

Consultation on a New Set of Service Areas for Spectrum Licensing (DGSO-002-18)

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Introduction

The other day an entrepreneur in Economy, Nova Scotia told me that he was having trouble sharing his price list with a German customer. When I asked him why, he explained that the internet in his area is so slow, it had taken half a dozen tries to get his price list to upload to his website. In nearby Glenholme, several businesses were facing the same problem. The great irony: the fibre optic trunk cable belonging to one of Canada's largest telecommunication companies runs not 5 miles from their door. But they can't access it.

The internet has become an essential service. It is not possible to participate, let alone be competitive, in the global economy without access to high speed internet service. It is harder to deliver essential services, from education to healthcare, without high speed internet. It is very difficult to attract and retain new residents to an area which lacks high speed internet.

Today the growth and diversification of rural economies is held back by poor internet service. I work for a Member of Parliament for the rural riding of Cumberland-Colchester. There are many communities around our riding struggling with declining population. There are incredible, innovative businesses in these amazing communities, but with download speeds of 1.7 MBPS, and upload speeds of half that, it is difficult to send email, let alone engage in richer forms of internet-enabled communication and marketing.

It is time to make serious investments in deploying technology that will enable rural Canadians to catch up with their urban counterparts. It is in the best interest of all Canadians that we close this digital divide.

Question 1: Design Principles

Most of the principles set forth are fine. Please clarify that adjacent Tier 5 blocks which aggregate into different (but adjacent) Tier 4 blocks could be operated as one service by a single provider.

The principle "maintain technological and competitive neutrality: not favouring or discriminating against one technology or group of stakeholders over another" is not benign. At the time of the consultation, Canada's policies have led to significant discrimination in fact, if not by intention. Some of the communities in our riding of Cumberland-Colchester are lucky to see download speeds of 1.7 MBPS, and some areas have no service at all. By contrast, urban areas enjoy download speeds of 50 MBPS, and in major urban centres elsewhere in Canada, far higher speeds are available to consumers.

Any new initiatives in this sector must focus on catching up rural communities. If that means favouring a technology because it will bring rural communities forward faster, so be it. If that means that some remote areas cannot sustain a competitive model, so be it. The neutrality principle sounds good, but rural communities need more than principles: they need high speed internet.

Therefore I propose that a further principle be: “Using the introduction of Tier 5 grid to close the digital divide between urban and rural communities.”

Question 2

Option 1—use of CSDs to define the Tier 5 grid—allows a finer gradation than Option 2 (based on population centres). The smaller grid units should benefit places like Cumberland-Colchester where the population centres essentially define the two poles of the region leaving vast rural areas lumped together.

Question 3

Defining small population centres as 2,000+ will exclude almost all areas of our riding. There are villages and former towns of 500-800 people which are certainly viable population centres and provide essential services to the surrounding more rural areas.

Question 4

No comment.

Conclusion

The initiative of ISED to crack Tier 4 into finer gradations in Tier 5 is a good idea and suitable for ensuring that the critical work of connecting rural communities can accelerate without coming into direct conflict with the roll-out of 5G technology. We in Cumberland-Colchester welcome all initiatives aimed at getting high speed internet to every corner of our riding. It is essential to growing our population and our economy.

JDH