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Change to World

UK urged to join broadband fast lane



Fibre to the home is the Holy Grail of broadband world

Broadband in the UK is not nearly fast enough and action needs to be taken if Britain wants to stay competitive in the high-speed internet market.

This is the view of Martin Thunman, Chief Executive of PacketFront, a Swedish infrastructure firm which is at the vanguard of a new type of broadband.

Fibre to the home can theoretically provide speeds up to 100 times faster than current DSL and cable services, offering a host of multiple applications including video telephony, digital TV and video-on-demand.

"If other countries such as France, Germany and Scandinavia start to deploy this type of infrastructure and the UK is stuck with DSL and cable it will lose in competitiveness," said Mr Thunman.

Swedish investment

Already in countries such as France, Italy and the Netherlands, local governments and communities are banding together to offer fibre to the home as an alternative to DSL - broadband over the copper telephone line.

Fibre to the home is also being deployed in the US and in Japan, where it is seen as a way of allowing employees to work from home, cutting down on commuter chaos.

In Sweden, 50% of all broadband connections



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are over fibre and both the Swedish national government and local authorities are investing heavily in fibre networks.

Broadband too slow

In fact local governments and community groups have been some of the earliest promoters of fibre access and it is a technology ideally suited to rural residents where neither cable nor DSL reach said Mr Thunman.

“
The UK government needs to act and to start looking at where the country needs to be in the long term

”
**Martin Thunman,
PacketFront**

More importantly it provided enough speed to satisfy even the most bandwidth-hungry application, he said.

"In a few years' time DSL broadband will be viewed as dial-up is today, simply not good enough," he said.

He is not impressed with BT's admission that it has no social responsibility for broadband and is equally scathing of government plans for the technology.

"Stephen Timms [the UK's e-Minister] demonstrates a lack of vision. He is not proactive, letting the market take care of itself," said Mr Thunman.

Instead, he argues the government should see a high-speed broadband infrastructure as a basic societal right in the same way that other utilities are viewed.

"The government needs to act and to start looking at where the country needs to be in the long term," he said.

The UK Government takes a more conservative view, saying broadband is a journey that must be taken in small steps.

"Broadband is a process and we need to think about the here and now. Fibre networks could be the big thing in ten years time but if we invested millions in it and it wasn't then that would not be a good idea," said a spokeswoman for the Department of Trade and Industry.

Fibre to the home has long been viewed in the

telecoms industry as a kind of Holy Grail - ideal but unattainable.

The biggest barrier to widespread adoption of fibre networks is the cost - around 30 to 40% more expensive than DSL - and the disruption caused by digging up roads.



For rural communities I'd say don't bother arguing with BT. Fund your own roll-out, it is already happening in other parts of the world



IDC analyst Jill Finger is not convinced that fibre to the home will become a viable alternative to current broadband any time soon.

**Martin Thunman,
PacketFront**

"Operators have invested too much in DSL. It would be unrealistic in the current climate," she said.

"Obviously it would depend on what applications were developed but copper will provide sufficient bandwidth in the next few years."

Mr Thunman remains convinced that large-scale infrastructure investments will be vital to the future development of broadband.

He pointed out that the billions the UK government made from selling off third generation mobile licenses would have funded a nationwide fibre network.

And it is not just a decision for governments. For residents cut off from the current broadband revolution, fibre to the home could provide a viable alternative, said Mr Thunman.

"For rural communities I'd say don't bother arguing with BT. Fund your own roll-out, it is already happening in other parts of the world."

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