

NUNAVUT ᓄᓕᓴᓴᓴ

Qiniq network to get \$21.6 million upgrade

“Bandwidth like water in desert”

JIM BELL

The many Nunavummiut who use the Qiniq wireless internet service will see the gradual introduction of better speeds and better services, thanks to a federal government contribution worth up to \$21.6 million between now and 2013.

“It’s an excellent, excellent investment and we will certainly be able to meet the growing demand on the Qiniq network for the basic services that people are expecting,” said Lorraine Thomas, secretary-treasurer of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corp., which runs Qiniq through a system of community-based service providers.

The money, announced Aug. 29 in Yellowknife by Diane Ablonczy, the secretary of state for tourism and small business, will help the broadband corporation pay for upgraded satellite connections, more satellite capacity and better ways of using and doling out bandwidth.

In Nunavut, Thomas said the broadband corporation will draw down on those funds to find ways of “playing catch-up.”

That’s because the Qiniq network, launched in 2005, was designed with enough bandwidth to accommodate only about 1,000 subscribers.

But the popular network, whose basic home service costs only \$60 a month, attracted more than 3,500 subscribers. This means that during busy periods, too many people end up sharing too little bandwidth, slowing service to a crawl for many Qiniq users.

“We’ve been far behind on the bandwidth curve. Back in 2004, no one had a crystal ball and at the federal level they thought our numbers were wildly out of whack and that all we would get would be 1,000 users,” Thomas said.

To fix that, Thomas said that over the next year the broadband corporation will introduce new technologies

that will make more bandwidth available to subscribers and create better ways of distributing existing bandwidth.

“The ‘busy hour’ sometimes lasts for eight hours. So we think we will see the busy hour reduced to next to nothing eventually,” Thomas said.

In Nunavut, the internet’s electronic data streams flow through expensive satellite pipes that cost 10 to 20 times more than the land-based fibre-optic lines used throughout most of southern Canada.

“For us, bandwidth is like water in a desert. You have to be careful how you share and conserve it,” Thomas said.

One way of conserving satellite bandwidth is a system called “local connect.”

Right now, when a government worker in a community emails a file attachment to a Qiniq user across the street, the email travels by satellite to Yellowknife, then over to Ottawa and then back again by satellite.

But the “local connect” scheme would connect all existing networks together in a community so that the files sent between all locally-based computers would move along a local network, without the use of a satellite.

Another new project, called “time shift,” would see huge video, audio and document files transferred from one computer to another in the middle of the night, when Qiniq’s satellite capacity is under-used.

And a proposed new service called “meet online” would allow users to book time on the network, for a fee, to run live video and audio conferences, as well as share documents.

Thomas says she says this could be used for education and training, or to hold online meetings.

Before introducing these new projects, the corporation will issue requests of proposals to find contractors to set them up.

The bandwidth money announced last week is a response to a proposal that the broadband corporation

submitted to Infrastructure Canada this past March, after a lengthy consultation with internet users in Nunavut, including governments.

“We heard from the people of Nunavut about what must be addressed because of the high cost of travel and the great need for capacity development and the great need for training, especially on-the-job training,” Thomas said.

The broadband corporation is a not-for-profit entity that brings together a long list of community-based internet providers who serve Qiniq users at the local level.

Since 2003, the corporation has received about \$16 million from a variety of contributors, but the biggest chunk came from Infrastructure Canada through its satellite bandwidth subsidy program. They’ve also borrowed money from Atuaqtuarvik Corp. and the Nunavut Business Credit Corp.

To pay for its core operations, the corporation gets \$200,000 a year from the Nunavut government’s Department of Economic Development and Transportation.

Thomas points out that the corporation isn’t allowed to use the new federal money to pay for those core operations – the money may only be used to upgrade its network and improve the management of bandwidth.

Also on Aug. 29, Ablonczy announced \$14.8 million to provide similar help to a wireless internet service in the Northwest Territories run by an aboriginal consortium through a Dene-owned corporation called Falcon Communications GP Ltd.

Ablonczy bragged that her announcement signals the Conservative government’s commitment to an “integrated northern strategy,” but she denied that her government is showering money on the North to buy votes in the upcoming election.

“As far as whether the government will have members from the North in the next government, that will be up to northerners themselves,” Ablonczy said.



This time, he’ll run. Nunavut Premier Paul Okalik jumps rope during Toonik Tyme games in front of Nakasuk School in 2007. Okalik confirmed last week that he’ll seek a third term as MLA for Iqaluit West in the Oct. 27 territorial election. (FILE PHOTO)

Okalik will run again

Comment ends speculation premier would seek another seat

CHRIS WINDEYER

Premier Paul Okalik left no doubt about his political intentions this fall, telling *Nunatsiaq News* Aug. 29 that he’ll run for the legislative assembly once again in Iqaluit West.

“Absolutely,” Okalik said when asked if he’d seek a third term in the upcoming territorial election, scheduled for Oct. 27.

“I’m making plans to seek another term,” he said. “I’ve been very pleased with my constituents’ support

and I look forward to the coming election.”

Rumours had been circulating for months that Okalik would leave federal politics and seek the Conservative nomination in the next federal election.

There were also rumblings that Okalik would run in Pangnirtung, his home town, and a seat currently held by Peter Kilabuk, speaker of the assembly.

But Okalik confirmed he’ll take a third run at Iqaluit West.

Okalik, 44, crushed challenger Peter Workman

in the 2004 election, taking 77 per cent of the vote. Okalik also won easily in 1999, when he took more than 50 per cent of the vote, defeating Ben Ell and Matthew Spence.

The legislative assembly will reconvene Sept. 9 in Iqaluit for one last sitting before the election. At that sitting, the government will ask MLAs to give third reading to the Education Act and the Inuit Language Protection Act.

The house will dissolve Sept. 21, and the writ for the Oct. 27 election will be issued Sept. 22.