

Launch of the roll-out of the broadband network

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Speech by the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Clr Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the launch of the roll-out of the broadband network, Westbury School, Westbury – Johannesburg

Programme Director

MMC for Community Development: Clr Oupa Monareng

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Fellow Councillors

Managers and Officials

The Community of Greater Westbury

Distinguished Guests

The Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, let me begin by expressing my appreciation for this opportunity to say a few words at this important occasion.

Just more than two years ago the City of Johannesburg took a bold decision to create the strategic infrastructure for the implementation of a city-wide broadband network.

Our intention is to create a digital City in line with developments in many other metropolitan areas in the world and with a network that will place us at the cutting edge of new trends in broadband connectivity.

Today we have the opportunity to reflect on the progress we have made with the establishment of this digital network and to consider the steps that will be taken in the coming months to realise our ideals.

Programme Director, I think it should be stressed from the outset that the City does not regard the establishment and maintenance of a quality network as a "nice to have" facility or an "optional extra."

On the contrary – this network is part and parcel of our broader service delivery strategy and will, over time, prove to be as essential for the future growth and development of Johannesburg as our initiatives to maintain and upgrade our road network, our water and electricity infrastructure.

Our experience over the past ten years has been that our residents want to communicate more directly with both councillors as their elected representatives as well as with the City's administration which is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of basic services.

Through the years we have accomplished much of this communication through traditional vehicles such as ward committees, mayoral visits to communities and regular opportunities for the public to make inputs into our medium-term budget process and the City's integrated development plan as well as the Mayor's open door policy.

For a large sector of our community these methods of communication have been adequate – but we are also keenly aware of the impact that modern technology has had on the daily lives of our residents and their ability to use such facilities every day.

When I was first elected Executive Mayor of Johannesburg the penetration of cellphone technology was relatively low and very few people in our City had access to anything more than internet over landlines.

We may all be aware of the digital revolution that has subsequently swept the world. Many of the Johannesburg residents are now connected to e-mails and the internet on a 24/7 basis. To most, if not all, businesses they are connected through cellphone applications and communicate amongst themselves and with their global counterparts through tools such as Twitter and Facebook.

Programme Director, it would not be wise for a modern City such as Johannesburg not keep track with these developments – but much more not to be able to predict where the trends will take us, and not to build the infrastructure that will enable us to ride the wave of new technology well into the future.

The decision to create a digital City through the introduction of a quality broadband network may bring a temporary inconvenience to the residents because roads and pavements have to be disturbed to lay the cable system. There may be occasional power cuts as existing networks might be damaged. We may also experience some teething problems when the system eventually become operational.

But the long-term consequences of not taking these bold steps now, far outweigh the temporary inconveniences that residents and businesses may experience with the introduction of the system. In two or three years from now, residents will enjoy the far-sightedness of the decisions we have taken to create a digital City.

With the active participation of our partners, Ericsson, we are establishing a quality broadband network that will serve as a model for other cities in South Africa.

The Johannesburg of the future will have at its disposal a network that will enable us to improve two-way communication between the City and residents and significantly improve our ability to bridge the digital divide.

Through this network communities in Johannesburg will be able to access the entire spectrum of government e-services from the comfort of their own homes or from strategically placed locations throughout the City.

Our ability to communicate effectively between City departments and Municipal Owned Entities will be greatly enhanced as well as our capacity to co-ordinate our activities with other provincial and national departments.

The schools in Johannesburg will have direct access to these networks and the hospitals and clinics will have online access to patient records, medical histories and the latest developments in the medical world.

Programme Director, slowly, but surely, we are delivering on our mandate as an elected local government to open the doors of learning and quality health care to all our people.

The envisaged surplus capacity on our fibre network will be rented out to internet service providers, banking institutions and private sector companies at competitive rates – thus making our contribution to bring down the cost of connectivity in Johannesburg.

The expected growth in cost savings and productivity should create an enabling environment for businesses and companies to grow, to create more employment opportunities and to create a virtuous cycle of economic expansion.

This network will enable us to complete the circle of our developmental objectives – namely to provide our residents with quality infrastructure that will improve the quality of their lives and build better communities.

Programme Director, our appreciation goes to our partner Ericsson for their continued participation in this project well into the future.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank the Member of the Mayoral Committee, the Executive Director, the entire management team as well as the entire staff for their vision to initiate this project.

The prospect of transforming Johannesburg into a digital City is an exciting challenge. I trust that once this network is fully operational all the communities of Johannesburg will be able to share in the benefits that technology can bring for the future growth of our great City.

Together we can build better communities!

Thank you.