

Three Native corporations join to build "info-pipeline"

Construction has begun along the 800-mile stretch of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline to build an "info-pipeline" with fiber-optic cable.

The fiber-optic system will link Valdez with Prudhoe Bay and will provide advanced communications to Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. Anchorage and Fairbanks will also be linked into the system as part of the project.

The one-inch diameter line will be able to handle the equivalent of over 350,000 phone calls at the same time.

The project will spin off benefits to Anchorage and Prudhoe Bay and all communities in between that can tap into the system.

The advantages of a fiber-optic network include higher information capacity, delivered faster and with higher quality and without the echo or delay that is sometimes experienced in bush communities, according to Bob Eide, vice president of MFS Technologies.

"This is state-of-the-art, and it's what's happening all over the world," said Eide.

The disadvantage of the system is that it is extremely expensive to lay the fiber optic cable, according to Laurie Herman, spokesperson for AT&T Alascom in Anchorage.

Another possible advantage to rural communities is tele-medicine. Tele-medicine is the use of phone lines to transmit

data or pictures from rural communities to doctors in more urban areas for diagnosis.

Kanas Telecom Inc., a new partnership between MFS Communications Company, Inc. and three Alaska Native corporations, won the contract worth over \$100 million.

Kanas means "to communicate" in the Ahtna dialect of Athabaskan. The Native corporate partners are Arctic Slope

Regional Corporation, Ahtna Incorporated and Chugach Alaska Corporation.

The two-and-a-half-year project will provide 250 jobs during construction, and 50 people will be needed to run the system.

The system allows Alyeska to provide digital data and voice communications between their offices and facilities. Alyeska can also monitor and control communications between Valdez, 62 gate valves and the pump stations.