

Cable monopolies broken

by Staten Island Advance

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Staten Islanders can soon bid adieu to their days of having a solitary cable TV service provider.

By the end of 2008, the system of obtaining cable service from a sole entity -- here, it's Time Warner Cable -- will go the way of the old rabbit-ears.

The city yesterday announced a partnership with Verizon to give all New Yorkers the option to ditch their current cable provider and choose a different fiber-optic alternative, known as FiOS. The Island, due to the ease of access with its existing above-ground network, will be the first borough to receive complete installation.

The project, which is set to be completed in the entire city by 2014, "creates the single largest cable television franchise project in the history of New York City," Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber said at the announcement inside the Downtown Brooklyn studios of NYCTV, the city's television station.

"[It will] when approved, for the first time ever bring true television service competition to each and every home in all five boroughs of the city of New York," Lieber added. "New Yorkers must have choice, have access to choice among the world-class cable television services."

The partnership requires approval from the city Franchise and Concession Review Committee and the state Public Service Commission. The FCRC vote, which will follow a public hearing scheduled for May 20, requires "yes" votes from five of its six members for approval.

City and Verizon officials, who announced the agreement yesterday inside the NYCTV studios, would not disclose the total cost of the project. A Verizon senior vice president at the announcement, Monica Azare, would say only that it is included in a national initiative that costs \$18 billion.

Prices for packages to be offered to the city's roughly 3 million households also were not immediately available.

The agreement features "fiber-to-the-home technology," which promises greater capacity and faster speeds.

But a Time Warner representative did not sound too concerned.

"Consumers always benefit from competition. As in the past, we believe that we're going to continue to provide our customers with the best product options and innovation and we're glad the city took this step to bring a new video provider to New York City," she said.

Verizon will not offer New York 1, the city's local news station, city officials said. Â

— *Contributed by Sally Goldenberg*