

# RVBAT Meeting - September 2, 2026

## Meeting Purpose

Discuss data centers, AI's impact, and regional broadband updates.

## Key Takeaways

- **Data Centers:** A new regional topic, facing public misinformation on water/power use. OSU is creating unbiased educational materials to counter this.
- **AI in the Workplace:** AI is optimizing roles (e.g., T-Mobile's 30% staff cuts) and boosting productivity. The key skill is using AI effectively while maintaining a "human in the lead" to verify output.
- **AI in Education:** OSU students are resisting AI, citing environmental impact, skill loss, and job displacement fears. This creates a dilemma, as employers increasingly require AI proficiency.
- **Broadband:** Fiber expansion continues, but high costs (e.g., Starlink at \$120/mo) remain a barrier. T-Mobile's "Friday Night 5G Lights" grant program is open for high school stadium upgrades.

## Topics

### Data Centers: A New Regional Topic

- **Context:** Local jurisdictions are starting to discuss data centers as a new regional topic.
- **Public Perception:** The topic is highly political and prone to misinformation.
  - **Water Use:** Often exaggerated; cooling is closed-loop, using water comparable to a golf course.
  - **Power Use:** Data centers can bring their own power (solar, gas turbines), potentially feeding surplus back to the grid and lowering community costs.
- **Speculative Development:** Some developers are building data centers speculatively to sell to tech giants later.
- **National Perspective (Victor, OSU):**
  - OSU is part of a national university group creating unbiased resources (webinars, papers) on data centers.
  - **Significance:** Data centers are essential infrastructure for all digital services, not just AI.
- **Industry Perspective (Ryan, T-Mobile):**
  - T-Mobile is building many data centers for its AI-driven 6G rollout (~2030).

## AI's Impact: Workplace & Education

- **Workplace Integration:**
  - **Productivity:** AI significantly boosts efficiency. Ryan (T-Mobile) used GPT to create a presentation deck in 12 minutes, a task that previously took hours.
  - **Automation:** AI automates tasks like network management. T-Mobile's standalone 5G network uses AI for auto-load balancing, dynamically expanding bandwidth for first responders during congestion.
  - **Job Optimization:** AI is leading to significant staff cuts (e.g., 30% at T-Mobile) by optimizing roles.
- **Educational Resistance:**
  - OSU students are resisting AI use, citing three main concerns:
    1. **Environmental Impact:** Energy consumption of data centers.
    2. **Skill Loss:** Erosion of critical thinking.
    3. **Job Displacement:** Fear of AI replacing them.
  - **Dilemma:** This resistance conflicts with employer demand for AI-proficient graduates.
- **Policy & Regulation:**
  - **OSU:** Has guidance but no single policy; use of external AI is permitted if no private/proprietary data is shared.
  - **Jackson County:** Prohibits loading external AI software onto county computers.
  - **Frontier AI Companies:** Are paradoxically asking for government regulation, raising questions about their motives.

## The Next Frontier: Physical AI (Robotics)

- **Rapid Advancement:** Robotics are evolving quickly from awkward prototypes to functional, autonomous machines.
- **OSU Research:** A local Salem company is scaling up production of humanoid robots for warehouses, based on OSU research.
- **Healthcare Applications:**
  - **Exercise Companions:** A low-cost (\$3-5k) OSU research robot increased exercise participation in retirement centers by 30%.
  - **Caregiving:** Advanced life care systems are using AI for tasks like medication reminders.
  - **Companionship:** Robo-pets, previously funded by COVID relief, address social isolation.

## Broadband & Connectivity Updates

- **Fiber Expansion:** The Oregon Broadband Office has awarded 10 of 18 contracts, with work underway.

- **Cost Barrier:** High costs remain a significant issue. Starlink, while globally available, is expensive at ~\$120/month.
- **Future Landscape:** Ryan (T-Mobile) expects a merger of satellite and terrestrial networks in 1-2 years, improving coverage and consumer options.
- **T-Mobile Grant Program:** The "Friday Night 5G Lights" program is open for high school stadium upgrades.
  - **Grants:** \$1k–\$125k, with one \$1M grand prize.
  - **Action:** Ryan encouraged local schools to apply, noting the application rate is low, which increases the chance of winning.

## Next Steps

- **Victor:** Share unbiased data center educational resources (webinars, papers) from the OSU national group.
- **Ryan:** Share details on the "Friday Night 5G Lights" grant program.
  - **Note:** Applications are now closed. Finalists will be announced on October 8<sup>th</sup>. <https://www.t-mobile.com/brand/friday-night-5g-lights>