

Please support the merger between the satellite companies Echo Star and DIRECTV. If this merger is defeted then there will be fewer investors willing to take the chance on satellite service and we will be forced to accept cable. Cable is the true monopoly. Echo Sar/DIRECTV are not preventing new satellite upstarts but are combining to compete against cable companies. It is apparent that cable is not meeting the needs of consumers. Read the following example:

Cable turnoff

Frustrated communities take TV into own hands

By Robert Preer, Globe Correspondent, 3/29/2002

scalating rates. Long waits on hold for customer service. Confusing changes in channel lineups.

Local officials unhappy with cable television service in their communities have called public hearings, fined cable companies, and threatened not to renew licenses - all with little effect.

So now, some Massachusetts cities and towns have adopted another strategy: launching their own cable television systems as alternatives to the hometown monopolies.

'We are going to provide it just like we do water and sewer,' said Michael J. Gagne, executive administrator in Dartmouth, one of a half-dozen southeastern Massachusetts towns eyeing a regional, government-run cable TV system. 'We believe competition is the answer to improving the market.'

Braintree, through its municipal electric department, has been offering cable television service for a little over a year and has already won over more than a third of AT&T Broadband's cable subscribers in town.

Norwood Town Meeting last year authorized its municipal electric department to borrow \$10 million to launch a cable service. Taunton's municipal light department plans to offer a pilot cable television package to about 200 subscribers this spring.

In its town election on Monday, North Attleborough voters will be asked whether they want to start a municipal cable system, while Mansfield voters will decide at Town Meeting in May whether to fund a study of town-run cable. Feasibility studies already are underway in Concord and Belmont.

'The whole genesis for this has been requests from our customers and their frustration with their current provider,' said Cindy Angus, spokeswoman for the Taunton Municipal Light Plant.

Because the telecommunications industry is largely deregulated, local officials have little power to force cable companies to change their operations. 'Service leaves a lot to be desired,' said Taunton City Councilor Barry J. Amaral, an advocate for a city-owned cable system. 'We've had fluctuations in rates, problems with billing. We would like to be able to give discounts to our senior citizens.'

The Board of Selectmen in Lakeville, a small town south of Taunton, last week fined AT&T \$25,000 for failing to respond promptly to customer service calls.

AT&T, the state's largest cable company, maintains it is working to correct problems and is undertaking expensive upgrades of cable systems across New England. Many of the systems AT&T operates in Massachusetts were acquired in the past year and a half from smaller cable companies.

Jennifer Khoury, director of public relations for AT&T Broadband's Northeast region, said municipalities may be making a mistake getting into the fast-changing field of telecommunications.

AT&T Broadband, the largest cable company in the country and a unit of one of the world's biggest corporations, is in a much better position to develop new offerings, such as video-on-demand, according to AT&T officials. "In most cases we will be offering advanced products first," said Khoury. "It will give us a competitive advantage over the municipalities."

According to the American Public Power Association, slightly fewer than 100 municipalities in the United States offer cable television service. Almost all of these municipal cable systems were built by government-owned electric utilities, which use new or existing fiber-optic el