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JUNE 28, 2007

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The revamped [FTTH Council Europe](#) expects 8 million homes to be hooked up to fiber-to-the-home connections by the end of 2012, says the industry body's new president. (See [FTTH Council Adds New Prez.](#))

Joeri Van Bogaert, sales director for German fiber optics equipment vendor Leoni NBG Fiber Optics, took over as president of the Council in April, since when he has been restructuring and refocusing the pressure group, which aims to influence regulators, policy makers, financiers, and network operators that FTTH deployments are a positive influence on individuals and businesses.

Bogaert says that at the end of 2006, the European Union's 27 member states, plus Switzerland, Norway, and Iceland, had about 820,000 FTTH connections. The current target is to increase that ten-fold, to more than 8 million, by the end of 2012. "That's probably more realistic than ambitious," Bogaert concedes, adding that current growth indicators mean "we may need to revisit that forecast at the end of this year."

He says that, of that 8 million, about 6 million to 6.5 million connections are expected to come from buildouts by utility firms, city developments (especially Amsterdam and Vienna), and other communities, with the remainder from carriers such as [France Telecom SA](#) (NYSE: [FTE](#) - [message board](#)). (See [FT Fleshes Out FTTH](#), [Neuf Unit Wins FTTH Deal](#), and [Amsterdam Fires Up Muni Broadband](#).)

"The big shots are becoming more interested," adds Bogaert, citing [BT Group plc](#) (NYSE: [BT](#) - [message board](#); London: BTA) and [Telecom Italia SpA](#) (NYSE: [TI](#) - [message board](#)) as two other incumbent carriers that have trials and small deployments. "The question is, when will it take off?"

That target of 8 million sounds a bit under-ambitious to some, though, especially as there are other network operators with announced plans that

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FIBRE TO THE HOME COUNCIL



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make that figure look very safe: French carrier [Iliad](#) (Euronext: [ILD](#) - [message board](#)), for example, has outlined its plan to invest €1 billion (US\$1.35 billion) to connect 4 million French homes to its fiber plant by the end of 2012. (See [Iliad Plans €1B FTTH Build](#).)

"This is a conservative target," says [Heavy Reading](#) chief analyst Graham Finnie, who believes FTTH deployments are important to a region's potential economic health. "Even if Europe achieves that, it will be far behind the U.S., Japan, Korea, and probably other Asian countries, too."

Finnie has higher hopes for Europe's FTTH uptake. His forecast has the region ramping up to about 16.6 million connections by the end of 2011, though he notes this is highly dependent on a number of factors, particularly regulatory.

Bogaert believes regulators and policy makers are aware of the benefits that high-speed broadband can bring. "A lot of the thinking at the [European Commission](#) is in line with our own," says the new president, though he believes the EC could do more to provide guidelines to national regulators about how to approach FTTH issues.

There's still plenty of room for helping regulators come to grips with the impact of FTTH, though, so Bogaert says the Council is planning a number of workshops to address fiber access issues and discuss the views of various policy makers.

Another group that Bogaert wants to target is the financial community. "We need to address the financial markets with detailed information -- we are trying to set up communications with companies such as [Merrill Lynch & Co. Inc.](#) to see what their needs are."

He also sees value in targeting pro-FTTH messages directly at consumers. "We need to address public opinion in markets where FTTH is not yet available," and show how it can have an impact on e-health, e-medicine, and meet the needs of particular groups such as young online gamers, though quite how to get those messages across to consumers is still being discussed, notes Bogaert.

There have also been changes within the FTTH Council Europe. For example, the organization's special committees are now more focused on business issues like capex and opex planning, in addition to addressing technical matters.

Bogaert also wants to extend the reach of the group, and says there's an ongoing discussion about whether Russia and the Middle East can be brought into the fold.

And to help drive all these developments forward, the Council will next week appoint a full-time Director General as Europe enters what the Council believes will be the most critical few years in determining the uptake of FTTH in the region.

— Ray Le Maistre, International News Editor, [Light Reading](#)

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