% and 2.5% @ 70% or higher; Standish - 2% @ 65% and 3% @ 70% or higher; Limerick and Limington - no franchise fee provision in Franchise;

- recording and cablecasting of taped delayed meetings. - approx. \$1,050
- 1992 United Video replaces the 1983 character generator with an Atari 8-bit computer bulletin board system. - approx. \$500
- 1993 United Video replaces the 1983 camera system and tripod and the 1985 cablecasting deck is also replaced. This equipment grant is given to Standish specifically. - approx. \$2,500
- 1996 Upon request by Buxton FrontierVision purchases one SVHS Camcorder and tripod for Buxton specifically - \$2,036. This equipment was delivered to Buxton after the town reiterated the above franchise paragraph to FrontierVision's representative.

It appears that the cable operators have not met the minimal franchise requirement set forth in the contract(s). Of the six towns only Standish has a return line to the cable system headend so only the Standish town offices have the "capability" to cablecast programming or to provide live programming to the residents of all six towns.

The equipment listed above does not appear to meet the franchise requirements to give each town "capability and equipment to enable that Town to cablecast on the public access channel."

Government/Public Access

With the exception of the recent (1997) equipment for Buxton, the access equipment that has been provided by the cable company is housed in the Standish Town Offices where it is primarily used by Standish for government access purposes with limited public access, specifically: limited use and training on the equipment to produce programs for Standish residents only and limited access to cable casting of programs provided by other towns.

In recent years, the Standish town government has placed its portion of the franchise fees into a fund from which money needed for equipment and staffing for government access (and limited public access for Standish residents with occasional tapes played for other towns) are drawn. Since 1990 the Town of Standish has used their cable franchise fees to purchase \$37,500 worth of video/audio production equipment for Saco River Community Television to provide remote recording and basic editing with cablecasting functions and automated tape playback from the Standish Municipal Building on Channel 3.

Currently the towns of Buxton and Waterboro are taping their town council meetings for delayed cablecasting on the shared access channel. All cablecasting on this channel is done from the Standish Town offices using a combination of cable company provided equipment and equipment purchased by Standish from their franchise fee fund.

During the ascertainment process some towns voiced a desire for a full-time government access channel. Those towns that are now involved in government programming want to have equipment and channel control in order to show their meetings, some of them live. In looking over the system the consultants are recommending that this could be accomplished with one channel, instead of individual channels for each town (i.e. six government access channels), by including in the RFP a provision for a single government access channel seen in all six towns but designed so that each of the towns has the ability to preempt the primary feed within its own boundaries with live programming from its town offices. For example:

On Wednesday night Buxton has a Selectman's meeting which they want to go out to the Buxton residents live. The signal currently being seen in all six towns on the government channel is a computer generated bulletin board with area governmental announcements on it. At 7:00 pm the operator at the Buxton Town Offices flips a switch turning on the Buxton modulator to begin the meeting coverage. Anyone within the town limits of Buxton would see that meeting coming from the Buxton Town Offices - the Buxton Town Selectman's Meeting on the government access channel. Meanwhile the subscribers in the other five towns are still seeing the computer bulletin board on the government access channel. At 8:00 pm the same evening the Town of Waterboro is holding a special government meeting. The operator in Waterboro turns on their modulator and the residents of Waterboro can watch the government meeting live on the government access channel while the remaining four towns still see the bulletin board and Buxton residents are still watching their Selectman's Meeting.

By using this one channel with preempt capability the need for all six towns to control their channel for live and simultaneous communication with their own residents can be satisfied.

Regarding Public Access, there has been discussion of creating a regional non-profit Community Public Access facility that would be overseen by a community

board which would in turn be overseen by a Cable Advisory Board with representatives of the six Towns. This would allow for efficient and effective use of a pool of equipment and operating funds and would eliminate the need for six separate public access channels, six separate cablecasting sites, six separate equipment packages of cameras, lighting, editing etc. and staff at six separate locations. One central place where training and staffing could meet the needs of all the residents of the six towns and where each town could put a portion of its franchise fee for staffing and operating costs. So far the Schoolhouse Arts Center and St. Joseph's College have been mentioned as possible sites.

The consultants interviewed staff at the Schoolhouse Arts Center and looked at the facility. The current organization teaches classes in various arts to children and adults and puts on performances of plays to a wide community. The Access Center could be housed at the Schoolhouse Arts Center since there is sufficient room that could be renovated into an adequate television studio and control room, editing, remote equipment and cablecasting areas. The missions of the Schoolhouse and Public Access could be compatible. The nonprofit Public Access center would be governed by an independent community board which would be overseen by representatives of a Cable Committee. It would also serve as the central cablecasting area for government delayed tapes and the government bulletin board that would be seen by all the towns on the government access channel. This would further lessen staffing needs by the towns, reduce equipment duplication and subsequent expenditures.

Recently all six towns have ratified a resolution supporting public access and the concept of a regional center. Standish ratified with some modifications to the original proposal but has proposed to set aside funds for this purpose awaiting approval of Rules and Procedures for the proposed Access Corporation.

Educational Access

The six Towns are served by two regional School Districts: Sad #6 for Buxton, Hollis, Standish and Limington and SAD #57 for Waterboro and Limerick. There are a total of 12 schools in SAD #6 and 4 schools within the franchise area from SAD #57 which includes the Massabesic school complex in Waterboro.

In 1984 Saco River Communications Corporation made a Side Agreement with SAD #6 to provide them with an educational access channel on the Saco River cable system. Since that time the various cable operators have donated equipment and capital grants to SAD #6 totaling approximately \$6,105, separate

from any franchise or side agreement stipulations. SAD #6 has purchased from school budget money approx. \$18,350 worth of audio/video production equipment to tape school board meetings and set up educational access television Channel 9, Bonny Eagle Television at Bonny Eagle High School.

In addition , Saco River Telephone has donated wiring and equipment to SAD #6 that has allowed them to create a data network between all of the schools in SAD #6, and also provides InterNet Access. All of the schools within SAD #6 are wired for data networking and a little less than half of the schools are fully wired to receive cable television in the classroom.

In contrast SAD #57 has no presence on the Saco River Cable system and has no video equipment and does not have an educational access channel. Additionally, none of the schools are wired for data networking and only some of the classrooms in the schools are wired to receive cable television.

Ascertainment questionnaires were distributed to teachers and staff at the schools in SAD #6 and SAD #57. 140 questionnaires were returned from SAD #6 and 111 were returned from SAD #57 for a total of 251 respondents.

In the 140 ascertainment questionnaires returned from SAD #6 which has access to Bonny Eagle Television and data networking, 34 % are using cable TV with their students, 79% are using E-Mail and 66% are using the InterNet. Additionally 95 % said that they saw the use of these technologies as being beneficial.

In the 111 ascertainment questionnaires returned from SAD #57 which does not have provisions for an educational access channel, equipment for training, or data interconnection, only 6% are using cable TV, 13% E-Mail and 22% are using the InterNet. The questionnaire responses showed that the majority (75%) of the respondents from SAD #57 felt that an educational data interconnect between the schools would be useful.

Since the local Telephone Company has already provided the means for the SAD #6 schools to be networked it appears that the only place that a full function Voice/Video/Data I-Net is needed for educational purposes is between the SAD #57 schools with interconnections to the SAD #6 High school and Middle school. In addition, to help address this technological disparity between the two school systems it is recommended that an additional educational access channel be set

aside on the cable system for use by SAD #57. The municipal I-Net should also be connected to this system providing data interchange to and from town offices.

Line Extension

A primary concern raised repeatedly during the course of the ascertainment was for universal, or near universal, coverage so that all residents within the six towns will be able to access the cable system.

The current franchise documents require that there be twenty (20) subscribers per mile before the cable is brought into an area. This density requirement is inadequate to meet the needs of the six communities. It does need to be recognized, however, that given the rural nature of the communities it may be necessary to continue with some form of minimum density requirement but a figure such as eight dwellings per mile would be far more appropriate to these six communities, would come fairly close to universal coverage and could realistically add as many as 1,000 more subscribers for the cable company on the Saco River System.

There were requests to extend the maximum length of a "standard installation" from 250 feet to 300 feet to match telephone and power company standards.

Saco River Area Focus Groups

Three separate community workshops were held. One each for government, education, and organization/ public access needs and concerns. Details about current and future cable related capabilities were discussed. Participants asked questions, offered comments and filled out questionnaires specific to the areas under discussion.

In the government focus group, select board members and town council members expressed interest in line extensions, discussed government access television, possibilities for I-Net and bulletin boards to provide inter-town communications and information to the public. Participants filled out questionnaires and additional questionnaires were sent out and responded to by other government representatives.

20 Questionnaires have been returned from individuals from the following areas
:

Chair of the Buxton Appeals Board, Chair of the Standish Planning Board, State Representative from Standish, Hollis Selectman, Hollis Town Clerk, Deputy Clerk from Hollis, 2 Secretaries from Hollis, Standish Recreation Director, Chair of the Buxton Planning Board, Planning Board Member, Secretary from Standish, Chair of the Buxton Budget Committee, 2 Selectmen from Buxton, Buxton Transfer Station, 3 State Representatives from Hollis Buxton and Standish, Planning Board Member from Standish.

In their responses to the questionnaire:

71% thought that it was very important to have local programming available for government, public and educational access channels, 23 % moderately important and 1 person out of twenty though it was not important.

73% of Standish and Buxton respondents to the question stated that a video/data interconnect between town buildings (I-Net) would be useful to their department, 9% said maybe and 18% said no.

Respondents indicated that their area would benefit from: 70% using live or taped meeting coverage, 65% government information on a interactive bulletin board system, 55% live coverage of community events, 55% video tape duplication services, 50% viewing past tape of programs, 50% for equipment and training to create programs.

76% of respondents stated that they thought it will be more important in the future to provide information on government services, to show town government in action or to bring in materials from other locations in the future to provide information on government services.

Respondents wrote in both factors that would help them to use access television as well as general comments:

“To have facilities, assistance in usage - training and materials”, “Direct connect for same day viewing”, “Information booklet for detailing procedures for obtaining and using equipment on producing and broadcasting for viewers”, “connect towns for meetings on like concerns”, “easy access to production facilities”, “Have pay per view available and more channels”, “Let more remote areas subscribe, especially Pequaket

Lake in Limington”, Consider NET a political station given for free”, “Education about what is available to us and how other municipalities are using it”, “Training of staff members for items relating to video tape duplication”, “Availability and training resources”, “Better sound equipment”, “Better camera operators”, “Need for equipment”, “Training of Town Personnel/Boards”, “Send schedule of Government/Public Information programs to households in our Town”, “The more information the better. Probably more people get their Standish news through cable than any other way. We have no town newspaper and many people don’t subscribe even to the Portland Press Herald. Video/TV they can handle - it’s easy to comprehend and it’s free (to them) since they are already on cable”, “Live telecasting of community events would get more people involved”, “Many members of the town don’t understand exactly what goes on in all town committee meetings. Information swaps between committees could provide greater awareness of common goals”, “Being able to summarize the budget process after the vote is done”, “Availability of equipment”, “Proper training for use of equipment”, “Funding”, “It would be nice to be able to receive direct viewing of training tapes or presentations from Universities for our police, rescue and fire fighters”.

Educational

At the Educational Workshop there were four representatives from the schools: the Principal from the Bonny Eagle Middle School, the SAD #6 Technologist, the Director of the School Board from SAD #6, and the Superintendent of Schools from Sad #6. It was decided to distribute questionnaires to other teachers, administrators and board members in both SAD #6 and SAD #57 for more input. 140 questionnaires were returned from SAD #6 and 111 from Sad #57 with a total of 251 educational questionnaires received.

Of the total responding to questions:

69% indicated that an interconnect between the schools would be useful to their school/department, 28% said maybe and only 3% were disinterested.

79% indicated that students would be interested in video production and/or media literacy courses.

73% indicated that an I-Net between school buildings, town hall, the library and other public buildings would be useful to the schools.

72% indicated that a dedicated channel for educational programming to be used by the schools would be desirable, 28% said maybe, and only 1% said no.

To the question "How significant is the availability of local programming for government, public and educational access channels to you as an educator?" 37.6% said very important, 49.6% said moderately important and only 12.8% said not important.

The majority of the respondents indicated that Distance Learning would or might be an effective teaching tool. The questionnaires indicated that the following study areas would be of value: 51% checked Science, 49% checked Social Studies, 41% checked Foreign Language and 36% checked Health.

Organizational/Public Access

The organizational/public access workshop brought out some of the Towns' organizations and public. It was decided to get questionnaires to organizational representatives who were not present for their input. The consultants have learned that the citizens of the six towns are not enthusiastic about attending meetings. The town governments and school boards have repeatedly cited lack of participation at meetings as a local problem.

However, there was interest expressed at the meeting by a local State Legislator for Buxton and Hollis, a representative from the West Buxton Public Library and Buxton-Hollis Historical Society, a high school student, three members of the Schoolhouse Arts Center, a representative from the Hollis Bicentennial Commission, a Buxton Cable Board Member, a representative from TOPS and a Limington representative to the Saco River Cable Committee.

In total between the workshop and distributed questionnaires there were a total of 36 respondents from individuals and groups cited above and including:

Lake Arrowhead Community Inc., Salmon Falls Library, Saco Valley Civic Association, Saco River Grange Hall, the Pythian Sisters, the Dorcas Society, the Buxton Toy Box, the Buxton Newsletter Committee, Buxton Planning Board, Bar Mills Community Church, Buxton Recreation Department, Waterboro Public Library, a number of general citizens, the

Limerick Public Library, Buxton Hollis Food Cupboard, Limington Grange,

Of the 36 Questionnaires completed, there was an overwhelming emphasis in learning to use public access and InterNet services and a desire to create and view programs of local interest for their organizational members.

90% of those who responded to the question were interested in having programs about their organizations services appear on the local access channels.

86% of those who answered questionnaires have watched Saco River Community Television. 81% have watched Bonny Eagle Television.

77% of those responding to the question thought that having a television production facility in the community would be a valuable resource.

76% of those responding to the question were interested in having InterNet access as part of the cable service.

Of those responding to the question, 46% indicated that the availability of local programming was very important, 42% indicated moderately important and only 12 % felt that is was not important.

Respondents wrote in that they were interested in locally made programs on:

Local Talk Show, Hobby - Gardening Clubs, Local Hot Issues, Performances - Dramas and Musicals, Education- How to Programs, New Books and Special Activities at the Library, Schedule of Programs for the Local Historical Society, Student Produced Variety Shows, Education Classes, Performances, Health and Fitness Programs, Planning Board Meetings, Town Council Meetings, Brief Presentations Explaining Local Ordinances regarding hunting, Fishing, snowmobiles etc.,. Local Interest News, Major News in the Community, Crime Watch, Social Events, Children's Hour, How Important Volunteers are and What they can Do, Historical Preservation, Community History, Special Events Advertised, Concerts such as Blue Grass, Jazz, Classical, Fiddle Jamboree, Irish and Country, Theater, Modern Classics and Broadway Musicals, Contra Dances, Needy People, Annual Fair, Fundraising Events, Needs for Donations Kickoff Event, Charities, Town Issues and Events, Local History, Types of Services and Materials Available in the Library, Church Services, Summer Recreation Information, Programs for Shut-Ins, Red Cross CPR Truing, Child Care, Puppet Shows, Coming Events, Story

Time, Nutritional Information, Outstanding Citizen's Awards, Service Programs for All, Exercise Information, Just Plain Homespun Entertainment.

Written comments in the survey indicated a further interest in using public access but also reflected a need for more information about how to connect to the service offered by public access.

86% said that they had watched programs on Saco River Community and 65% said they would be interested in learning how to make programs for public access.

Respondents wrote in saying they would like "Money for equipment", "opportunity, training", "ease of access - location and convenient hours," "technical assistance", "availability of equipment", "reminders and updates about the availability of access", "open workshops available in camera and lighting etc.", "increased information on how to utilize public access", "knowledge in what is available in training, production and programming opportunities," "availability of equipment and training", "skilled facilitators", "equipment provided"

This is a very high percentage of viewership and interest especially given the limited amount of access programming now being shown or created in or by the 6 communities.

Public Hearing

As part of the Ascertainment a public hearing was held on June 19, 1997 at the Buxton Town Hall by the Saco River Cable Committee. There were 5 Cable Advisory members presiding one each from Standish, Waterboro, Buxton, Hollis, and Limington. Approximately 26 residents of the towns were present. Two town managers and 3 Select Board town representatives were present. Issues and needs put forth and discussed at the public hearing included:

- Many people still can not get cable. The desire for universal service was expressed. Streets with only a 1/4 mile of no wiring were cited and other streets that had no cabling even when the main cable line passed nearby
- The benefit of connecting UME into the cable system.
- The positive worth of training and production of programming at Bonny Eagle Television and the need to develop and expand the educational access television space within the building.

- The Desire for a “RoadRunner” type service for InterNet access
- Support for Public Access and Government access.
- A request for Classic Arts Showcase on the public access channel.
- Complaint that the system is 15 years old and made of aluminum cable and only some fiber in Standish. It is having problems as it has outlived its reliable life of 15 years. It needs to be rebuilt.
- The need for instrumentation monitoring of the channels on the system as currently there is no way for the company to know that there is an outage unless customers call the answering service.
- System capacity that will allow for InterNet access.
- Preventative maintenance on the system: currently, the audio on channel 20 is low, there is a buzz on the audio on some channels when bright video scenes appear, Channels 24, 25 and 26 are snowy in the winter, Channel 6 frequently has sync loss and buzz, audio on all channels varies from day to day indicating that frequent head end testing is not being done.
- Control of P.E. & G. Channels by the community
- Poor response to subscriber difficulties was countered by a cable company representative who offered that by fall there will be a 24 hour service staffed with Cable Company personnel to answer calls.
- In sections of Buxton, all channels are snowy. Channel 6 and 13 have ingress, a common problem throughout the system.
- The perception was given that some customer complaints are not being addressed by the Cable Company. However, subscribers have to let the cable company know there are problems, and document the call.
- The term of the new contract must be no more than 10 years with a 5 year reopener. There was discussion re a shorter five year contract to keep pace with technology changes. Ref. letter from Ed Gomes, S.A.D. 6 Educational Technologist.
- Addressable system to allow for pay-per-view and UME type courses
- A request for a local office since the nearest is now Rockland
- A once a year public hearing type review with cable company reps to address outstanding problems and update the public about new issues.

- When insertions are done they are not always switched back fast enough and there is an interval of blank screen before the satellite feed comes on .

Resident Surveys

The Town of Waterboro sent a survey to all of its residents and the Town of Hollis sent a different survey to all of its residents. Both surveys were intended to asses satisfaction with current cable services and to help determine future needs.

Waterboro Survey

There were 158 responses mailed back to Waterboro from this survey, 102 were cable subscribers, 4 were PrimeStar dish subscribers, 2 were residents who could be subscribers but choose not to be and 50 were from Waterboro residents who cannot be subscribers due to current line extension policies. The survey asked residents to rate the overall service received from United Video/FrontierVision on a five point scale (poor, fair, good, very good, excellent) in seven question areas. The survey also solicited comments and asked for information as to additional channels and services that respondents wanted.

In analyzing the survey responses the consultants noted that, as happens in many surveys, about one third of the responses for each of the questions falls in the “good” or middle range. For the most part we analyzed the responses by looking at the very good to excellent range (“VG-E”) and the fair to poor range (“F-P”).

In terms of billing and customer service the respondents were fairly evenly split with 33% rating F-P and 29% rating VG-E

Overall the surveys indicate a general satisfaction with the installation and repair service form UVC/Frontier with 45% rating it at VG-E and only 25 % rating in the F-P range.

Respondents were generally dissatisfied with the comparative cost of service with 73% ranking UVC/Frontier in the F-P range and only 16% ranking them in the VG-E range. It is interesting to note that this was the only question where the general one-third “good” notation did not hold true. In this question only 15% marked good.

The ratings for the companies support for access services were broken down into the three categories of Educational, Public and Government access equipment and funding. The responses for Service to the Schools (Educational access) were 44% F-P and 16% VG-E, Public access was 43% F-P and 24% VG-E and Government access was 38% F-P and 29% VG-E.

Finally in the Overall Value of Service question 47% marked F-P and only 18% marked VG-E.

The most common comments on this survey were “Too few channels for the Cost” (17), “Other nearby towns have many more channels” (9), “Poor TV reception at times” (6), and “Basic channels available are mostly worthless” (5).

In terms of additional channels requested the most request channels were: Pay-per-view (25), History Channel (18), ESPN-2 (16), Parental Lock-out capability (13), Comedy Channel (9), Ch. 56 Boston (7), Ch. 4,5,7 Boston (5) and the Home/Garden channel (5).

The fifty non-accessed respondents were unanimous in complaining of lack of service to the less populated sections of Waterboro.

Hollis Survey

A four-page survey was mailed to all residents in Hollis and 95 were returned. Of those 95, fifteen were not subscribers.

In general, subscribers were satisfied with the customer service on the system.

When asked how quickly the cable company fixed a reported problem, 62% of the subscriber responded in the “good” to “excellent” range.

Additionally, 72% indicated that the problem was resolved to their satisfaction in the “good” to “excellent” range.

More than half of the subscribers were not satisfied with the value that they receive for the fees that they pay for cable service.

68% of subscribers ranked Value for Cost in the fair to very poor range, 32% felt that the value was Good to Excellent

There was a very positive response to the importance of having PEG access programming and channels on the system.

88% of respondents felt that having public, educational, and government access programming and channels available was important or very important, 10% were neutral and only 2% saw it as unimportant.

Subscribers responded to questions about what they would like to see more or less of on the cable system. The categories which received the highest percentage of votes were:

52% - Better Reception/Fiber, 37% - Universal wiring, 34% - More movie channels, more entertainment channels and more culture/educational programs.

It is interesting to note that the second ranking item, even among subscribers who already have cable is universal wiring for all those who don't get cable.

The programming and services which subscribers ranked the lowest were:

2% - more home shopping, 11% more music video channels and more news/public affairs channels, and 12% - more financial news.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, these six towns are growing in their use of and desire for televised and interactive communications. Through workshops or from the public hearing or answered questionnaires as well as in discussions with the Saco River Cable Committee, various select Board or Council members and State Representatives it proved that the majority of representatives and individuals contacted are in favor of :

- A better cable system with better reception, more channels, significant line extensions, more public access for all, more educational access, more government access and interconnection within the schools and town offices.

and

- Organizations and individuals, schools and governments deemed it important that there be video training, programs and bulletin boards of local interest and information.

Through the Cable Refranchising process it is possible to meet these needs through the upgrade of the cable system to include more if not all households; provide good reception and a better selection of channels, proper support of

government, public, and educational access - operating, facilities and equipment; the wiring of town and school buildings to allow for Institutional Networks and better service response. This will create an infrastructure for cable services and other telecommunication services that will become the basis for meeting current and future needs and growth for the Towns of Buxton, Hollis, Limington, Limerick , Standish and Waterboro.