

Report ITR-TAPS-06-14

To: Chair Al Barfoot and Members of Transportation and Public Safety Committee
From: Geoff Hogan, Information Technology (IT) Director
Meeting Date: October 23, 2014
Subject: **Facilitating Fibre Construction in Grey County**
Status: Recommendation adopted by Committee as amended per Resolution TAPS116-14 by circulating the information to AMO, OGRA and WOWC; Resolution TAPS116-14 amended by County Council to include SWEA on the circulation list per Resolution CC151-14 November 4, 2014;

Recommendation(s)

WHEREAS encouraging diversification of local and regional economies through the increased use of broadband and information and communications technologies (ICT) is an essential component of developing a knowledge-based economy;

AND WHEREAS leveraging high speed, high capacity communications technologies (broadband) across a wide range of sectors achieves above average rates of economic growth, job creation, social diversification and environmental innovation;

AND WHEREAS the lack of affordable high quality broadband is impeding Grey County residents and businesses' ability to fully take advantage of the new economy;

AND WHEREAS initial results of the County's Economic Development Action Plan indicate that the implementation of high quality fibre based broadband needs to be a priority of Grey County;

AND WHEREAS a significant portion of the cost of installing fibre is permits required to be in compliance with municipal policy;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT report ITR-TAPS-06-14 Facilitating Fibre Construction in Grey County be received;

AND THAT the Transportation and Information Technology departments be directed to update polices to decrease cost and complexity of installing facilities required to improve broadband (particularity fibre) in Grey County;

AND FURTHER THAT County staff work with member municipality staff to align policies between County and member municipalities to standardize access to road allowances for the installation of broadband facilities.

Background

In order to be viable and prosper in today's global economy, communities and regions must compete for investment on the global stage, and its communities must have the tools to grow their economies from within. It is the ability of business and government to adapt and innovate the skills and creativity of the local labour force, and it is the availability of high capacity broadband access to the Internet that now powers wealth creation, entrepreneurial activity, job creation and overall community prosperity.

The demand for more robust Internet service is increasing dramatically, as more and more people become aware of and reliant on Internet-based services and information. Continued innovations in e-health, e-government, e-commerce and entertainment are extending the societal reach of and dependence on the Internet and this in turn is fueling an unprecedented revolution in how we all live, work and play.

Worldwide experience shows that the extension of ultra-high speed broadband to as much of the population as possible reaps significant and measurable economic and social benefits. Communities that connect to and embrace the so-called Internet of Things are rewarded with many so called 'Intelligent' outcomes and attributes (as reported by the [Intelligent Community Forum](#)).

The Intelligent Community forum has 5 key success factors for Intelligent Communities, the first and most important is broadband connectivity. "Broadband is the new essential utility, as vital to economic growth as clean water and good roads. Communities need a clear vision of their broadband future and to craft policies to encourage deployment and adoption".

Fibre Optic Installation

Fibre optic cable is the most scalable infrastructure that can be installed for broadband communications; cables can be installed either on poles, or buried in the ground. Due to the regulatory requirements of Electrical Safety Authority, installation on poles in Ontario

is very expensive and many providers would like to bury fibre cable in our road allowances. For providers to install cable in Grey County they need to acquire permits from the County, our member municipalities and conservation authorities. Each individual organization has different requirements and different contracts. A significant portion of the cost of installing cable is dealing with the regulatory environment and subsequent delays.

Recommendations

To reduce the cost of installing fiber-optic cable, it is recommended that the County review its policies to streamline the regulatory environment without compromising safety so that installers find Grey County a more attractive place to do business. A simplified, consistent standard master services agreement (contract) for all regulatory authorities would also be very beneficial. Telecom providers all have fixed capital budgets and are more likely to build in a region where their return on investment is improved due to lower cost of installation.

To improve the experience for telecom providers, who do not typically recognize municipal boundaries, it would be beneficial for all the member municipalities and the County to have policies and contracts that are aligned and similar so that the legal costs and time required for paperwork are reduced for all parties.

Outcomes

If Grey County is to survive and thrive in the future knowledge based economy broadband access must be improved. A long term vision that aligns with the regional SWIFT project's plan must be created to increase the quantity and quality of private sector broadband investments in our community.

A recent draft of the county's upcoming economic development strategy indicated that broadband is critical to the future economic health of our county. The consultants comment on broadband was simple, "get it".

The regional WOWC SWIFT project will bring the fast, highly available, fibre based broadband service to between 10 and 20 Points of Presence (POP) across Grey County. SWIFT is a long term solution to building world class fibre based broadband access in our region but it will take time. To speed up the process of encouraging last mile access improvements for Grey County residents and business the county needs to make every effort to make Grey County easy place to do business for telecom providers.

Financial / Staffing / Legal / Information Technology (IT)

Considerations

There will be some staff time required to facilitate meetings between member municipality staff and County staff, time will also be required to draft and update policies. This time can be built into existing staffs 2015 work plan. There may be external legal costs for contract reviews. A complete estimate of costs will come forward during 2015 budget discussions.

Link to Strategic Goals / Priorities

Goal Number One of the Corporate Strategic Plan is to expand the prosperity base of the county. This means, enhancing and diversifying economic opportunities within the county, by becoming “investment- ready” and ensuring the foundation is in place for sustained success. Our shared vision of sustained community and regional prosperity encompasses:

Economic Opportunity and Growth

Wealth generation and the creation of work are the basic building blocks for livable, healthy communities where human initiative and stable families can flourish. Opportunities for entrepreneurial initiative, business expansion and training for jobs that offer upward mobility are critical to this success.

Community Sustainability

Communities that are vibrant, strong and offer hope to their residents are communities in which neighbourhoods are safe, the environment is clean, housing is affordable, social support services and cultural/recreational opportunities are accessible, and civic spirit is nurtured by participatory decision-making, innovative design and celebration.

Community Partnerships

Economic opportunity and social/cultural development rely on broad community participation, both at the individual level and at the institutional level. Engaged individuals, governments and the private and not-for-profit sectors working together to provide relevant, accessible and coordinated programs and services that build towards the community’s strategic direction.

The Intelligent Community program and its reliance on high quality (fibre based) broadband is wholly consistent with this strategic direction.

Respectfully submitted by,

Geoff Hogan
Director of Information Technology