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AT&T plan would cost city

- Giant utility wants to install high-speed system that would mean less revenue for cities.

By Chris Wiebe, The Leader

BURBANK -- City officials are negotiating with representatives from telecommunications giant AT&T to accelerate a process to bring cable television services to Burbank residents over the Internet.

The proposed plan, dubbed Project Lightspeed, calls for installing broadband cables within 3,000 feet of homes in Burbank to facilitate quicker Internet speed and to enable AT&T to provide both cable television and telephone service online, Assistant City Manager Mike Flad said.

But with transmission lines for television and telephone signals moving from above-ground and underground cables to fiber optic networks under the plan, the city would lose its ability to impose traditional telecommunication taxes, Flad said. The city would also lose the ability to regulate the placement of the infrastructure required to provide a service, Flad said.

"If our wired telephone went over the Internet, we could lose \$3.5 million per year in recurring money," he said. "For us, this infrastructure, while on its face is a great thing and gets customers and our citizens the fastest and highest and best technology available, what it could cause is a fiscal crisis for us in the short term. It's just a matter of figuring out how to make cities' revenue streams work."

advertisement A bill pending in the state Legislature would shift fees municipalities receive from companies that utilize city infrastructure to a statewide model, meaning a more uniform standard for telecom providers, but less revenue for cities, Flad said.

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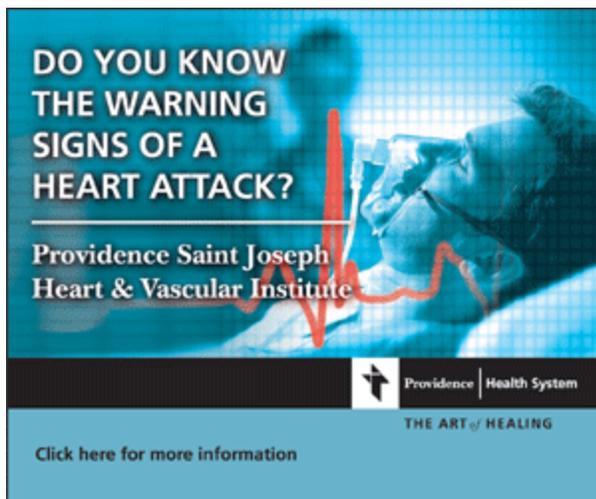
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Through negotiations with AT&T, officials hope to forge an agreement that could put the city in a better financial position once the legislation is passed, Flad said.

The city, for instance, wants to recoup costs from AT&T that the city will likely incur to process the numerous permits required to supply power to AT&T's forming network.

Granting the city such amenities would allow AT&T to begin constructing its network, rather than waiting until the legislation progresses through the Legislature and is signed by the governor.

AT&T is negotiating with municipalities in order to expand consumer choice in the cable television market, AT&T spokesman Gordon Diamond said.

"There's certainly something going on at the state level but we still have been in discussion with cities, including the city of Burbank, and really what it means is to be able to provide this new technology, to provide consumers with a choice for video services," Diamond said.

But City Councilman David Gordon voiced concerns over the details of negotiations, which have not been made available for public input, adding that increased competition does not necessarily mean a better result for the consumer.

"I think providing better and alternative cable services is great," he said.

"I think people have been asking for that for a long time. But the problem is you don't want to sell your soul to the devil in order to get competition Just because there's more competition doesn't mean there's going to be better service or less cost."

QUESTION

What do you think about a plan to wire Burbank with cable television over the Internet? E-mail your responses to burbankleader@latimes.com; mail them to the Burbank Leader, 111 W. Wilson Ave., Glendale, CA, 91203. Please spell your name and include your address and phone number for verification purposes only.

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