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Duncan, Ralston Announce EMC Partnership to Expand Broadband in Rural Middle Georgia; Central Georgia EMC, Southern Rivers Energy and Conexon expand broadband to 80,000 EMC members across 18 counties

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Atlanta, GA – Efforts to provide broadband in unserved areas of Georgia took another leap forward when Governor Brian Kemp, Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan and Speaker David Ralston made a [joint announcement](#) at the State Capitol today. Governor Kemp announced that Central Georgia EMC (Jackson, GA) and Southern Rivers Energy (Barnesville, GA) will form a new partnership with Conexon to provide high-speed internet to 80,000 homes and businesses in 18 Middle Georgia counties: Bibb, Butts, Clayton, Coweta, Crawford, Fayette, Henry, Jasper, Jones, Lamar, Meriwether, Monroe, Morgan, Newton, Pike, Putnam, Spalding, and Upson.

The partnership includes a capital investment of more than \$210 million overall. Central Georgia EMC (CGEMC) will invest \$135 million, Southern Rivers Energy (SRE) will invest \$53 million, and Conexon will contribute \$21.5 million. Monroe County has also committed \$1.3 million in local funds to incentivize the EMCs to start their projects in Monroe County.

Under terms of the agreement, the EMCs will partner with Conexon, a full-service fiber broadband provider, to design and build a 6,890 mile fiber network that will serve two strategic purposes: provide improved electric service and increased reliability through smart grid capabilities, and provide high-speed internet access to all 80,000 of the two EMCs' members within the next four years, beginning as early as June 2021. Conexon works exclusively with electric cooperatives and is considered one of the pioneers in the electric cooperative broadband movement.

The two EMCs will own the fiber and lease excess capacity to Conexon which has agreed to serve every EMC member with fiber-to-the-home internet speeds up to 1 gigabit per second. The internet service will be powered by EMC fiber, but Conexon will provide the retail service to homes and businesses, managing account set-up, customer service and billing.

"The announcement we are making today will have a real impact on the lives of countless hardworking Georgians. With expanded broadband access comes new job opportunities, improved education tools, and access to telemedicine," said **Governor Kemp**. "This partnership is why I signed Senate Bill 2 in 2019 to allow EMCs the authority to provide broadband service. The legislation was intended to encourage what you see today - EMCs and community leaders, working together on creative solutions to close the gap between those with internet service and those without. This is an important leap forward, but make no mistake: we are just getting started. I will continue working alongside Lieutenant Governor Duncan, Speaker Ralston, and leaders in both chambers to expand access and opportunity for the people of rural Georgia."

"As we work together to move all of Georgia forward, our partners across the state understand that access to broadband, high-speed internet, is a fundamental component for continued growth," said **Lieutenant Governor Geoff Duncan**. "I want every Georgian to have access to reliable, quality internet and today we are taking a giant leap in that direction. I applaud the commitment of local EMCs to partner and invest in this project. This is a prime example of their continued dedication to the communities and members they serve. The expansion of rural broadband will remain a top priority for the Senate as we look for ways to close internet gaps across the state."

"The House has focused intently over the last several years to expand economic opportunity in rural Georgia," said **Speaker David Ralston**. "Thanks to our partners like Georgia's EMCs, we are now seeing the fruits of that labor as high-speed broadband is being deployed in rural communities across our state. I appreciate the efforts of all those involved and the members of the General Assembly who have worked on critical legislation, like Senate Bill 2, to make today's announcement possible. We will continue to work with Governor Kemp, Lieutenant Governor Duncan, and our colleagues in the Senate to ensure that prosperity is accessible to every Georgian – regardless of your zip code."

"The need for rural broadband access is one of Georgia's most pressing challenges," said **PSC Commissioner Tricia Pridemore**. "As a utility regulator, I have seen that better connectivity helps Georgia ratepayers and allows our state to remain competitive."

"EMC directors and staff live and work in the communities they serve," said **George Weaver, president/CEO of Central Georgia EMC**. "We see firsthand the disadvantages associated with a lack of internet service. That's why electric cooperatives throughout the state have been actively searching for partnerships with providers like Conexon and community leaders like Monroe County, negotiating to bring high-speed internet to rural Georgia so our members are afforded the opportunity to participate in today's digital world."

"The majority of members in our service area have no access to the quality, high-speed internet service they so desperately need. That changes today," said **Southern Rivers Energy President and CEO Michael McMillan**. "We know electric cooperatives play a critical role in connecting underserved areas and we are proud to partner with Conexon to help bridge the digital divide for our communities. This partnership will enable thousands of rural Georgians to finally access the same online connections as those in more urban areas, while allowing us to maintain focus on our core mission – providing reliable, affordable electricity to our members."

"We have been impressed with the efforts of Georgia's electric membership cooperatives in exploring ways to provide critical high-speed internet services to the rural Americans they serve," said **Conexon Partner Randy Klindt**. "In keeping with the spirit of cooperatives across the country, the shared goals of our partnership with Central Georgia EMC and Southern Rivers Energy is to offer a quality, reliable, high-speed fiber broadband service to all locations they serve at a reasonable monthly price. Fiber is considered the gold standard of communications transmission technology and will serve customers far into the future."

In recent years, Georgia's EMCs have been aggressively pursuing solutions to help expand broadband. Some, like [Blue Ridge Mountain EMC](#) and [Habersham EMC](#), another Conexon client, have created affiliates and are already providing high-speed service to members and many are exploring or have formed partnerships with broadband providers. In addition to today's news, other EMC partnerships and projects were announced recently by [Amicalola EMC](#), [Carroll EMC](#), [Colquitt EMC](#) and [Diverse Power](#) resulting in expanded access for thousands of Georgia households.

About Central Georgia EMC

[Central Georgia EMC](#) is a member-owned cooperative providing electricity and related services to over 60,000 billed accounts in 14 counties (Bibb, Butts, Clayton, Fayette, Henry, Jasper, Jones, Lamar, Monroe, Morgan, Newton, Pike, Putnam, and Spalding).

About Southern Rivers Energy

[Southern Rivers Energy](#) is a member-owned cooperative providing electricity and related services to more than 20,000 billed accounts in nine counties including Bibb, Coweta, Crawford, Lamar, Meriwether, Monroe, Pike, Spalding and Upson.

About Conexon

[Conexon](#) works with Rural Electric Cooperatives to bring fiber to the home in rural communities. We offer end-to-end broadband deployment and operations support, from a project's conception all the way through to its long-term sustainability. We work with clients to analyze economic feasibility, secure financing, design the network, manage construction, provide operational support, optimize business performance and determine optimal partnerships. To date, Conexon has assisted nearly 200 electric cooperatives, nearly 50 of which are deploying fiber networks, with more than 150,000 connected fiber-to-the-home subscribers across the U.S. The company has secured over \$1.3 billion in federal and state funding for its clients.

About Georgia EMC

[Georgia EMC](#) is the statewide trade association representing the state's 41 electric cooperatives, Oglethorpe Power Corp., Georgia Transmission Corp. and Georgia System Operations Corp. Collectively, Georgia's customer-owned co-ops provide electricity and related services to 4.4 million people, nearly half of Georgia's population, across 73 percent of the state's land area. To learn more, follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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