

NEW FUNDING WILL EXTEND 'BACKBONE' INFRASTRUCTURE TO UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

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problem that is unique to rural areas attached to large urban areas."

But Halton Hills Councillor Clark Somerville, who's also Halton's appointed member on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) board of directors, thinks the budget plan could deliver some real results for local high-speed-starved households.

He pointed to the tax policies for Internet companies and \$1 billion in funding slated to come from the Canada Infrastructure Bank - an investment that's designed to leverage at least \$2 billion in private capital to increase broadband access across the country.

"I honestly believe it will make a difference," he said.

Somerville and the FCM have long been advocating for better access to broad-

band and mobile Internet - an issue the organization says has become a national imperative as communities across the country face connectivity challenges.

"When I was the FCM president, the number one issue I got asked about was rural internet," said Somerville. "We do have areas in Halton Hills and north Milton where people still can't get high-speed Internet. This isn't about Netflix - it's about quality of life."

Regional Chair Gary Carr added that Halton has been calling on both the provincial and federal governments for universal access to broadband Internet to ensure small businesses are able to effectively compete in a digital world.

"I am pleased to see FCM also making this a priority issue in their own advocacy initiatives," he said.

Current FCM president Vicki-May Hamm deemed the federal budget's nation-

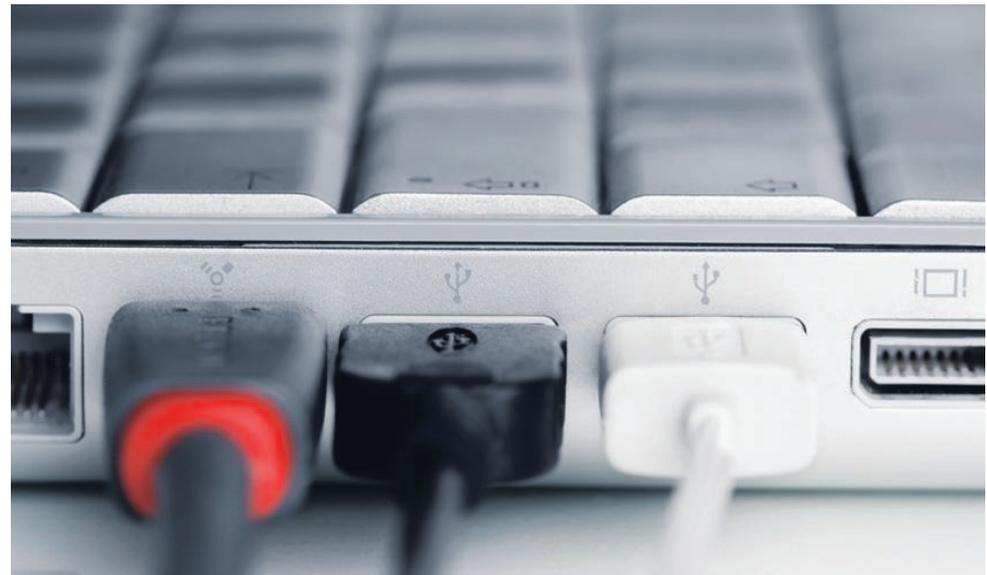
al broadband strategy "a strong response to FCM's call to prioritize universal Internet access for two million Canadians who still can't access a reliable connection."

Further details of the federal government's plan to deliver high-speed for all include:

- \$1.7 billion in new investments in the existing Connect to Innovate program

- The launch of a new Universal Broadband Fund that will focus on extending 'backbone' infrastructure to underserved communities. For the most difficult-to-reach communities, funding may also support 'last-mile' connections to individual homes and businesses.

- A look to secure advanced, low earth orbit satellite capacity to bring reliable high-speed Internet access to the most challenging-to-reach rural and remote homes and commu-



Metroland file photo

The federal government is pledging universal high-speed Internet access for Canadians by 2030.

nities in Canada.

Greater co-ordination with provinces, territories and federal arm's-length institutions, such as the CRTC and its \$750-million rural and remote broadband fund.

In addition to the high cost of extending broadband Internet to the rural areas, Lunau said the issue is compounded by the need for Internet service providers to share the available spectrum - the crucial frequency used in all wireless communications, such as wireless Internet service.

With spectrum in high demand, Industry Canada

auctions it off to companies, which are then granted exclusive licences to use it.

The major Canadian service providers have licensed wide swaths of areas for cell service around the GTA in order to protect their ability to grow, however this creates difficulty for smaller competitors to provide service in the periphery of the licensed areas, like in Milton and Halton Hills.

"It's like having a six-lane highway and closing all but one lane to general traffic," said Lunau. "They have purchased the high-

speed capacity and aren't using it, but won't share it with the providers who are more than willing to serve the rural area."

Local officials have previously called on the CRTC to implement a "use it or lose it" policy to rectify the licensing issue.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The federal government's budget spending for rural Internet is designed to encourage private companies to invest in broadband infrastructure as well.

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