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## TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Feb 16, 2009

### Government backing ensures a fibre-rich future

FTTH COUNCIL EUROPE CONFERENCE 2009 – Where there's a political will, there's a way. A couple of interesting case studies described here at the FTTH Council Europe conference in Copenhagen show what can be achieved when a government really puts its mind to it.

In Greece, the government wants to bring the country fast-forward "into the digital age" by building a dark fibre infrastructure for the access network that will pass 2 million homes over the next seven years.

Some municipalities have already set out plans to build independent fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) networks (see [Ericsson to build 'digital cities' in Greece](#) and [Optronics to build Greek FTTH network](#)), but this is a state-backed project that aims to connect some 40% of the country's citizens with fibre.

Panayiotis Tsanakas, chairman of GRNET (Greek Research and Education Network), described how the state plans to offer broadband services at 100 Mbit/s to consumers and businesses in Athens, Thessaloniki, and 50 other cities across the country where the population density justifies the investment.

The estimated cost of the fibre roll out is €2.1 billion, of which the Greek government will finance one third through a public-private partnership. The Greek authorities will pay "availability dividends" to the network construction consortium for each home passed, with additional dividends awarded when subscribers are connected.

The Greek state's contribution of €700 million over seven years is described as "a minor amount considering the total budget for a country like Greece".

The investment is pending approval from the European Commission and the competition authorities, but Tsanakas is confident that it will be granted. "We have proven that the deployment of fibre networks will never happen without state aid," he says.

Once approval for the project has been obtained, the Greek government plans to issue an international public tender for

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the construction of the network in the first half of 2009, and award contracts before the end of the year.

## Singapore

In contrast to Greece, Singapore is already a well-connected nation with close to 100% broadband penetration, and a liberalized telecoms sector. Yet, the government has managed to orchestrate a policy that will bring fibre to every one of the island state's 4.4 million citizens, with the intention of replacing the copper access network entirely by 2015.

Singapore launched its "intelligent nation" initiative, iN2015, back in 2006, of which the country's next-generation National Broadband Network (NBN) was a crucial part. "We already had fibre to the curb, it was really the last mile that was the challenge," said Khoong Hock Yun, assistant chief executive of Singapore's Infocomm Development Authority (IDA).

The IDA, which is part of the Ministry of Information Communications and the Arts (MICA), acts both as telecoms industry regulator and manages the Singaporean government's IT procurement activities.

One of the key policy decisions by iN2015 was to build an open access network, rather than the facilities-based competition that exists in other countries with liberalized telecoms markets. "We felt there was a natural monopoly," says Khoong.

As a result the state issued two tenders. The first tender, for a "NetCo" to build and own the passive network infrastructure, was awarded in September 2008 to OpenNet, a consortium of companies led by Axia NetMedia and Singapore Telecommunications (SingTel).

The winner of the second tender, for an "OpCo" to build and operate the active equipment in the network, should be announced in the next month or so. This OpCo must be operationally separated from operators offering services over the network, and will also be subject to price control and universal service obligations.

Although the Singaporean government is not allowed to invest in the network directly, it has offered grants totalling S\$1 billion (€516 million) to the companies that win the tenders: S\$750 million to the NetCo, and S\$250 million to the OpCo.

"The target was 50% coverage in 2012, but in fact we're moving much faster than that," says Khoong. If the roll out keeps up the pace, the country will have replaced its copper access network with fibre by 2013 – two years ahead of schedule.

About the author

<http://fibresystems.org/cws/article/tech/37809>

Pauline Rigby is editor of *fibresystems.org*.

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