

Press Release

Minister calls for road map for super fast broadband



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DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS
ENTERPRISE & REGULATORY REFORM

The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP will today make his first major speech as Minister of State for Competitiveness on the subject of broadband. He will say that the UK needs a road map for the move to super fast broadband and that the clock is ticking as other countries move forward. He will also announce a high-level summit on the potential need for public sector intervention in broadband deployment.

In response, Kip Meek, chairman of The Broadband Stakeholder Group (BSG) – the government’s advisory group on broadband – will call on the government to set a target benchmarking the UK’s broadband infrastructure against its key economic competitors. They will be speaking at the launch of the BSG’s new work programme, which aims to ensure that next generation broadband becomes a reality in Britain.

Kip Meek, chairman of the BSG comments, “Other countries are investing in higher speed broadband and the UK isn’t. If we want to see the UK stay ahead amongst the international leaders in broadband, we must find a way to encourage timely and efficient investment. We’re not looking to government for all of the solutions, but we are looking for ministerial leadership. Communications infrastructure is a key enabler of competitiveness. The evolution of the UK’s broadband infrastructure must be prioritised by government, I therefore welcome Stephen Timms’ engagement in the issue alongside the Broadband Stakeholder Group.”

Stephen Timms, Minister of State for Competitiveness, says: “When I became e-commerce Minister five years ago, the UK was neck and neck with Croatia on broadband availability and use.

“Together, thanks in no small measure to the work of the Broadband Stakeholder Group, we fixed that problem and put Britain in a leading position. However, today we face a new challenge. Other countries are starting to invest in new, fibre based infrastructure, delivering considerably higher bandwidth than is available in the UK today.

"As Minister for Competitiveness, I see it as one of my highest personal priorities that we have a high performance telecommunications infrastructure in every part of the country, enabling us to compete successfully on a global basis. That is why I have decided to chair a high level summit later this year to consider the circumstances that might trigger public sector intervention, the form that intervention might take and at what level it might sensibly take place. I want it to be an open exchange, to bring together key people from Government, from Ofcom and from industry.

“It is essential that the UK undertakes timely deployment of technology – we can’t lag behind. I would like to thank the Broadband Stakeholder Group for their continued support and involvement in this important work.”

In April 2007, the BSG published its Pipe Dreams? report, highlighting the uncertainties associated with next generation broadband and warning that unless steps are taken by government, Ofcom and industry, the UK risks widening the digital divide and falling behind its global competitors in terms of its broadband infrastructure. The report called for a concerted and innovative approach to regulation and policy making to achieve the right balance of investment incentives and competition to enable a market-led transition to next generation broadband.

Over 200 people from industry, government, parliament and think tanks will attend the launch of the BSG’s work programme, underlining the growth potential and economic importance of the next generation broadband. In addition Ofcom is expected to announce its consultation on the regulatory framework for next generation shortly.

BSG Work Programme

The BSG *Pipe Dreams?* report recommended nine next steps for improving the prospects for efficient and timely investment in next generation broadband in the UK. To take these recommendations forward the BSG has developed the following work programme:

- **Policy**

Improve the evidence base about the relevance and importance of next generation broadband to the UK economy and society in order to aid policy and regulatory decision-making. This includes promoting a benchmarked target for the UK and producing a framework for measuring the value of next generation broadband.

- **Commercial**

Stimulate a debate about how the commercial landscape may need to adapt to allow investment in next generation broadband infrastructure to take place. This will include a series of events on issues such as business model innovation, traffic prioritisation, network cost sharing and the commercial relationship between content and delivery platforms.

- **Regulation**

Promote a regulatory framework that enables and supports investment across the value chain. This includes submitting substantial inputs to consultations at UK and EU level, as well as undertaking more specific work on non-domestic rating and video on demand content regulation.

- **Public sector intervention**

Work with local and central public bodies to identify and experiment with the development of efficient and effective models for public sector intervention where persistent market failure is likely to occur.

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Notes to Editors

About next generation broadband

In this report, the BSG has used the same definition of next generation broadband as Ofcom did in its Next Generation Access discussion document:

‘Broadband access services that are capable of delivering sustained bandwidths significantly in excess of those currently widely available using existing local access infrastructures and technologies.’

In practice this general definition currently suggests services that are capable of providing in excess of 20Mbps downstream (which would be sufficient to support services such as multiple HDTV feeds using MPEG4, broadband internet and voice services) as well as faster upstream access capable of supporting an increasing range of peer-to-peer applications and interactive and user generated services.

There is a range of technologies capable of delivering next generation broadband. Some are effectively evolutions of existing access infrastructures that have already been deployed (copper and cable), while others would involve the deployment of entirely new physical infrastructures.

About the Broadband Stakeholder Group

The BSG was established as a cross-sector government advisory group in 2001 to help the UK lead the G7 in broadband penetration and connectivity. It provides a neutral forum for collaboration between organisations across the converging broadband value-chain with the ultimate aim of helping to create a strong and competitive UK knowledge economy

It aims to be a critical friend of government and the regulator, and comprises companies from the telecoms and technology sectors through to content providers and rights holders. It also has direct representation from government departments and Ofcom. It is funded through a combination of government funding and industry sponsorship.

The BSG focuses on strategic, medium- to long-term challenges, which have latterly included next generation access networks, predicting future bandwidth requirements, the EU Television without Frontiers Directive, digital inclusion and self- and co-regulation in the audiovisual media market.

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