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NEWS: Nunavut September 28, 2012 - 7:42 am

Nunavut telecom players call for government action Firms offer complex menu of choices

JIM BELL

They may not agree on much, but there's one issue on which all of Nunavut's telecom players agree: governments must soon develop new ways of supporting broadband internet in Arctic Canada, a conference session held Sept. 27 at the Nunavut Trade Show revealed.



Mark Walker of Northwestel, Paul Bush of Telesat and Oana Spinu of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp. listen to Jeff Phillips of the SSI Group give a presentation on the morning of Sept. 27 at the Nunavut Trade Show in Iqaluit. Despite their business rivalries and philosophical differences, all players agree that there's an urgent need for governments to develop new policies and a new financial framework for broadband telecommunications in northern Canada. (PHOTO BY JIM BELL)

The gathering brought together a collection of mostly private firms whose clashing commercial interests often bring them into conflict.

But all groups admitted that governments, especially the federal government, must act now to replace a subsidy system that expires in 2016 and to recognize the technological landscape has changed radically over the past decade.

And they also said the CRTC, Canada's telecommunications regulator, must change the terms of a special fund that is now used to subsidize the cost of landline telephone service in remote communities.

It's also clear that to fix the widening communications gap between the North and southern Canada, governments must choose from a complex menu of commercial pitches.

"The time is now for Arctic Fibre," said Doug Cunningham, of Arctic Fibre Inc., an Ontario company that plans to build an undersea fibre optic cable from London to Tokyo under the waters of the Canadian Arctic.

Cunningham said hundreds of millions of telecom consumers in Asia would ultimately pay for his undersea cable, eliminating the need for government subsidies to build it.

But, in response to questions, he said that connecting all or most communities in Labrador, Nunavik and Nunavut to the marine cable would likely require government spending of between \$174 million and \$190 million over about 20 years.

At the same time, he said his proposed route would automatically connect 52 per cent of Nunavut's population to his firm's fibre optic cable, supplying them with fast, cheap connections that eliminate the latency delays and high annual transmission costs that bedevil satellite-based systems.

This would include residents of Iqaluit, Cambridge Bay, Cape Dorset, Hall Beach, Igloodik, Taloyoak and Gjoa Haven.

With government spending, including money to pay for a spur line to hook up Kivalliq communities on the west coast of Hudson Bay, 92 per cent of Nunavut's population could be connected to Arctic Fibre's cable, Cunningham said.

This would not kill satellite communications, but it would relegate satellite to a backup role if fibre lines are damaged, Cunningham said.

"I'm not suggesting that you throw out your satellite dishes — it will be a backup," he said.

But in Nunavut, Arctic Fibre's big satellite rival, Telesat launched a big pitch of its own this past February.

Under it, Telesat would spend \$30 million over 10 years to make three more satellite transponders available to the North and another \$10 million to finance upgrades to ground equipment, said Paul Bush, the company's vice president of business development.

At the same time, Bush said Telesat wants government to spend \$120 million over 10 years on another 12 transponders (a transponder is a spot on a satellite that supplies a fixed unit of bandwidth).

In his remarks, Bush slammed the Arctic Fibre plan, saying fibre cuts are far too common, that ice conditions near shorelines could damage fibre cables and that implementation of Cunningham's plan might take too much time.

And he downplayed the [Oct. 6, 2011 satellite meltdown](#) across the North by saying satellite-based services are "99.999 per cent reliable."

Cunningham responded by saying fibre cables can be protected by laying them in covered trenches and by doing horizontal drilling near shorelines.

And he said most cuts to fibre optic lines occur in land-based systems, not marine cables.

"A little ice is nice," Cunningham said, because ice-covered seas reduce the chance of undersea cables getting damaged by ship anchors or bottom-trawling fishing vessels.

Another objection to Arctic Fibre — which Telesat takes full advantage of in its pitch to government — is that an undersea cable cannot reach every single Nunavut community.

Oana Spinu of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp. said her group believes all communities, no matter how small or isolated, must each gain access to the same level of broadband connectivity.

In the same vein, Bush said only Telesat satellites are capable of delivering the same service to all communities, because satellite signals are accessible everywhere.

Cunningham dismissed the parity notion as "utopian" saying that if more communities were to gain access to inexpensive fibre optic connections, the resulting savings could pay for faster satellite services in communities the cable can't reach.

He also pointed out that rural communities on the outskirts of Ottawa still rely on antiquated dial-up internet.

However, Jeff Phillips of the SSI Group, which runs the NBDC's Qiniq network, said "broadband for all" should be the governing principle for telecommunications development.

"Paul and I have got you covered," Phillips said.

And Phillips said that within the system his company manages for Qiniq, SSI Micro has trained customer agents in every community, which meets another NBDC goal: building local capacity.

But, depending on what the CRTC later decides, [SSI Micro may have to compete with another "broadband for all" proposal](#).

Their rival, Northwestel, is proposing that the CRTC approve a \$273 million service improvement plan that would offer high speed internet to all 96 communities in its service area, as well as 3G cell phone service.

"We are asking the CRTC to step out and be bold," Walker said.

Another entity that's under pressure to step up is Industry Canada, whose subsidy system for northern broadband expires in 2016.

"The sky is falling in 2016... We need a long-term plan for Nunavut," Spinu said.

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(13) Comments:

#1. Posted by Heavy Internet User on September 28, 2012

Why should the whole territory suffer because a couple of communities cannot get fibre hook ups. Give fibre to those who can get it. Give the extra bandwidth that is now free from use to those communities to who cannot get fibre. It is about as close to parity as you can get.

#2. Posted by Nunov on September 28, 2012

Telesat is the same company that refused a faster connection for the North while making satellite equipment capable of up to 25 Mbs available to the south. I don't know what they plan on using.

#3. Posted by Competition on September 28, 2012

Satellites and fibre cable are both the same in that they have very high fixed cost and very low operating cost. The the price for both are artificial, designed to get as much money as possible.

You will notice that Arctic Fibre won't let you hook your computer to their network. They want



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you to go through one or more levels of "service providers". Same for Telesat Canada. Those "service providers" are mostly sales agents who add to the cost you pay.

What each of these operations want is to lock in customers and lock out competition.

What no one is saying is that lots of new telecommunications satellites will be launched within the next few years. There will be lots more capacity in the sky.

#4. Posted by LoneTraveler on September 28, 2012

"Oana Spinu of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp. said her group believes all communities, no matter how small or isolated, must each gain access to the same level of broadband connectivity"

This essentially means that everyone will have the lowest common denominator in terms of bandwidth : the lowest quality of services and highest amount of frustration shared for and by all users in the territory. This is not how the quality of life of a territory/province/civilization improves.

Waiting for a technology to mature to a point where it is universally available is tantamount to having no improvement for the usefull lifespan of the technology in question.

All the while another technology will come into being that will surpass it in terms of increased ability, lower cost, etc. But for the average user this future increase in capability is only illusionnary. He/She only sees that, in his/her daily life, that a for a technology to be available to him/her it has to be developed to the point of obsolescence.

#5. Posted by sled dog on September 28, 2012

according to poster , op'ed you cannot call on the governments for support for fibre. at least that was his/her post in reply to me a few days back.

again, this is part of the infrastructure deficit in Nunavut that no one seems to quantify, qualify and openly discuss.

the real deficit in NU is the political leadership, know-how and letting bureaucrats run the show. (and i am not talking about harper and leona)

#6. Posted by Lacking Fibre on September 28, 2012

#4 LoneTraveler: You are dead on, you stole the words from my mouth. I too am tired of being held back by remote communities of a couple hundred residents.

I would be willing to pay 20% extra to have southern quality internet as I am sure many others would be too. Take that extra 20% and pay for everyone in remote NU communities to have top of the line satellite internet through Xplornet. The residents of bigger towns get southern quality internet and the residents of the most remote and tiny communities get their satellite internet paid for free. It is a win-win situation for everyone.

#7. Posted by Op ED on September 28, 2012

Ya reight sled-dog! What you fail to mention is you were calling on GN with it's limited resources. Players that know are at least indicating that due to scope the Feds would likely have to play the biggest role. Actually I think your posts are politically motivated, especially when you make sure to exclude the MP and PM?? Get real will you?

#8. Posted by Talk Back on September 28, 2012

I think a diservice is done be excluding the comments being aimed at Leona and Harper?? Unless you are an employee or major supporter of theirs. That would put you in the 13% that think she is doing a good job I guess..

#9. Posted by Feeling Cheated on September 29, 2012

Somebody should tell Ms. Oana Spinu and Mr. Jeff Phillips that their Qiniq system sucks and it is a total disgrace that this group gets government money to supply the people of Nunavut with such an inferior service

Can someone explain why this Nunavut broadband corporation even exists? What is it? As far as I can tell it is just a mafia-type protection racket set up to siphon off money and pick the pockets of their Nunavut customers

Build the fibre cable now and make this ridiculous group disappear...

#10. Posted by Lyle on September 29, 2012

I have been working for my community on fiber ownership and infrastructure, and i can say we have been very successful. Our concept is communities should own and benefit from the long term economic sustainable growth in providing services. Our goal we build it, we lease it to anyone willing to provide services to our community, also we are looking at building fiber to the south. The Jeff Phillips and Northwestel's will tell you they do it for Northerners and it's called a business, so call it what you want, bottom line it's a business for profit. All those business built on the backs of aboriginal governments and it's peoples. If you want to get real, the real owners should be the people.

#11. Posted by sled dog on September 29, 2012

NorthEastern Canada 2D Seismic Survey

Project Proposal

RPS on behalf of Multi Klient Invest AS has filed a Project Description with the National Energy Board for a potential 2D Seismic Survey offshore Baffin Bay/Davis Strait within their jurisdiction.

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On behalf of Nunasi Corporation, Will Wilkins, Chairman and Mr. Archie Angookuk, Chief Executive Officer are pleased to announce the appointment of Gregory Cayen as President and Chief Operating Officer of Nunasi Corporation.

Mr. Cayen brings over 22 years of experience working in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories with various Inuit and Aboriginal organizations in senior management roles. His experience will serve Nunasi well as it moves forward to enhance its partnerships.

Mr. Cayen will also maintain his present responsibilities as President and CEO of NCC Investment Group Inc.

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hey op'ed .just where does the Gn get 95% of its funding from. ooooooh, i know that one: from the feds. so, what is the harm of the Gn pushing for infrastructure dollars for fibre rather than leaving it just to private business to ask the feds for subsidy.

same pot of money in the end. asking the gn for support, of concept and dollars is not politically motivated , is it.

#12. Posted by Op ED on September 30, 2012

Sure sled dog...add it to all the other infrastructure gn is lobbying for - i am sure the reception will be warm! One day some of you folks will wake up from your fantasy world I guess. Amd no I do not believe your suggestion is the base for my comment about political motivation but the fact you specifically tried to exclude the MP and Fed PM from any culpability while trying to insinuate that NU wasnt doing their job???? Lost your credibility with me right off. Dont love GN but I can say havent much uise for what the MP and "cons" have done to us either. As indicated by another poster, killed foodmail to save money and run around pretending it was good for us [as onlyone example]. So YA I do believe you are tied in politically one way or another....

#13. Posted by The Old Trapper on September 30, 2012

The whole debate over satellite or fibre for internet is rather amusing.

Let's see some statistics regarding business and essential government use of the internet. If they topped 20% I would be surprised.

It's all well and good to cut down the time it takes to download a movie, but is this what we need to spend our money on?

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