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MEMPHIS LAUNCHES PIONEERING FIBER BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT Blue Suede Networks Financing and Developing Citywide Fiber Broadband Network

MEMPHIS, TN, April 30, 2024 – In a major step toward transforming Memphis into the nation’s most digitally-equitable large city, Mayor Paul Young today broke ground on Memphis’ first citywide fiber network.

Young was joined at the Willow Park ceremony by JB Smiley, Chair Memphis City Council; Charles Elliott, CEO Blue Suede Networks; Doug McGowan, CEO Memphis Gas Light and Water, Jozelle Booker, President and CEO, Mid-South Minority Business Council Continuum, and Blair Taylor, President Memphis Tomorrow.

“Today we break ground on a new infrastructure project and start to break through the digital barriers that will expand our city’s potential,” said Young. “This historic private investment promises to transform Memphis from one of the country’s least connected cities to a model of digital equity and opportunity. It is testament to what can be achieved when government, business, community, and private industry collaborate with vision, ambition, and with our collective betterment as the ultimate goal.”

Memphis’ median fixed broadband speeds today rank among the slowest of any major U.S. cities and less than 25% of residents have access to superior fiber internet¹. The citywide fiber infrastructure being designed, built, financed, and managed by Blue Suede Networks, is being designed to pass 85% of Memphis’ business and residential premises, including 85% in low-income communities.

“This landmark project is a collective step toward ensuring that residents of every neighborhood are equipped to participate in our digital society now and in the future,” said Memphis City Council Chairman JB Smiley. “By ensuring that this fiber broadband network reaches across the entire city, we are opening doors for everyone.”

Memphis-based Blue Suede Networks is responsible for delivering the network infrastructure, leveraging its technical and operational expertise as well as its financial resources and investment from Meridiam. Blue Suede Networks is owned and financed by Meridiam, a leading infrastructure developer, investor and manager.

“Blue Suede Networks is dedicated to making high-speed, symmetrical fiber broadband accessible citywide,” said Charles Elliott, CEO Blue Suede Networks. “We are determined to help eliminate the divide that excludes thousands of Memphians from our digital society and that compromises opportunity for all.”

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/memphis-tennessees-solution-to-the-next-big-digital-divide/>

In today's digital age, high-speed symmetrical broadband is as essential as water, gas, and electricity. It's often recognized as the fourth utility,² vital for the modern workforce to upskill, work remotely, and pursue entrepreneurial ventures. It supports crucial services like telemedicine, distance learning, and home-based businesses. Fiber broadband is a generational solution that can accommodate Americans' fast-rising data needs and future demands and applications.

“Facilitating the installation of fiber across our city will catapult Memphis into the digital age and improve the quality of life for MLGW customers and attract new businesses to our area,” said MLGW President, Doug McGowen. “We are proud to partner with Blue Suede Networks and the City of Memphis to help create a smart city that will drive prosperity for all.”

Memphians will be able to subscribe to Ting's 2-gigabit symmetrical internet plan for \$89 per month. Ting will offer lower-cost options for qualifying households when service becomes available in Q3 2024. Ting is known for its world-class customer support and dedication to supporting communities where it operates.

“At Ting we believe that people deserve better than what they get from telecom today. We are an ISP that Memphis will actually like doing business with,” said Elliot Noss, President and CEO at Ting. “Helping people get the most out of the Internet takes more than just providing a network and we are looking forward to partnering with BSN to help really make positive change in Memphis.”

The City, Blue Suede Networks and Ting will collaborate with Memphis-based non-profit groups to develop and deploy comprehensive digital equity programs, including helping connect qualifying low-income residents to service, equipment, and device subsidies, and implementing digital literacy programs to equip participants with the skills necessary to live, work and learn in our increasingly digital society.

To ensure that Memphis businesses and organizations are explicitly involved in the project from the start and through the duration, Blue Suede Networks is developing business partnerships in collaboration with Mid-South Minority Business Council, Black Business Association of Memphis, and the Memphis Chamber of Commerce; collaborating with local workforce development partners to hire local talent and deploying training programs for highly skilled technical roles.

“This community-wide fiber project elevates the vital role that small, minority, and women-owned businesses play in our economy. As we build a more connected future, we are committed to creating meaningful opportunities that foster sustainable and inclusive growth, skill development, and economic empowerment,” said Jozelle Booker, President and CEO of The MMBC Continuum.

Residents can learn more about the project by visiting <https://www.smartmemphisfiber.com/>.

Project Background

In April 2022 and as part of its Memphis 3.0 strategy, the City issued an RFP for developers to design, build, operate and maintain a dark fiber optic network for non-commercial smart city

² <https://bbcmag.com/internet-as-the-fourth-utility-2/>

applications. Following a competitive process, the Blue Suede Networks consortium was chosen as the preferred bidder. Blue Suede Networks further entered into an agreement with the City of Memphis to develop a fiber broadband network that will serve nearly every Memphis business and residential premises.

About Blue Suede Networks

Blue Suede Networks is a Memphis-based Fiber-To-The-Premises network developer. The company and its partners are leaders in designing, building, financing, and managing fiber optic facilities; developing, delivering, and managing projects within the City of Memphis and the State of Tennessee; and developing and implementing Digital Equity programs.

Blue Suede Networks' fiber network is being designed to pass at least 85% of Memphis premises. To ensure access, affordability and adoption, Blue Suede Networks is partnering with local leaders and non-profit organizations to connect eligible low-income households with service subsidies; create access to tablets and laptops; deliver computer and digital literacy training; and offer specialized technical support.

Blue Suede Networks is financed by Meridiam, a global leader in long-term sustainable infrastructure investment. The company has committed more than \$2.7b to fiber internet projects around the world.

About MLGW

Memphis Light, Gas and Water is the largest three-service public power utility in the nation, serving the residents of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee since 1939. MLGW consistently provides customers with rates that are amongst the lowest in the nation and stewards a water supply from artesian wells that is minimally treated. Actively engaged in promoting the prosperity of Memphis and Shelby County, MLGW supports the seven local chambers in its service area and makes doing business with local, minority- and women-owned business a priority. Deeply rooted in the community, its employees generously donate time and money in support of bettering the Greater Memphis area.

About Ting

Ting provides superfast fiber internet in select U.S. towns and cities. Ting is committed to net neutrality and the Open Internet. More than that, Ting is committed to being a part of improving the communities it serves by supporting and championing local good works. Ting sponsors local programs, events, foundations, festivals, charities, and public services everywhere we go, investing in the future of the towns we serve.

About The Mid-South Minority Business Continuum

The MMBC Continuum is an economic accelerator for state II Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs) that strategically partners with major CEOs and corporations, mayors and municipalities, the US Department of Commerce, other levels of government and regional economic development agencies to support the growth and scalability of minority and women businesses with the outcome of economically improving inner city communities. The MMBC Continuum plays a vital role by servicing as a critical resource to impact the growth of scalable minority and women-owned businesses locally, regionally, and nationally.

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