

Testimony in support of Google Fiber Resolution
Portland City Council
March 17, 2010

I am Russell Senior, currently the President of the Personal Telco Project, a volunteer-based non-profit here in Portland. I am speaking in support of the resolution.

Personal Telco is best known today for its free wifi hotspots. Approximately 30,000 people used networks we managed last year, nearly 10,000 unique users every month. We have built many networks, including at Pioneer Courthouse Square, and a neighborhood-scale network along North Mississippi Avenue. There are about 100 Personal Telco wifi networks in Portland today, providing Internet access free-to-the-end-user. Early work by Personal Telco helped to create the expectation that wifi hotspot networks should be free, which is the norm in Portland today.

However, the Personal Telco Project really began 10 years ago, not because we were inherently wifi geeks, but in response to our perception of fundamental flaws in our telecommunications. We are acutely aware that today bandwidth is too costly and too limited in speed, availability, and freedom. In fact, our original goal was to build our own network, because the incumbents were failing to meet our needs.

Personal Telco Project supports an open-access fiber network in Portland. We support the City's application to Google to help build it. Google understands innovation and what is required for innovation to flourish.

However, it is important for Portland citizens to have an open-access fiber-to-the-premises network even if Google ultimately chooses to build somewhere else.

I believe that public ownership of the last-mile infrastructure is the easiest, fairest and best way to get the freedom and price advantages that our citizens want and need. Most for-profit partners are going to want to exercise control over the way people are allowed to use the network in order to maximize their profit, charging extra for arbitrarily different services.

We don't manage our streets like that, we should not be managing our communications infrastructure that way either. Imagine if Chrysler got to decide what cars you were allowed to drive on **their** streets, or where you could stop to shop.

In the hands of private for-profit carriers, we can expect increasingly intrusive "network management" as they seek to wring the last drops of money from the advantage their ownership and control of the infrastructure affords. Access to faster internet threatens incumbents' existing businesses, so they have a incentive to be miserly.

For what most Portlanders pay Comcast for three years of Internet service, we could build fiber to their house, and then we'd own it and we wouldn't need to worry that our freedom was preventing the carrier from making more profit. A hundred years ago, Portland made a wise investment in a public water system that we are rightfully proud of. In another hundred years, let's hope that citizens then can say the same of us.

Thank you.