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Why today's broadband is not your everyday utility.



Submitted by Gary McLaren on Tue, 11/11/2014 - 21:04

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☆ 242^[2]

I am surprised by how often I am told that broadband should be just treated like our other utilities such as electricity, gas, water and (of course) sewers.

Marc Andressen, founder of Netscape, explained this better than anyone else back in February 2014.

As this twitter post so graphically describes, the extreme growth in applications and uses of broadband make it most unlike other utilities. Unless of course we install a future proof deep fibre network that will, with relatively minor upgrades, cope with the extra demands!

By the way this was part of a longer twitterexchange ^[3] involving Tim Berners Lee and others on aspects of Net Neutrality that are relevant to Australia's NBN debate. It is well worth a read including the referenced articles to keep up to date with this important topic.

Topics:

net neutrality

NBN

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Comments

Malcolm Turnbull's advisors don't accept this argument ^[6]

Graham Shepherd

- 12/11/2014 at 14:10 (last edited 12/11/2014 at 14:10)

The advisors to Malcolm Turnbull, so far, do not accept the argument that *"the extreme growth in applications and uses of broadband make it most unlike other utilities."* Communications Chambers makes a bewildering case that demand for speed is going to flatten out because of advances in video compression. They seem unaware of drivers for increasing speed and the enormous growth of applications.

I see no evidence of video file sizes decreasing. In fact I see the opposite. The commercial and consumer demand for higher accuracy of reproduction (more colours, better motion) and higher resolution (more pixels and more dimensions) driving research and standards in the opposite direction. And what is stopping them? Certainly not the bandwidth available to end-users which is growing dramatically everywhere, everyday - even in Australia, if NBN ever gets going. Neither is user screen resolution which now typically exceeds print resolution. Colour is a big trick but is important in clothing and soft-furnishings just for colour-matching. All current compression methods degrade colour first because the assumption was once that the eye is less sensitive to it.

The evidence for new bandwidth hungry applications is everywhere before us. Applications in the cloud are gathering, analysing and distributing more data than we have ever contemplated before. Much of this is economically very useful and powerful, not just indulging a whim to lounge about watching more sport or playing high speed games. Research, health, education, mining, agriculture, transport, manufacturing infrastructure management, environmental management are just a few of the areas where revolutions are taking place. Most of these applications are device or environment dependent, not user dependent, so they will make parallel demands on speed, not serial demands like a single video viewer might make.

"Research" - that's if Australia can spare a penny for it.

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