

Broadband - a basic commodity

In line with the broader vision of the National Development Plan (NDP), the 2020 Vision for broadband is that all South Africans will have access to broadband services at 2.5% or less of the population's average monthly income. Is this a merely another fantasy or is Government serious about achieving its vision?



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OpenWeb CEO Keoma Wright says it is no longer a privilege but a right to have access to fast internet. "The internet has become a basic commodity and broadband plays a crucial role in economic growth, development and job creation."

Building the knowledge economy

Broadband is an enabling infrastructure for building the knowledge economy and information society and for accelerating the socio-economic growth and development of South Africa. The broadband policy aims at ensuring universal access to reliable, affordable and secure broadband infrastructure and services by 2020 and stimulates sustainable uptake and usage of ICTs.

Furthermore, the policy prioritises the need to implement interventions aimed at strategic positioning of broadband infrastructure as a catalyst for social and economic growth and enhance universal access.

According to research by the World Economic Forum, good broadband Internet access contributes between 0.25% and 1.4% to economic growth.

Wright says broadband is also no longer limited to being delivered over one technology, a modern corporate network will have fibre, ADSL and mobile data complimenting each other, running in perfect unison to create a virtually indestructible network.

To this end, Government will encourage and support investment in broadband backbone network infrastructure and increasing the uptake and usage of broadband services.

Government has recognised that there will be challenges in implementing and executing the plan and said that the transition may take some time. It also realises that success in rolling out broadband depends on an appropriate market structure, clear institutional arrangements and high level state coordination across sectors.

Broadband targets

It has set broadband targets for the country which will encourage fibre deployment whilst encouraging mobile broadband rollout by releasing, over time, broadband spectrum.

Western Cape premier Helen Zille recently announced in her state of the province address a project where Neotel will fund the infrastructure roll-out of 384 Wi-Fi hotspots, using Western Cape government buildings, which would cover almost every ward in the province.

Leading by example, the Western Cape plans to invest approximately R3-billion of its infrastructure budget over the next three years to roll-out broadband connectivity across the province. The project will see most Government sites being connected by fibre-optic cables, with most of them boasting Internet speeds between 100Mbps and 1Gbps.

"Government has to ensure that broadband is accessible and affordable. More importantly, it must focus on increasing the awareness of the value of the mobile phone and its capacity to provide Internet, and broadband in particular, and the tremendous benefits of this," he concludes.

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