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An Iowa Town's \$60 Million Plan to Span the Broadband Gap.

In a bid to boost digital access, West Des Moines is building its own fiber-optic conduit network — and committing Google to provide citywide service.

Ben McAlister, principal engineer for West Des Moines, Iowa, shows off a small hunk of flexible plastic tubing roughly three inches in diameter, filled with narrower tubes that look like thick colored straws.

It's a section of fiber-optic conduit — the small, multilane tunnel through which internet cables run, and a critical piece of the town's developing digital infrastructure. Nearly 1,000 miles of conduit like this is being laid in West Des Moines, bringing lightning-fast internet to every home and business, thanks to a \$60 million municipal bond and a novel public-private partnership

The municipality, a suburb of Des Moines with a small, historic downtown and about 67,000 residents, is like many communities in less-populous parts of the US in that residents rely largely on outdated internet infrastructure. Most West Des Moines residents get their internet either through coaxial cable originally intended for cable television or through copper lines initially laid for telephone service, known as DSL internet. DSL typically boasts maximum speeds of around 30 megabits per second download speed, which is barely faster than the federal government's minimum speed required to be considered broadband (25 Mbps). Cable internet is better, but both are far slower than fiber — the gold standard in internet access, wherein data is encoded as light signals and sent across hair-thin glass threads.

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