

Access Irish Loop Initiative

Program Description

The *Access Irish Loop Initiative* was developed to address regional communications infrastructure requirements in relation to high speed Internet technology. Activities included:

- Undertaking business case development to support private and public investment (through the Broadband for Rural and Northern Development (BRAND) and Connecting For Rural Canadians Programs
- Identifying relevant private ISP's
- Managing project implementation

Our objective was to achieve 100% (Universal Coverage) of the region in high speed and as well to develop applications and build capacity among local users in key municipal, not-for-profit and commercial sectors.

Program Implementation

Beginning in 2003, the Irish Loop Development Board was successful in responding to a request for proposals under Industry Canada's BRAND Program and became one of the initial five BRAND applicants in the province. Partnering with Bell Aliant and with the Board acting as overall project manager, the BRAND initiative resulted in 93% coverage of high speed for homes and businesses in the Irish Loop. Concurrent with BRAND Program implementation, the Board developed the *Innovation Irish Loop* strategy in 2005-2006 to drive use and applications on the new technology.

In 2008 the Board sought support for innovation strategy implementation as was successful in 2008-2009 in undertaken needs assessment for 15 local governments and 15 NGOs in technology. A subsequent proposal was developed, in collaboration with the St. Mary's Bay North RDA (outside of Zone 20) for investment under the Connecting Rural Canadians program.

Program Outcomes

- 93% coverage of region by high speed Internet
- In excess of 70% of homes and businesses utilizing high speed Internet technology as of 2010 – Bell Aliant's projected uptake rate after five years was 30%
- Five municipalities involved in Phase I Municipal Website Initiative
- Three municipalities (30% of all participating municipalities in the province) BizPal enabled by March 31, 2010
- Technology strategies for 15 NGOs
- Technology strategies for 15 local governments
- Over \$4.0 million invested in region communication infrastructure since 2004

Linkages to Regional Economic Development

The Board's *Access Irish Loop* Initiative has enabled us to satisfy a key requirement under our core functions, in relation to both supports for local governments and in building capacity within the region. The Board remains engaged in addressing outstanding coverage gaps and in implementing aspects of the *Innovation Irish Loop* Strategy with a potential Phase II website initiative under development for an additional five municipalities and a commitment to bring remaining 12 municipalities online through BizPal by March 31, 2012.