

Broadband Gap Analysis – Eastern Ontario

Recognizing that connectivity is essential infrastructure for economic renewal, the Eastern Ontario Development Fund provided support to determine the investment required to create ubiquitous service to Eastern Ontario.

Critical to making this determination was the engagement of all those directly involved in the current provision of service, and the collection of data in such a manner as to substantiate support from the public sector, as well as supporting the formulation of a business case that would result in private sector buy in.

Utilizing the Eastern Ontario Broadband Coalition (EOBC) was integral to the process. This group of community stakeholders brought together all the organizations in Eastern Ontario that have been and are currently working on, the common objective of finding a solution for the provision of ubiquitous broadband connectivity to the residents, businesses and institutions of Eastern Ontario.

In discussion with representatives from Community Futures organizations and within representing the interests of Eastern Ontario, the coalition made application for funding from the Eastern Ontario Development Fund. The Technology Alliance Group for Kawartha Lakes became the recipient of funding to enact the project through the Kawartha Lakes Community Futures Development Corporation.

Based on a sound understanding of the location and size of the un/under serviced areas, and utilizing input from private sector telecommunication service providers, the project has successfully identified the service gaps in Eastern Ontario and has provided recommendations on how to achieve ubiquitous connectivity through Broadband/High Speed Internet services in Eastern Ontario.

DSL, Cable Modem or Wireless Broadband, as it applies to this project, defines Broadband as the level of high speed IP based services that are typically provided.

Many of the residents of communities in Eastern Ontario are unable to get information as readily as their neighbours. It is only when one goes outside of the community that one truly realizes the difference between the dirt road and the “information highway”. The ‘Broadband Highway’, if you will, provides immediate knowledge related to health, education and world economic and business issues that impact locally.

Seasonal and new residents, businesses and visitors look for this level of information. The future growth of our existing and new businesses demands it.

- **Government On Line**

All levels of government are providing information and various forms on line, but people in some rural communities cannot access this information because their service is faulty, often timing out before a form can be downloaded. The process is not an effective way for these residents and businesses to receive government information.

- **Health**

People in rural communities need to access health information regarding health concerns, particularly after being diagnosed with an illness. It is well known that many rural communities are having difficulty attracting new doctors and that our current physicians are overburdened. The ability to access credible health information on the Internet can assist to ease the burden on local rural health systems in answering some basic questions regarding treatment and care for individuals.

To assist with provision of healthcare in some of our more remote rural communities, high-speed would enable small rural health facilities to connect with larger hospitals for consultation.

- **Retention of Youth**

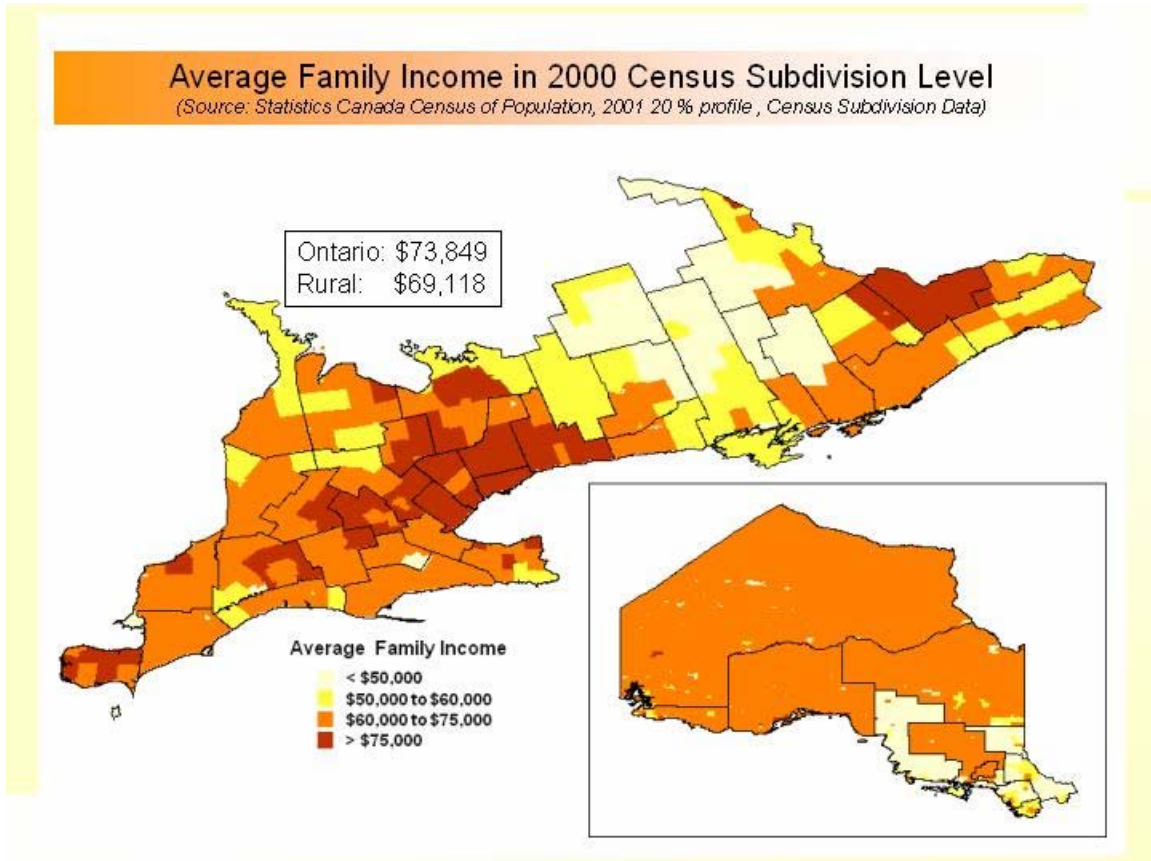
Young people want to live and work in a community that is progressive and provides them with the most opportunities possible. They study for positions in technology and presently many must move to other locations outside of Eastern Ontario where they can apply this knowledge. Presence of high-speed in their home communities may allow them to start businesses or work in local businesses that are using technology.

- **Business Development and Retention**

New jobs and businesses are opening fast in the field of technology. We need to be able to provide companies that wish to locate in our rural communities with a skilled workforce and access to high-speed communications. People cannot develop the skills needed to work in the new jobs if the tools to learn are not provided for them. Business will not locate in the rural communities without access to high-speed communications.

- **Competitiveness and Creating a Level Playing Field**

Without Broadband technology, businesses in rural Eastern Ontario will not be able to fully compete on a local or global level. The map below is a further indicator of how Eastern Ontario lags behind the Western portion of the province in terms of economic competitiveness in this area.



- **Distance Education**

People in rural Eastern Ontario are unable to access distance education programs from their own homes due to the lack of Internet connectivity. It has become necessary to constantly upgrade skills in order to remain employable. Many people within these communities value the principal of life-long learning and desire to improve themselves. The flexibility of distance learning would enable them to do so, and this feature is especially important when we consider the travel involved for these rural residents to attend traditional learning facilities.