

<http://www.pocket-lint.com/news/16047/comment-broadband-speeds-across-uk>

## COMMENT: Broadband - why isn't it up to speed?

### Investment needed but from where?

by Katie Scott published on 11 July 2008

It seems that a different ISP announces each week that they are going to massively boast the speed of their broadband offering.

BT, to name but one example, declared at the beginning of May that it was going to deliver 24Mbps using ADSL2+ technology. But the caveat was that only one million UK homes would get the privilege. This is initially - but BT promises that 10 million homes and businesses could take advantage of this technology by next spring.

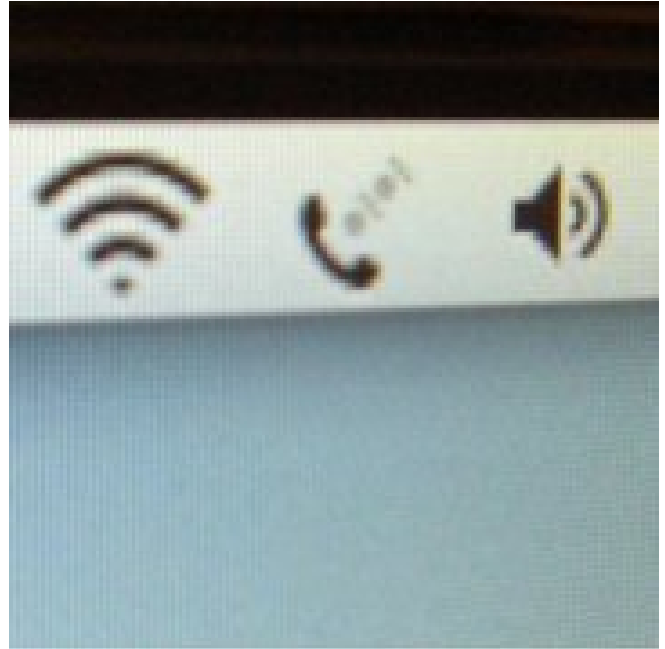
Then there's H2O Networks, which has had great success laying high-speed cables in sewers, thereby avoiding the costs of disrupting traffic while cables are laid under roads or pavements by using an infrastructure that has snaked under the majority of British city streets since Victorian times.

This system could deliver speeds of 100Mbps and we will soon see the results in Bournemouth, Dundee and Northampton. But of those homes, how many will achieve the speeds promised?

Ofcom has carried out and published numerous reports on broadband speeds across the country - comparisons between how connected the city is against rural areas.

In a day and age where access to the Internet can mean success or failure for companies, as it offers access to a whole world of customers, it is encouraging that the UK is getting more connected.

Yesterday, we had a story about a new cable network being laid in the North of Scotland to deliver better broadband to those living in the Northern Isles.



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But we have also published details of a scheme to bring free broadband into a deprived area of Solihull, which will not only help to encourage enterprise into the region, but also, on a simple level, help people who live there to get connected to the infinite resources of the web.

But for the average punter, it is no longer about having broadband services, or indeed wireless connectivity, because we take these for granted. It's all about speed. And here lies the issue.

ISPs are competing against each other and because of this, it seems that they will promise incredibly fast broadband connections that they actually can't deliver.

Somewhere in the small print will be caveats about distance from exchanges, quality of the cables, etc, worded in some convoluted corporate way, but it's so small that you don't see it on the poster. Nor - in the case of Virgin Media - which was the most recent ISP to get its knuckles rapped - do you see anything about usage caps during peak times that will seriously slow your downloads.

The team from moneysupermarket.com published a report at the end of last month that revealed that the average speed for O2's 8Mbps package is 5.39Mbps (when it tested 20,000 lines), and that was the best. Sky customers got just 3.59Mbps for the same package while TalkTalk achieved just 2.99Mbps. And it added that the packages that offer the least value for money are those promising (but definitely not delivering) 16Mbps.

Ofcom says it wants transparency and has signed up 32 ISPs to a new code of practice which includes the rule that they must publish accurate connection speeds. But some ISPs haven't signed up and who is going to police those that have to check that they're not, to put in bluntly, lying to get custom?

The code is a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done. A start maybe to get all ISPs to sign up to the code so then absolutely everyone who uses broadband will know exactly what they are getting compared to Mr and Mrs Smith next door.

Beyond this, we need investment. We Brits are very good at just putting up with things - a report published on 3 June by Quocirca revealed that one in three medium sized businesses across the UK is affected by internet connectivity problems, but only 10% of these would consider switching provider.

A day before, the state of the internet report revealed that the UK isn't even in the world top ten in terms of broadband speeds (but I wonder how much we're paying compared to other nations).

So money needs to be pumped into laying faster networks and ensuring that the current cables being used are well serviced and updated over the years. But who is going to pay?

We return to BT, which is promising to spend a whopping £10-£15 billion on covering 80% of the UK with second gen fibre optic cables, which could deliver speeds of 100Mbps.

But BT says it's worried about getting a return on its investment - and with such a huge amount of money involved, who can blame them?

Money is needed, and ingenuity in designing new technology to deliver fast connections nationwide, but investment means risk, and in a market where there is so much competition, how many companies are going to put their hands in their pockets when there is no guarantee that they'll get their pennies back?