



To: Toronto Public Library Board – September 24, 2001

From: City Librarian

Subject: **The New National Dream: Networking the Nation for Broadband Access – Report of the National Broadband Task Force**

Purpose:

To inform the Toronto Public Library Board of the report of the National Broadband Task Force and to seek approval for a letter of support from the Toronto Public Library Board.

Funding Implications and Impact Statement:

Not applicable.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board:

1. Receive for information *The New National Dream: Networking the Nation for Broadband Access – Report of the National Broadband Task Force*; and
2. Express its support for the findings of the Report of the Broadband Task Force.

Comments:

The National Broadband Task Force was established in January 2001 by the Minister of Industry. The principal mandate of the Task Force was to map out a strategy for achieving the Government of Canada's goal of ensuring that broadband services are available to businesses and residents in every Canadian community by 2004. In addition, the Task force was asked to advise the government on issues related to the development and deployment of broadband networks and services in Canada.

The Report of the Task Force was issued on June 18, 2001. A copy of the Executive Summary is attached. The full report is available electronically at the following address: <http://broadband.gc.ca> or in paper from the City Librarian's office. Canadian public libraries were represented on the Task Force by Wendy Newman, CEO, Brantford Public Library and Vice-President/President Elect of the Canadian Library Association.

The principles and recommendations in the Report are important to the Toronto Public Library in that they speak to issues addressed in our Strategic Plan. One of the key focus areas in our

Strategic Plan is *Your Global Library: Connecting You Virtually*. Within that focus area the Library has made commitments to: minimize barriers to access, especially for those separated by the *Digital Divide*; offer virtual services and programs; and increase the ease of use of the virtual library. Another key focus area, *Transforming the Organization*, includes the commitment to create an information technology infrastructure that supports the Library in achieving its strategic direction. In the past, the Toronto Public Library has received support from several Federal Ministries to achieve these commitments. On-going Federal support is important to Toronto Public Library.

The principle focus of the Task Force report, as reported in the media, was the provision of broadband service in scarcely populated areas of the country. TPL has achieved broadband access and its location in the largest urban area in Canada means that developments in broadband service will be easily available to it. On the surface, it would seem that the Report is of marginal interest to TPL. However, there are other principles and recommendations in the Report that address significant issues for TPL. The issues are: sustainability, content development, and provision of public service electronically. The principles and recommendations of particular interest to Toronto Public Library are excerpted from the Executive Summary below.

The Task Force agreed upon a set of principles to guide its work. Four of the principles are of particular interest to Toronto Public Library:

- ? all Canadians should have access to broadband network services so that they can take advantage of broadband opportunities wherever they live;
- ? in addition to broadband infrastructure, access involves the parallel development of content, services, and individual and community capacity;
- ? all communities, institutions, businesses and individuals in Canada should have equitable and affordable access to broadband services, and to the widest possible range of content and service providers; and
- ? publicly assisted programs should achieve sustainable broadband access to every public learning institution, public library, health care centre and other designated public access point in the country.

The Task Force also developed an Action Plan, with specific recommendations to be achieved by 2004. Again, several of the recommendations are of particular interest to Toronto Public Library.

4. To ensure that public access sites have the capacity to provide access to a wide clientele, governments should:
 - ? ensure the availability, accessibility, affordability and sustainability of access to the Internet and required equipment;

- ? ensure technical and user support to enable public access sites to maximize their capability to use and provide broadband services; and
 - ? ensure training and continuous professional development for public access providers.
- 5.5. Governments as model users: Governments, including public learning, health and cultural institutions, should act as model users and establish and monitor specific goals for model use of broadband content and services and should provide:
- ? leadership in providing government services on-line, the popularization of e-governance (e.g. on-line town halls, consultations, participation in the electoral process) and the aggregation of demand through collaboration between government department at all levels; and
 - ? extra support to public institutions in the areas of equipment, technical support and training, where necessary in order that the benefits associated with access to broadband content and services be effectively realized.
7. Innovation in content development: Governments should encourage the development of innovative content and services, particularly for learning, health, government, culture, entertainment, community building and e-business. Development of this content should be supported through incentives and direct funding as appropriate, through expanding the mandate of existing programs to incorporate funding for broadband content or by creating new programs.

The adoption of these principles and recommendations by the Federal Government would encourage continued federal funding for the development of broadband content and services. As well, it could lay the groundwork for potential funding programs that address issues of sustainability. In the past three years, the Toronto Public Library has benefited from a total of \$2.962 million in federal funding for improved access to Internet services and content development. The Toronto Public Library Board needs to support and encourage the development of policies and funding models that will continue and expand upon this support.

Conclusion:

The provision of broadband access will help to bridge the digital divide that separates many Canadians. For public institutions charged with delivering public services, there is a need for government funding models that ensure sustainability and scalability of broadband access. This would include capacity to serve the Library's clientele by providing the necessary equipment, Internet access, technical support and training for staff and the development of content and services. The principles and recommendations of the National Broadband Task Force address these issues. Therefore, it is recommended that the Toronto Public Library Board express its support for the findings of the Report of the Broadband Task Force. Such expression of support would be made through a letter to the Minister of Industry, Brian Tobin.

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City Librarian

List of Attachments:

- Attachment 1: Please note: The Executive Summary is unavailable electronically. However, the full report is available electronically at <http://broadband.gc.ca>
- Attachment 2: Draft Letter of Support to the Minister of Industry