

Internet

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innovations that have transformed communication and commerce," Google said in a statement. "We can't wait to see what new products and services will emerge as Kansas City moves from traditional broadband to ultra-high-speed fiber optic connections."

Past efforts to bring fast affordable broadband to Portland failed for economic reasons. But in January, the city kicked off a new broadband planning effort. Work groups, which include business and industry representatives are studying the problem and will issue a draft plan in June. So what's happening in other cities?

Some Cities Own Their Own Networks

About 130 cities across the country have created municipal broadband systems, where the city owns the fiber cables and provide Internet service as a utility, just like water or electricity. According to the nonprofit Institute for Local Self-Reliance, more than 3 million people get their Internet from local governments such as: Independence, Ore.; Wilson, NC; Tacoma, Wash., and Lafayette, La., and Chattanooga, Tenn., which became the first place in the country to offer internet speeds as fast as those planned for Kansas City.

Municipal networks have answered the problem for some cities, but not without opposition from for-profit providers. In four states, Internet corporations have successfully lobbied to ban governments from creating their own networks. And barriers make it difficult for governments to provide service in 10 more states, including Washington. Find the map online at the New Rules Project.

Could Portland create a city-owned and operated Internet service?

It's possible, but would be challenging, says Mary Beth Henry, who is helping lead Portland's latest effort to bring high-speed Internet to every business and home in the city. Many of the cities that offer Internet, already owned cable networks because they owned electricity utilities.

"We already have a city-owned fiber sys-

Internet corporations have successfully lobbied to ban governments from creating their own networks

tem that provides connections to schools, libraries and some city buildings," Henry said. "That's worked very well and has saved the city a huge amount of money—we don't have to pay a private carrier."

"We do have plans to extend that to other city buildings but not right now to commercial and residential buildings."

Where Do We Stand?

In downtown Portland, residents and businesses can choose between several companies which offer everything from wireless to DSL and fiber cables. But both DSL and wireless must be backed up by cables. And while DSL used to be the gold standard, it's fast becoming as obsolete as dial-up.

That's why one key issue is the high cost of putting in the huge underground pipes, fiber cables or utility poles needed to transmit large amounts of electronic data. The

advantage for the corporations that already own those pipes and poles is so great, that in many parts of the country competing internet providers have simply not bothered to invest in new pipes. Instead they have simply divided up the territory, so each has a monopoly in its own areas.

Susan Crawford, former broadband advisor to the Obama administration and author of *The Big Squeeze*, says these few giant Internet providers exert a crushing power.

"If we've got a single monopoly provider in each community of one pipe—the pipe for high-speed wired access—and wireless does not compete," Crawford told the Students for Free Culture Conference in New York City Feb. 18. "One guy with one pipe and everything goes over it: culture, information, news, our lives, anything we're creating, new businesses, all conditioned on what these very few actors (the ISP corporations) want to see for our future. I think this is a big civil rights, economic and industrial policy moment for America."

Portland does have some competition. Several companies provide broadband in the city. Still, just two—Comcast and Qwest (fresh from a merger with CenturyLink)—own the cable networks needed for the fastest speeds.

"Century Link/Qwest says it covers 85 percent of the city," Henry told *The Skanner News*. "Comcast has 100 percent coverage. So they do compete head to head. But for that 15 percent who don't have that it can be a problem."

Outside of the city center, what's available is a hit or miss patchwork of coverage. Fiber connections don't reach every part of the city. And the poorer and further out you are, the fewer choices you have.

Too Slow, Too Expensive and Too Limited

According to the *Your Voice* report from Mt. Hood Cable Regulatory Commission, companies are not delivering the internet speeds consumers need.

"There is a significant need to increase the capacity of residential internet access net-

works to provide higher connection speeds," the report says.

Lack of money is the most important barrier to high-speed internet access. The *Your Voice* study found that nearly half of everyone from households with an income of less than \$30,000 a year say they can't afford an internet service. One in four Portlanders simply don't have internet access at home.

Many people don't understand that a speed of 1Gbps is a thousand times faster than a speed of 1mbps, which is a thousand times faster than 1kbps. So consumers rely on information from internet providers. But the packages are not easy to understand. If, for example, you pay \$69.99 for the "Air Speed" 512kbps service, you're buying a package that is 30 times slower than the \$69.95 Comcast Blast. Visit CUBConnects.org online to compare services in your zip code.

Meanwhile in Japan, New Zealand and many other countries in Europe and Asia, national governments are delivering better services than exist today in the United States. But in Washington DC, the battle still rages for who will control the internet—and profit from it.

Heading to Battle

Recently, the House of Representatives voted to repeal a Federal Communications Commission ruling that stops service providers from interfering with traffic on their networks. President Obama has said he will veto the legislation if it passes the Senate.

Big telecommunications companies and content providers all want a piece of the action. But net neutrality activists say that without regulation, big Internet corporations—like Comcast or AT&T will push their own content at the expense of competitors, nonprofits and small independent creators.

Free-market enthusiasts say competition will solve the problem and deliver better service. But activists, and even the Federal Communications Commission—hardly a hotbed of leftist activism—say that regulation is needed to prevent abuses.

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The Tacoma Housing Authority

The Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) will receive sealed bids from qualified contractors at the offices of Tacoma Housing Authority until 2:00 p.m., Local Time, on Friday, May 20, 2011, for renovation work to four facilities located at 3201 South Fawcett Street, 5425 South Lawrence Street, 911 North K Street, and 401 North G Street, all in Tacoma, WA.

The Notice to Bidders and more detailed information may be found on THA's web site www.tacomahousing.org. Click on Doing Business with THA, Business Opportunities, Real Estate Development.

Contractors may obtain Contract Documents at THA's administrative office located at 902 South "L" Street, Tacoma, WA 98405 only during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For questions regarding the scope of work, you can contact Harvey Adams at 253-207-4470 or via

email at hadams@tacomahousing.org. Each set of Contract Documents includes the Project Manual which includes details of the scope of work.

A pre-bid meeting is scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on Monday, May 9, 2011, starting at the Fawcett Project Site at 3201 South Fawcett Street, Tacoma, WA, and then proceeding to the Ludwig Site on South Lawrence Street. The pre-bid meeting is not mandatory, but attendance is highly encouraged.

Particular attention is called to the provisions for WMBE and Equal Opportunity and Prevailing Wage Rates to be paid under the contract. No bidder may withdraw their bid within 60 days after the actual date of opening thereof. THA reserves the right to waive any and all informalities or to reject any and all bids. THA is an Equal Opportunity Employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or handicapped status in the employment or provision of services. Approved for publication by Michael Mirra, Executive Director.

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