Personal Telco Project, Inc.
P.O. Box 12314
Portland, Oregon 97212
June 14, 2008

Dear City Councilor,

I am writing to pass along an article (attached) that I recently stumbled upon. The article discusses the future of telecommunications, and in particular the dysfunctions of its current manifestations. The article is largely in alignment with my personal views on the subject and its analysis bears some significance on the subject of the fiber-to-the-premises (FTTP) idea that has been floating around Portland's city government [1] of late.

The thesis of the argument is that bits are bits, and that the current channelization into "television service" and "telephone service" and "internet service" does not serve the public interest, but rather serves only the legacy interests of the incumbent telecom companies. Indeed, the existance of these legacy business models actively impedes the deployment of faster and more capable infrastructure in that the latter directly undercuts the existing "fee for television programming" and "fee for voice" services markets. The current scarcity only serves the service providers, not the networks' users.

The article draws parallels between the incumbent telecommunications carriers and the robber barons of the railroad monopoly days, and in the end argues for the treatment of local telecommunications infrastructure more like we treat sidewalks and streets, with local and largely public ownership. I personally endorse this view and very much want to see a future in Portland and elsewhere in which private monopolies do not control which bits are transmitted from whom, to whom, in which manner and at what price. To me, that means some form of public ownership of the so-called Last Mile of infrastructure and it means the absense of restrictions on the types of use permitted.

The city government of Portland has a history of understanding these issues, having litigated open access requirements on the cable infrastructure[2]. Though the public lost that legal case, the policy of open-access networks that benefit the users is still extremely desirable and is likely to become increasingly so in the future. The most certain way of securing open access networks for the public is for the public to build and pay for them.

I am on the board of directors of the Personal Telco Project, a local educational non-profit that advocates the idea that people should have some ownership in the networks they connect to, and that has over the better part of a decade helped people share their internet connections using wifi technology, and I would be happy to sit down with anyone and everyone to discuss the finer points and how to make something like this happen in our community.

Sincerely,

Russell Senior
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cc: David Olsen, Director of Cable/Franchise Management
[1] http://www.portlandonline.com/cable/index.cfm?c=45468
[2] http://www.techlawjournal.com/courts/portland/Default.htm