

Go for gigabit speeds: America should expect nothing less

September 1 2009, By Mark T. Ansboury

As federal officials begin reviewing 2,200 detailed proposals requesting more than seven times the \$4 billion in broadband investment in this round of stimulus funding, it's a good time to revisit the big-picture and ask what outcomes are we looking for and what should drive funding decisions. With the government investing ambitiously in economic recovery, Americans should be equally bold in expecting a return on our nation's investment.

And to ensure the long-term benefits -- particularly given this is our infrastructure for innovation and global competitiveness for years to come -- we all should be thinking years and decades out. To quote the "Great One," Wayne Gretzky, you should "go to where the puck's going, not where it is." So, as the [Federal Communications Commission](#) is charged with establishing our nation's first broadband policy, we should focus not only where we fall short today but also where we will entirely miss opportunities -- and the puck. We need to know where our broadband strategy is going and what happens to our nation's future without a bold strategy.

We need to follow the lead of other countries and start aiming (including investing and incentivizing) for gigabit Internet speeds for all. Gigabit-speed networks would provide Americans with hundreds of times the Internet speeds broadband households currently have. Only a broadband policy striving for gigabit speeds will put us on par with our world competitors and provide the infrastructure America will need to compete for years to come. Right now, the U.S. government and the [stimulus](#)

[package](#) are allowing the bar to be set so low, we are certain to fund initiatives that are, by international standards, already obsolete, while other countries such as Australia and Korea are committing even greater funds than the U.S. to upgrade networks. Quite simply, tomorrow's innovation will come from whatever parts of the world have the platforms to foster it.

Gigabit broadband can also drive sweeping transformation in our communities and across sectors that affect us all, such as health care, education, government and public safety, and get our economy moving in the right direction again.

If the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act is truly going to help, today's investment needs to continue once the shovels are put back in the shed. That means investing in technologies that will continue to have impact and empower businesses individuals while creating new opportunities and sustainable growth. As our economy changes, business and individuals are looking for new ways to engage their future workforce. On the home front, it's about addressing the future needs of a connected household, providing high-bandwidth networks to manage household services, access to sensors for environmental and health management, availability of real-time access to the workplace, school, public safety and community services and numerous applications that have not been invented yet.

What do we know? Internet service has become more and more a necessity of daily life. It was only 15 years ago when phone companies said the Internet was a fad. The world has changed and will keep changing. Enabling gigabit access throughout the community will foster economic development and enable citizens to have access to new applications where they live, work and play. We should be thinking about incentivizing investment and innovation enabling new markets, new consumers and new services so as a nation and as individual citizens,

we have a choice on the type and level of services we can access. Such access will determine whether we can actively conduct business from a home office, participate in a class discussion remotely, or access top quality health care regardless how far we live from the best hospitals.

What don't we know? The opportunities, services, efficiencies and competitive advantage that having a true platform for innovation -- a gigabit national network -- would provide.

Take the example of health care, and what gigabit speed -- or lack of it -- would mean to you. With gigabit speeds, you could live in a remote town, yet be "seen" by a top doctor any distance away via video, through your home television screen, use local sensors to provide environmental information, statistics regarding your condition or state of health, monitor the trends in regards to chronic conditions. Gigabit speed means you can be monitored daily from your home by nurses and technicians at your local caregiver or doctor's office. This, too, is possible with medical devices available on the market and is already happening in pockets of our country, where [broadband](#) capacity is available.

Close monitoring of this kind can mean life or death to many individuals. Simultaneously, it can help shift the focus of health care to wellness and prevention, to avoid as many high-cost emergencies as possible.

Looking similarly at government, education and other key sectors of our economy, there are equally transforming possibilities that will result from gigabit speeds.

Collectively across sectors, the effect of gigabit speeds will be not just [economic recovery](#), but also improved quality of life and sustained competitiveness. Today's spending choices and public policy decisions amount to an incentive and investment into the business plan for

America's future. Good planning requires that we learn from the past while keeping our eye on a greater future. Our American tradition is one of reaching for the highest goals, whether, in our past, via the Oregon Trail or an Apollo mission to the moon. Today, in the 21st century, why wouldn't we go for gigabit speeds?

ABOUT THE WRITER

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