

Fibre for all


"Fibre for all! When? Why?" is the rallying cry for this year's FTTH Council Europe conference to be held in Barcelona. During 2006, FTTH project development increased across Europe, spurred in many countries by government support. ARCEP, France's telecom regulator, began actively promoting fibre and calling for the sharing of infrastructure to accelerate FTTX deployments.

Today, the big questions facing the fibre-optics industry are when will FTTH take off, what flavour will it be (PON or point-to-point Ethernet) and who will own the networks. Hopefully council members will present their own views and their company views, even at the risk of causing schisms in the council, at this year's conference. It will make it a more enriching and lively event.

When and at what speed FTTH takes off will depend on the regulatory situation in Europe. The European Commission, which has been calling for the sharing of new infrastructure, is working on a new framework. Incumbents have been resisting the idea of unbundling FTTH networks even if they are fairly compensated.

Germany has revolted against the commission by proposing a law that would allow Deutsche Telekom to exclude competitors from using its new FTTC/VDSL network. EU Commissioner for Information Society and Media Viviane Reding has threatened to take Germany to court if the bill is not removed. The situation has changed in France. France Telecom, which faces FTTH competition, has agreed to share its FTTH infrastructure.

In France and other leading European broadband countries with dynamic and competitive DSL markets, the move to fibre is natural. Triple-play and other high-bandwidth services have pushed DSL technology to the limit.

While the unbundling debate will be lively in some sessions at the Barcelona conference, it could fizzle out in others. In northern Europe, the question of unbundling is becoming non-debate in some places. More and more northern European municipalities favour the 'open access model', which they say helps guarantee citywide FTTH coverage and reduces the amount of civil work and civil engineering costs. These governments view broadband access as a necessary utility service. The model, which exists in many forms, has become very popular in northern Europe (see "Cabling Market Awaits FTTX Boost" on page 11). The growing tendency is for the cities and their partners to control the passive and active network layers and to sell capacity to service providers. Amsterdam, which has adopted this model, uses point-to-point Ethernet; the subject is fodder for a lively discussion (see "European FTTH debates GPON vs. Ethernet" on front page). 

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