

LACK OF BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE BAD FOR BUSINESS



Nicola Mortimer, head of business products and portfolio management with O2

Does Ireland have the broadband infrastructure to entice businesses here?

JJ Worrall reports

President of the European-wide Fibre to the Home (FTTH) Council, Karin Ahl has said she believed Ireland's broadband infrastructure may harm the nation's potential for both attracting and retaining business on these shores.

Speaking with *Computers in Business*, Ahl -- who also acts as market and business development manager at fibre network business, RALA Infratech in Sweden -- said "companies are choosing to establish themselves" in regions with larger levels FTTH or fibre-to-the-building (FTTB) infrastructure, as opposed to Ireland's current norm of fibre-to-the-cabinet.

The latter option sees fibre-optic cables run as far as the nearest cabinet on the street, rather than into the home or business as Ahl and her colleagues would prefer.

"It's definitely a key area to investment if [Ireland] wants to be competitive and stimulate the economy," said Ahl, who added that connecting directly into a business offers more "reliability" than other forms of broadband.

"I think one of the most important messages is that it's not just about speed, it's about quality and to see fibre as a business enabler," said Ahl. "There's virtually unlimited bandwidth with fibre connection to the business, you also get a service with almost no buffering, no interruptions, no delays -- I think this is really a key message. Speed is not really what we see as the key to future usage."



Karin Ahl: president of the European-wide Fibre to the Home (FTTH) Council

Ahl also said the industry-backed FTTH Council were worried that as a continent, if Europe failed to "put

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band infrastructure delivery, it could create economic difficulties in numerous countries.

"We have to let our companies grow," she said, adding nations like Ireland must ensure that new and established businesses can "access this fibre technology here, which they may of course get in other regions".

Despite Ahl's concerns, Nicola Mortimer, head of business products and portfolio management with O2 felt that Ireland's roadmap for broadband development should see businesses feeling quite comfortable with setting up shop here.

She said the roll out of fibre options from various providers "combined with 4G coming from mobile operators" meant that "what we're using broadband for, whether we're consumers or businesses, will definitely change".

Said Mortimer: "4G and fibre offer you guaranteed uptime and far better latency levels in terms of what we've been used to up to now."

For UPC Ireland business services director, Gavan Smyth, the changing landscape of Ireland's broadband infrastructure should cope with the needs of any business.

"Three, four, five years ago Ireland was low on a lot of [broadband service] lists. But we've stepped up and we're certainly in the top 15 at the moment," said Smyth.

Noting that his own company could "deliver 150MB [services] to half the country", Smyth said "I think that at the moment the speeds that we deliver in Ireland are comparable with anywhere around Europe."