

Evidence of economic impact of broadband

Submitted by: Access to Broadband Campaign (ABC)

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ABC conference discusses progress of broadband in the UK. Stephen Timms MP, Minister for e-commerce gives keynote address - announces wireless hotspot trials in rural libraries

ABC's second conference held at Cisco's European HQ embodied what Stephen Timms described as "This widespread ferment of innovation and energy at community level in pursuit of broadband which has been pretty much unprecedented . . . Communities have come together to campaign for access to the new benefits of communications."

At the conference, delegates heard new evidence of the economic benefits enabled by broadband to communities and SMEs in rural areas. Daniel Heery of Alston Cybermoor told the conference "We have evidence that broadband is helping to create rural jobs, 5 new businesses have moved into our area creating 50 new jobs. One company being an ICT company employing local young ICT professionals who have moved back, bringing skills back into the area." Alston has one of the largest community owned networks in the UK with over 30% of households connected to one of the UK's largest wireless broadband networks.

Brian Condon, ABC's CEO said, "We are beginning to see hard evidence that broadband communications can deliver measurable economic benefits. It looks to us that once take-up reaches 30% of the local population, progress accelerates and businesses and consumers really capture the benefits."

Minister for e-commerce, Stephen Timms said, "It has been suggested that the introduction of broadband could have the same impact on the UK economy as the

introduction 80 years ago of mains electricity. That is the scale of the impact we are talking about and nobody should under-estimate it."

WiFi hotspots in libraries

At the conference, Stephen Timms announced that DTI and Resource (the library and museum agency of the Department of Culture Media and Sport) are now planning to run a series of pilots of WiFi hotspots in public libraries. The Minister attaches a high priority to these WiFi pilots. "I have said on a number of occasions that I want to see every public library a Wi-Fi hotspot. Every public library in the country is now providing Internet access to the public, in over 90% of cases through broadband. It is an important opportunity to use rural libraries as wireless hotspots for local communities, enabling local people to gain access to the Internet using their own laptops or PDAs."

Commenting on the announcement Brian Condon said, "Sharing public sector bandwidth with community networks is a great idea - as it maximises benefit from existing infrastructure that the community has already paid for. As part of our campaign, we are lobbying government and OFCOM to make sure that community networks are seen as part of the bandwidth aggregation process in the public interest. It's our bandwidth and we need access to it".

[ENDS]

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Notes to Editors:

The Access to Broadband Campaign (www.abcampaign.org.uk) exists to promote the universal availability of broadband Internet access:

A is for Access.

B is for Bridging the broadband digital divide.

C is for Community empowerment.

The objectives of ABC are to accelerate the deployment of high-speed - "broadband" - Internet access throughout the UK and to make it as affordable and accessible as possible to all members of the community.

The second ABC conference was held on 27/8 January 2003 with over 200 attendees drawn from communities (37%), industry (41%) and public sector/NGO (22%).

NB Photo of Stephen Timms MP, Brian Condon, CEO of ABC available on request, email gwen@rapidresponsemarketing.co.uk