

# Riverside takes over Wi-Fi network

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Riverside's free wireless Internet service has formally changed hands and officials are hoping to improve coverage in the coming months, but the city won't be getting a major federal grant to expand the network.

The Wi-Fi network was created in 2006 as a partnership between the city and **AT&T**, which built the network for free and was paid to provide service to some city agencies. But AT&T wanted out of the five-year deal because it didn't sign up enough customers who would pay for premium service.

The City Council voted in May to end the AT&T contract and hire Minnesota-based US Internet to maintain the wireless network. The city now owns the equipment that AT&T installed, and **Time Warner** was picked as the service provider, said Steve Reneker, the city's chief information officer.

US Internet opened an office across from North High School for two workers with a bucket truck that can reach the 1,600 transmission devices on streetlights and the six poles that provide wireless connections to the devices. AT&T had its own servers, so the city had to replace those by installing new ones at City Hall.

The official Wi-Fi changeover on Thursday wasn't without glitches. Reneker said the network was quickly signing people out if they were inactive, so the timing of that function was changed, and there were some issues with slow service on Friday.

Resident and blogger Mary Shelton said city Internet service was down in her Canyon Crest neighborhood from Thursday night through at least Friday morning, but after she called the city, workers came out to fix the problem.

She said she's reserving judgment on whether city ownership of the network is an improvement. It's a good system overall, she said, but it should be maintained and improved.

"Ultimately people will or will not have faith in the network by how outages are handled," Shelton said. "Are they going to be handled promptly or are they going to be out for days?"

Reneker advised people to call the city's 311 line about outages or with questions about the new network. Now that the city controls the service, staff at the 311 call center can check whether a complaint is due to a hardware or software problem and respond accordingly.

US Internet will be making suggestions in the next few weeks on how to improve the Internet connection for people using the network outdoors with a laptop.

But plans to expand the network from about 77 percent coverage of the city to the original goal of 95 percent won't move forward for now. Reneker said the city didn't receive a requested federal grant of more than \$8 million to install more equipment.

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## Wireless switch

Riverside last week took over the Wi-Fi network that covers three-fourths of the city and had been owned by AT&T. Here's what users should know.

**City internet service** is free, but customers need a wireless modem to use it inside their homes.

**The old network** was called ATT Metrofree; now look for the network called

Smarriverside.

**Call** the city's 311 information line with questions or problems with the network.

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