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Snare a faster Net deal.

By Chris Griffith

Providing fast Internet access is possible but sometimes hard to find, writes Chris Griffith

MOST of us find our lives intertwined with Telstra, the company that runs the fixed-line phone system, owns most of the communications network infrastructure, and is the biggest provider of Internet broadband services.

Even if you ditch your home phone, as some mobile phone users have, you will still need a Telstra home line for ADSL.

And if you manage to rent the copper wire from another telco, they'll be renting it from Telstra anyway.

But as new technologies emerge, there may be less reliance on the big telco.

This is good news for consumers, because Australian broadband will be more competitive, more technologically advanced and cheaper for consumers if it does not have to rely on the platform of one provider - however good that provider may be.

New wireless broadband services where the Internet is transmitted by radio from the ISP to your home is becoming affordable.

In parts of southeast Queensland, for example, you can already buy unlimited wireless ADSL at high speed for under \$50 a month, although this technology is in its infancy.

There is also the emerging technology of broadband over powerlines where the Internet enters your home via power lines rather than your phone line and satellite.

These are options for the so-called "last mile" solution, the means by which the Internet travels locally to your home. Another part of this platform is the fibre optic network that connects the Net from Internet Service Providers around the state to Brisbane and beyond. It is here that Telstra is facing some healthy competition from power companies Ergon Energy and Powerlink which, along with Queensland Rail, have high capacity fibre optic cable networks.

While denying it has set out to take on Telstra, Ergon Energy says it has enough spare fibre optic cable capacity to supply high-speed broadband to the entire cities of Townsville, Rockhampton and Gladstone.

Ergon Energy says the prime use of its fibre optic cable has been to link its substations and provide telecommunications between Ergon offices, but the capacity is there for more.

"In Townsville or Rockhampton and Gladstone we've probably got enough spare capacity on that network to supply the entire town," says Andrew Deme of Nexium Telecommunications, an offshoot of Ergon Energy offering wholesale high-speed data broadband.

"Whether you can get access to every customer is really the issue."

Deme says Ergon has undertaken a \$19 million, two-year project to roll out 300km of fibre optic cable to Cairns, Mackay, Toowoomba, Maryborough, Gladstone, Dalby and Bundaberg.

The rollout has been achieved in conjunction with Powerlink, which already has mounted fibre optic cable along

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doc no. 0007557
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party Australian Labor Party (ALP)
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context Ministerial Statement (MS)

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central-.ALP) (Premier and Treasurer) (9.43 am): There are a number of matters that I wish to report on briefly.

One relates to the proposed Telstra sale.

As members know, my government remains totally opposed to the sale of Telstra.

I seek leave to incorporate in Hansard the reasons.

Leave granted.

With arrogant disregard for telecommunications users and taxpayer-.shareholders, the Federal Government intends to sell Telstra.

People are having problems getting a decent broadband service sometimes only 12 to 15 kilometres from the centre of the city, let alone in the bush.

Broadband coverage in Australia is not keeping up with world best practice.

* Australia's broadband penetration rate is well below that of other industrialised countries.

* As at June 2003, Australia ranked 20th out of the 30 OECD countries, compared to 18th the previous year.

* More recent analysis suggests only 32% of homes have broadband, compared with 67% in Canada, 65% in Singapore and 46% in the United Kingdom.

An innovative, competitive telecommunications market is critical to Queensland's and Australia's future economic growth.

We need a review to address the best way of ensuring services (including repair times, installation, mobile coverage and broadband) will allow all Australians to be part of the global village.

In particular, the best way to deliver broadband must be considered.

Broadband is most commonly delivered via ADSL, cable or satellite (one or two way).

Satellite provides 100 percent coverage, but ADSL is only available to approximately 75 percent of Australia's population and cable is only available in parts of the capital cities, Newcastle and the Gold Coast.

Dial up internet, which is more commonly available, is capable of speeds of up to 56kps, but in reality is often slower.

This technology is not suitable for business and is also frustratingly slow in rural areas where the Federal Government has set the mandated minimum speed at 19.6 kps for the Universal Service Obligation.

Also, it is more prone to drop-.outs and customers cannot use their telephone line at the same time as they use the Internet as they can with broadband.

Despite the fact the Commonwealth has a clear constitutional responsibility in telecommunications, the Queensland Government has maximised opportunities to ensure regional Queenslanders have better, affordable services.

Yesterday Cabinet endorsed the Queensland Telecommunications Strategic Framework 2005-.2008, to enhance competition and improve telecommunications in Queensland.

This builds on earlier initiatives, such as a \$117.5M five year agreement with Optus to support the installation of alternative broadband infrastructure in Queensland.

Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads

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QR LEASES EXCESS OPTICAL FIBRE CAPACITY TO AAPT

Queensland Rail has signed a commercial agreement to enable AAPT Telecommunications to use some of the excess fibre

capacity on QR's suburban optical fibre cable communications network.

Transport and Main Roads Minister Steve Bredhauer said that as a result, QR would receive more robust telecommunications

for train operations together with an annual income.

AAPT would use the Queensland Rail optical fibre network to provide directly connected high-speed services to Queensland

businesses in the greater Brisbane area.

Mr. Bredhauer said the agreement gave AAPT access to QR optical fibre cables from Brisbane City to Ipswich, Robina,

Nerang, Mitchelton, Petrie and Fisherman's Island.

AAPT Business and Government Group Director Bill Egan said his company had just completed a roll out of fibre in Brisbane's Business District.

"Now that we also have access to 200kms of fibre through Queensland Rail's in the South East, we will be able to use modern

access technologies to provide a full range of broadband high speed services including internet, data, voice and multi-media."

The commercial agreement will cover five years with an option to extend it for a similar period.

Mr Bredhauer said the agreement was another example of government working closely with private enterprise for the good of

all Queenslanders.

Further information: Harry Williams (07) 3225 4826



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FULL DETAILS

doc no.	0015654
title	Optus to run cable link north
author	Hellaby, David
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~~MASSIVE
STATEMENT~~

THE Queensland Government has signed a \$23 million agreement with Optus Networks that will lead to a 2000km, fibre-optic broadband cable link being laid between Brisbane and Cairns.

Optus has signed up to operate the link, which will be built by Reef Networks.

Optus must allow other carriers to use the link.

In return, the Government has guaranteed to take at least \$23 million worth of services from Optus.

Communication and Information Technology Minister Terry Mackenroth said the Government had guaranteed to use Optus services in return for Optus's agreement to operate the cable.

The deal will provide Optus with the facilities to offer broadband services to most of coastal Queensland.

Optus is expected to finalise agreements with Reef Networks, a subsidiary of Leighton Vision Stream, within the next three weeks, and work on the cable will begin within two months.

Reef will lay the cable inside the Brisbane-Cairns railway corridor.

The project is expected to take about a year to complete.

The Queensland Government hopes the deal will create competition and push down prices for telephony and Internet services to regional areas.

Mr Mackenroth said the high-bandwidth cable would greatly enhance delivery of communications services, such as the Internet, to and from regional areas.

Apart from increasing telecommunications capacity, it would stimulate competition and provide greater scope for telecommunications providers to reduce prices, he said.

Reef Networks has signed contracts with Queensland Rail for run the cable in rail corridors.

In return, Queensland Rail will be given free access to the cable for signalling and telecommunications.

The cable will be laid from Brisbane north, and regional centres will go online as soon as the cable reaches them.

TELECOMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (CET)

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (CK)

COMPETITION (TC)

STATE GOVERNMENT POLICY (5S)

Optus Networks

QUEENSLAND (AQ)

BRISBANE (AQ1)

CAIRNS (AQ9)

MACKENROTH, T.(MP)(ALP - CHATSWORTH - QLD.) (3092)

Queensland Rail (8075)

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