

Unprecedented Fiber Cuts by Construction Crews Disrupts Service to KanREN Members



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KanREN, Inc.

Lawrence, KS, December 15, 2022 – KanREN, Inc.

Several educational institutions experienced Internet outages Wednesday and continuing overnight into Thursday due to four physical disruptions to the long-haul fiber used in the statewide backbone network operated by KanREN, Inc. (kanren.net). The KanREN backbone is a research and education network (REN) servicing all public universities and many other anchor institutions throughout the state of Kansas. KanREN is a member-based nonprofit consortium providing professional services, network technologies, and specialized high-availability connectivity to regional networks, Internet2, and the global Internet.

Two catastrophic cuts were made by Evergy and Cox Communications construction crews and were unrelated to KanREN or their primary fiber partner, the Kansas Fiber Network (KFN). Due to the highly redundant connections throughout the KanREN network, these disruptions did not affect 90% of KanREN members.

Unfortunately, these disruptions came at a critical time for students and staff of the 10% of KanREN members that were affected. Pittsburg State University (PSU) is one of KanREN's anchor institutions hosting redundant backbone nodes, and this disruption left PSU without connectivity for just under 10 hours before KFN was able to complete repairs to one leg of the fiber damaged by construction crews. Community anchors affected by the cuts included Pittsburg USD 250, City of Pittsburg, Frontenac USD, Fort Scott Community College, Fort Scott USD, KUMC Pittsburg AHEC, Prairie View High School, Prairie View LaCygne Elementary School, Linn County Library, and the Central Burden School District.

An unrelated fiber disruption in western Kansas also reduced redundancy of connections to Fort Hays State University, another community anchor institution hosting redundant backbone nodes for the KanREN network. Redundant connections prevented this outage from having any impact on user experiences.

A fourth unrelated fiber disruption occurred near Paola, KS, and resulted in a disruption to connectivity to one of Fort Scott Community College's satellite campuses. The crews for the fiber carrier in that area, AT&T, were able to restore services shortly after lunchtime on Thursday.

Through its close partnership with member institutions, KanREN was able to help mitigate the impact of the cuts, such as redirecting traffic destined for PSU's webpage to a notification as students desperately sought answers during the busy finals season.

Bradley Hook, Interim Executive Director of KanREN noted, "Yesterday was a very unusual day for fiber in Kansas. Simultaneous fiber outages in four geographically diverse portions of the state are unprecedented in the history of KanREN. The limited availability of fiber infrastructure throughout Kansas severely impairs the ability of any institution to have a diverse set of options to remain connected in highly unusual outage scenarios such as this. We appreciate the efforts of our staff, members, and partners to restore services as quickly as possible."

According to DJ Good, CTO of Allero Telecom (allerotelcom.com), "The lack of middle mile fiber in the state of Kansas puts the entire state at risk for similar outages."

KanREN has been and continues to be engaged with the Kansas Office of Broadband Development on initiatives to increase middle mile fiber infrastructure throughout the state and is working with partners to increase capacity for disaster recovery for situations such as these, as well as for other events like natural disasters that could have even more significant impact on rural communities throughout Kansas.

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