City of Seattle
Citizens Telecommunications and Technology Advisory Board (CTTAB)

CTTAB Position Regarding Broadband for Seattle

This position letter was unanimously approved by the Board on October 12, 2010

The Citizens Telecommunications and Technology Advisory Board (CTTAB) urges the Mayor and the Council to move forward without further delay to bring a Fiber-to-the-Premise network to Seattle.

Access to a broadband internet connection at all premises in the city is the critical – indeed, the cornerstone – technology that will enable Seattle's citizens, businesses and institutions to compete and thrive in the global marketplace. State-of-the-art internet access is essential to Seattle's ability to compete and lead in the 21st Century global economy. CTTAB envisions access to the internet for all Seattle citizens, businesses, and institutions that is fast, fair, and everywhere. Achieving that vision will require the City to create a Fiber-to-the-Premise (FTTP) network.

A city-run FTTP network would provide superior speed, offer users more options, and provide equal opportunity to internet access across all Seattle neighborhoods. We believe the City has acted responsibly in carefully seeking and considering a number of options for fulfilling this need. It is now time to act.

Do Citizens Want or Need Broadband?

We know that many people doubt there is a need for the level of service FTTP would provide. Some argue that no one is asking for this level of service, or that existing options already meet market demand. Yet studies requested by the City confirm that there *is* demand and that it is not being met. From 2004 to the present, City government has carefully and thoroughly studied the desirability and feasibility of bringing FTTP broadband to Seattle. Each successive study has confirmed an abiding interest in internet access with FTTP-level capacity. For instance, a 2007 residential survey showed a strong interest from the citizenry in a City-run FTTP network. Given the results, the authors of the study concluded the opportunity for success of a City network was outstanding. A 2008 study to quantify the business case for FTTP in Seattle conducted by CTC for Seattle City Light and the City found that "Seattle residents and businesses recognize benefits of high speed networking" and that the need is not being met by private carriers.

At CTTAB, we see dozens of requests annually from community groups all over the city seeking matching grant funds to support adequate and affordable access for members of their community. We have spoken individually and as a board to business owners, entrepreneurs, neighborhood groups, neighbors and friends to gain an understanding of how important this issue is to fellow citizens. Our sense is that there is not so much a lack of community interest in the promise of FTTP as there is a sense of not being empowered to change the status quo. Citizens get it, even if

the issue is not in the headlines. Along with our fellow citizens, we see FTTP broadband as a means to keep Seattle globally competitive, promote economic development, offer new opportunities to provide 21st Century educational learning, enable innovative methods of health care delivery, and provide a ubiquitous and consistent level of service throughout the city.

Why a City-run FTTP Network?

The 2004 Citizen's Task Force on Telecommunications Innovation, established by former Mayor Greg Nickels and the City Council, found that fiber optic cable to the premises is the only technology presently available to meet Seattle's long-term technology infrastructure needs to remain competitive in the global economy. In the ensuing six years, technological advances in applications available on the internet, coupled with enormous broadband infrastructure investment in many developed and developing countries have only increased the imperative for the City of Seattle to build a state-of-the-art broadband network. A city-run FTTP network with capacity of at least 100Mb bi-directional throughput remains the only way to achieve the goals of global economic competitiveness and universal city-wide access.

The 2004 task force concluded that not only was FTTP desirable, but that the Seattle market lacks the competitive forces that might lead to a state of the art broadband network. Following the study, the City sought private sector partners to help it create a competitive FTTP network. The City issued a Request for Interest (RFI) to gather comments, form conceptual frameworks, and to identify partnership teams from private parties interested in and capable of partnering with the City of Seattle. The RFI included the promise of access to an array of physical assets and other resources held by the city to support development of the citywide FTTP network. While the RFI received 28 responses, no private commercial provider emerged who was willing to finance construction of the FTTP network the task force envisioned.

Private operators may, quite logically from a business perspective, not build FTTP because the private returns from the sale of internet, video, and phone may not justify the investment. However, the City must use a more expansive measure of returns on investment. The social returns and economic benefits from broadband in the areas of electricity, health-care, transportation, education, and economic development could well be larger than the costs of building the network. Furthermore, the City has an interest in providing equal access across all Seattle neighborhoods, not just those likely to be the most profitable. The City must also factor these social and economic benefits into its decision making. No profit is made from building, maintaining and operating streets; it is the social and economic benefits that justify the investment. Indeed, the 2008 CTC business case study affirmed the City has "compelling objectives in encouraging FTTP deployment, and there exists a foundation for investment in fiber."

We encourage the city to drive towards, settle on and implement a business plan without delay. The most likely outcome of doing nothing is that Seattle will lose its edge to cities that are better positioned to compete in a global economy that is increasingly dependent on information technology.

CTTAB Next Steps

We have had a number of productive discussions with the Mayor's staff and with all Council members on the issue of broadband. CTTAB believes this is one of the most important technology issues facing the City today, with far-ranging implications for the future economic and community development of Seattle. We appreciate your time and the seriousness with which you have welcomed our input.

CTTAB is united in our position on this important matter. In support of our recommendations and as part of our charter, CTTAB intends to advocate, solicit, and facilitate citizen participation in advancing the goal of FTTP broadband for Seattle. We look forward to further discussion with Council and the Mayor and welcome the opportunity to assist in realizing that goal.