



## ***Press Release***

Wednesday, April 7, 2004  
For Immediate Release  
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### **New Collaboration Targets Alignment of Optical Networking Initiatives**

**Washington, DC** – The Board of Trustees of the Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) today endorsed advancing a collaboration agreement with the National LambdaRail (NLR) that capitalizes on a complementary commitment from the State of Louisiana to help complete a major component of a new, national research and education (R&E) optical network.

The action authorizes up to a \$2.5M cash commitment from SURA and the allocation of assets and services acquired by SURA in collaboration with its Geographic Network Affiliates (GEO) and the Internet Educational Equal Access Foundation (IEEAF) partners, through a recently announced GridFiber Collaboration Agreement with AT&T. The collaboration agreement will focus on completing a major segment of the NLR backbone that stretches across the South from Jacksonville, Florida to Dallas, Texas.

“In the next five years, building a ubiquitous national optical grid will be as critical to the R&E community as the Internet has been for the nation in the last 15 years – an essential tool for our leadership in the R&E arena that will ultimately also strengthen our economy and improve our quality of life,” said Dr. Jerry Draayer, President of SURA.

This new segment of the network will provide connectivity between the Florida advanced research network (Florida LambdaRail) and the Texas Lonestar Education And Research Network (LEARN) by establishing an access node in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that links to the Louisiana Optical Network Initiative (LONI).

In her March 29 state of the state address, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco said, “The LambdaRail will link the country's most powerful computers into an advanced network for research and technology development.” She added that linkage to the NLR will help the state become distinguished “as a major player in high-performance computing and network technology and secure tremendous economic development gains in the future.” This planned deployment of the AT&T assets also complements SURA’s commitment to work with its GEO and IEEAF partners in bridging the digital divide and the Southern Governors’ Association through its Southern eCorridors Project, led by the SGA’s chairman, Virginia Governor Mark R. Warner.

The SURA–AT&T GridFiber Collaboration Agreement, announced last December, is a ten-year agreement designed to speed the creation of regional and national grid services to support the R&E community. Under the agreement, AT&T has made available at no cost to the nation’s R&E community, 8,000 miles of dark fiber network and a substantial inventory of optical networking equipment. A collaboration between SURA, LONI and NLR that honors SURA commitments to its GEO and IEEAF partners represents the first implementation of the assets made available to SURA through the AT&T agreement and will signal a significant alignment between SURA and the NLR.

Draayer concluded that, “SURA’s goal is to exploit optical technologies to enhance the research capabilities of our nation while enabling a bridging of the digital divide. An immediate interest of SURA is to support the nuclear physics program of the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility that it manages and operates for the Department of Energy, the SURA Coastal Ocean Observing and Prediction (SCOOP) initiative, and an anticipated collaborative bio-informatics and telehealth, medical research and high performance computing grid applications, according to Draayer. “SURA also places a high value on making advanced networking capabilities available to the broadest set of institutions, especially ensuring equal access to minority serving institutions.”

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*The Southeastern Universities Research Association (SURA) is a consortium of over 60 leading research institutions in the southern United States and the District of Columbia established in 1980 as a non-stock, nonprofit corporation. SURA serves as an entity through which colleges, universities, and other organizations may cooperate with one another, government and industry in acquiring, developing, and using laboratories and other research facilities and in furthering knowledge and the application of that knowledge in the physical, biological, and other natural sciences and engineering. For more information, visit [www.sura.org](http://www.sura.org).*