

Regional broadband recommendations

June 2008

A best practice by Intercommunale leiedal

This best practice is an extract of the conclusions of a study created by Dolmen in June 2008. The study is a result of preparational meetings between Leiedal and the municipalities, other stakeholders and Dolmen. The most important meeting was a workshop held on June 18th 2008.

Participants of this **workshop** where:

- Luc Velghe (Municipality Zwevegem, ICT manager)
- Hans Van Den Heede (Province West-Flanders, manager datawarehousing/GIS)
- Peter-Jan Pertry (Citymesh, system engineer)
- Vincent Grymonprez (Citymesh, sales manager)
- Wim Stubbe (Port of Oostende)
- Geert Speleers (Dolmen, consultant)
- Wouter De Jans (Dolmen, system engineer)
- Bob Bulcaen (Leiedal, e-government)
- Bart Noels (Leiedal, e-government)
- Filip Meuris (Leiedal, e-government coördinator)

The study had **two goals** for our region:

1. Create the basis for a regional broadband strategy
 - Vision on the future of broadband
 - Analyse broadband needs and issues
 - Define the role of government
2. Make a proposal for the creation of a regional broadband network. This network should help the 12 municipalities and attract new businesses.

These are the final conclusions and recommendations of that study. The full study is available in Dutch.

1. A Regional Broadband Strategy

The rapid growth of data traffic, ever increasing data volumes and online applications has made broadband a crucial requirement for companies, schools, health centres and (local) governments. The business sector righteously requests greater bandwidth. This demand has become almost as important as the need for industrial terrains or a solid transport infrastructure.

A solid broadband infrastructure can be an important incentive attracting companies to our region. Obtaining a solid infrastructure cannot be done by banking on existing providers. These providers must be stimulated to expand their existing infrastructure. Another issue is the verification of the need for investments in public or private-public infrastructure. This can be an important impulse for new providers, attracting them to built an own infrastructure or an opportunity for companies to exchange data without passing by an public network as the internet.

Advice 1: Compose a strategy - together with all the actors in the region - regarding ways of attracting companies by offering broadband access. Possible stakeholders are RESOC, federations of employers, local governments,...

Advice 2: Deliver a powerful signal to existing providers that more investments in broadband connections via fiber need to take place in the region. If these networks aren't ready to tackle the increasing demand of capacity, glassfiber to desk (company, government, citizen,...) is out of the question. The key question is: How to encourage these providers. The existing duopoly makes it virtually impossible for new providers. Besides that the providers are very reticent when it comes to their network.

Advice 3: Ask public providers such as Belnet to open up their network for companies. Belnet, with it's gigantic capacity, is the Belgian national research network that provides high-bandwidth Internet connection to Belgian universities, colleges, schools, research centres, and government departments. If companies could join Belnet, they would not only benefit from the capacity but also from the existing cooperation between the other actors in the Belnet network.

2. A Regional Network

The creation of an own regional network certainly has potential surplus values for the different actors in the region. The technological solutions are available, but certain questions concerning content must be solved before the project of an own network can be set in motion.

Advice 4: Analyse which applications make a solid base to invest in a regional network.

Make an analyses of possible shared services, cost restraining measures, exchange opportunities, etc. For example: Is it possible to use a common

data centre as a centralised data repository or for the centralisation of municipal applications?

Verify if an own regional network could be of interest for emergency services. In case of disaster it might be necessary to use own networks instead of the too busy public networks. (for example the terrorist bombings in the London metro where emergency services counted on the mobile network for communication.)

Advice 5: Aim at the construction of an independent fiber network.

This technology offers currently the highest possible speed and has the ability to increase speed with the same infrastructure with future technologies. A cable network also doesn't lead to interference (in contrast with wireless technologies).

Advice 6: Determine the role of the local government.

Cities and municipalities have a role in delivering permits to Third Parties. For example: If the electricity network needs adjustments, local government can enforce that the job is can be done on condition that a bundle of fiber cables or provisional piping is put next to the new electricity cables. The biggest cost concerning fiber is the placement and not the "building material".

Or municipalities could enforce the placement of fiber cables as a presupposition when a new housing development is built.

- What are the potential applications on a regional network?
- Who will built the network?
 - Aim for a complete public network in hands of local and other governments (cfr. Groningen)?
 - Aim for a public/private cooperation?
 - Appoint a provider?
 - Can we provide public broadband infrastructure on (new) industrial terrains?

Advice 7: Instigate projects concerning "bundling of demands"

It needs to be possible to encourage existing providers to bring great capacity to new industrial terrains in the planning phase. Multiple companies that will work on this terrain can support this demand. This way these requests will gain in importance because the provider has direct benefit (new customers) and the potentially even more companies in the near future. The placement of fiber on the terrain can be done with reduced costs together with the placement of electricity, gas, etc.

Advice 8: Try to make an inventory of the existing networks.

In this region a widespread fiber infrastructure is already in place, among which a lot of public networks as Eandis, Elia, Fluxys, B-telecom. This infrastructure can be used creating a new network.

Advice 9: Make a business model holding into account the above mentioned advices and investigating all possible solutions to create a regional network; public, public/private or private.

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