

Quality of life tied the information highway



By Wallace Pidgeon

York Region's broadband infrastructure is mission critical to keeping and growing new businesses in Canada's fastest growing region and ultimately bettering the quality of life for all of its 1.1 million residents.

York Region Chair, Bill Fisch is on record saying, "to continue to attract this kind of industry, we have to provide the necessary connectivity infrastructure."

This was the overwhelming view coming out of the YRBizSeries Conference this past Wednesday at the Richmond Hill Centre for the Performing Arts.

Chris Rickett, York Region's Manager of Strategic Economic Initiatives presented that, while there is connectivity, there is a gap when it comes to access.

"All parts of York Region have connectivity – just not always at the speed and price point that makes the Region competitive with other communities," said Rickett.

Disparities also exist between urban and rural connectivity, while businesses and public sector organizations also have challenges when it comes to price point and access.

Actionable Intelligence's Laura Bradley highlighted this as a specific challenge for York Region due to the rural – urban make up.

"Generally there are challenges in supplying broadband to citizens especially in rural areas," said Bradley. "The reality is that it costs the same to service 10 houses as it does 100-200. When household densities drop, so do potential revenue levels. However cost levels do not. This is part of the reason services are not holistic as any service provider has to generate a positive business case."

This is what her Eastern Ontario group focuses on working with eight municipalities trying to bridge that gap.

"People need higher speeds to complete average transactions and business in the current world," continued Bradley. "As we move more and more tasks; banking, ecommerce, marketing and enable cloud computing more bandwidth, commonly considered speed, to a household is and will be required."

But, it will come down to leadership to connect the audiences.

There is a need to, "engage the private sector to make the necessary investments," said Rickett. "If the private sector is not able to be

the sole investor in projects required to reach the Region's targets, public private partnership opportunities will be explored.?

And, if these two options prove to be problematic, Rickett believes there is a role for municipalities to invest in certain projects. In September, this was the Region's hope when it released its Broadband Strategy.

The Strategy emphasized the need to improve connectivity in a timely and effective manner and without breaking the bank for government, business or for homeowners ensuring York Region punches above its broadband weight for years to come.

The conference reaffirmed these issues so York Region continues to be an attractive place to live, work and raise a family.

Frank Stronach is the keynote speaker at the next YRBizSeries conference on Friday, November 15, at The Mansion Events Centre in Aurora.