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City to offer wireless Web for all

CERRITOS, California (AP) --Browsing the Web from this Southern California city may soon become an outdoor sport.

The first phase of a project to establish citywide wireless Internet access is slated to begin next month. Ultimately, anyone with a laptop or wireless device will be able to surf the Web from virtually anywhere in the city's 8.6-square-mile (22-square-kilometer) area.

Scores of wireless networking transmitters are being placed atop public buildings, traffic lights and other structures to blanket the city.

The project is being touted by Aairnet Wireless, its operator, as the largest wireless networking, or Wi-Fi, deployment in the nation.

The city struck a deal with the company that allows Aairnet to place transmitters throughout the city for free, city spokeswoman Annie Hylton said.

Cerritos, meanwhile, agreed to buy 60 subscription accounts, each at \$34.95 a month, for its field employees.

Brian Grimm, spokesman for the Wi-Fi Alliance, which certifies and promotes the technology, said he couldn't verify Aairnet's claim, but noted Cerritos is the only city so far that has said it intends to establish citywide wireless access.

Wi-Fi radiates an Internet connection that multiple computers within 300 feet (90 meters) can share at fast speeds. Wi-Fi hot spots have cropped up over the last couple of years in coffee shops, hotels and airports.

Some small towns, including Half Moon Bay, California, and Athens, Georgia, have started experimenting with Wi-Fi as a way to provide relatively cheap, easy access to high-speed Internet.

The 51,000 residents of Cerritos, located 26 miles (41 kilometers) southeast of Los Angeles, have not had DSL broadband access to the Internet because the city is too far from the telephone company's central office. Cable Internet access has not been an option, either, Hylton said.

Residents in Cerritos have asked city officials to find a way to bring broadband to the city for some time.

"We're pleased that our residents will at last have an option for broadband that will be more affordable than is currently available," Hylton said.