



Stevenson Wi-Fi Project FAQ's

What is the Stevenson Wi-Fi Project?

The Stevenson Wi-Fi Project was setup to provide free, public access wireless Internet connectivity to visitors as a way of promoting tourism and increasing overnight stays in the community.

How was it funded?

The project was built and is maintained with money from the city Tourism Promotion Fund.

What was the time frame for getting the project going?

Conceived in April 2003, funding was requested from and approved by the Stevenson City Council in July. The first equipment was installed in September and the basic network was operational by the end of October 2003.

Who operates the network?

The Stevenson Business Assoc. (SBA) provides this tourism promotion service under contract with the city. We have one paid, part time tech person and a volunteer project coordinator. The SBA pays bills.

How much of the town does it cover?

Our entire downtown commercial core is covered (approx 8x20 blocks) as well as our Fair Grounds and recreation area adjoining the downtown.

What technology does the Stevenson Wi-Fi Project use?

We use a system of overlapping "nodes" that intelligently route Internet traffic using the 802.11b protocol. These nodes are located throughout our downtown area with two of the central nodes acting as gateways for connection to the Internet. The mesh management software we use is Qcode, developed by Qorvus Systems (www.qorvus.net) located in Vancouver, Wa.

How many nodes are used?

We currently have 11 nodes operating.

What is the coverage of each node?

Coverage varies depending on distance and terrain. Most of our nodes are at least 300 yards apart. Most are positioned on the top of buildings for best line of sight.

How much equipment is required at each node location?

Each node requires a mesh box (about the size of a home DVD player), small power supply plugged into AC power, antenna and connecting cable.

Where does the bandwidth come from and how much do we use?

We purchase our bandwidth from a local Internet Service Provider. During a recent main street renovation, the city installed fiber optic conduit throughout our downtown core. The Stevenson Wi-Fi Project paid to have lit fiber pulled to our gateway in the center of town. We also operate a second gateway located in our Port building along our waterfront. We currently purchase 1 megabit with the option of increasing that amount as use builds.

Who can use the network?

The network was built for use by tourists and other visitors to Stevenson. Locals also use it from time to time while in our parks and restaurants. We have the ability to monitor use to determine if the network is being abused and can block specific computers should that become necessary.

How is the network accessed?

A Wi-Fi enabled computer is a prerequisite. Once Wi-Fi enabled, connecting is quite simple. Most users will simply click on their Internet browser where they are taken to a login screen. By clicking on "Guest Login" the user is taken to a "Welcome to Stevenson" page, which has links to local lodging and dining establishments. From that page, one is free to roam the Internet at will.

Do you control the amount of bandwidth a single user has access to?

The MeshAP software allows different classes of users different amounts of bandwidth. Our "Guest" users are supplied with approx two times the bandwidth of a good dialup connection. Our administrators and our webcam have access to full bandwidth that can vary depending on how many people are on the network at one time.

How long can one user stay connected?

We have our system configured so that "Guest" users can be on the network for up to one hour.

How secure is the network?

The internal workings of the MeshAP software are extremely secure. Data that is sent and retrieved over the network has no built in security. We feel that is the responsibility of each individual user.

How does the city measure benefit vs. cost?

The city of Stevenson provides this service as a promotional tool. By routing network users directly to our web pages first, we have the opportunity to expose the user to all the amenities and services the city offers. By developing this content and tracking the traffic to these web sites, we will be in a better position to assess the benefit of the Wi-Fi Project. Additionally, each mesh node could have its own entry portal that specifically advertises the businesses within that node's coverage area. The ability to target content to very specific geographic areas could be used to sell advertising that would offset some of the operational expenses.

The amount of local and regional press we have received so far has been incredible. It is a compelling story... a small municipality of 1300 people in the heart of the Columbia River Gorge having the foresight and willingness to spend municipal funds on cutting edge technology infrastructure necessary to attract increasingly tech savvy visitors. This infrastructure also demonstrates to potential employers this is a community that understands what businesses in the 21st century need to remain competitive. In the last century, towns prospered where there was easy access to transportation. In this century, access to information will be the key for economic development.

What other things does Stevenson use the network for?

We have a "Stevenson Downtown Webcam" attached to the mesh node located on the roof of our county courthouse. It can be seen by clicking on "Stevenson Webcam" at <http://www.skamania.org/>. We also operate a mobile "Eventcam" that streams live video content onto the Internet during our many community events. Visiting the same web site and selecting "Live Event" will take one to this camera.