The City of Monroe communications system became one of a handful of Southeastern cities to connect to a massive data center, the Atlanta Internet Exchange at 56 Marietta St., N.W. in Atlanta. The address is home to the largest Internet hub in the Southeast. //

In doing so, the city's Internet speeds jumped from 150 megabytes per second to 1 gigabyte per second or about 10 times as fast.

Now the Monroe Utilities Department, which runs its own cable and Internet company, is able to offer faster Web service to customers. The city can now sell higher capacity bandwidth. Currently, the fastest speed the city provides to its customers is 6 megabytes per second. In the future that speed can be increased to 20 megabytes or faster, according to city officials.

And not just residential customers who benefit from the faster Internet speed, according to Electric and Telecommunications Director Brian Thompson. He said high-tech businesses need the supped-up bandwidth Monroe can now offer. More bandwidth leads to more businesses locating here, he said.

"It gives us the ability to be peered with all the big players," Thompson said. "The biggest employers need this type of Internet connectivity — high-speed data. It helps the bottom line for them. If you don't have this type of connectivity, (potential businesses are) not even going to talk to you.

City officials said the connection to 56 Marietta St. cost less than $5,000.