

## **HRRRI Impacts Working Group**

### **February 4, 2005 Workshop on Community-level Impacts Summary**

The objective of this one-day workshop was two-fold:

- to learn more from external experts about the indicators and approaches to be used to measure economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts of public infrastructure at the community level; and
- to foster discussion about how to measure the impacts of broadband infrastructure at the community level.

#### **Highlights**

In the morning, five expert speakers presented previous work on measuring various types of infrastructure impacts:

- Dr. Ricardo Ramirez of the University of Guelph spoke of his work assessing the social, cultural and economic impacts of broadband on rural and remote communities.
- Mr. Jason Stanley, currently of HRSDC, presented his qualitative work with Coasts Under Stress looking at cultural, social, environmental and economic impacts of a road in Labrador.
- Mr. Michael Curri of Strategic Networks Group focussed on his study of the economic impacts of broadband on communities.
- Dr. Ken Jones of Ryerson University presented his work with Artscape examining the social, cultural and economic impacts of cultural infrastructure on neighbourhoods; Mr. Reid Henry of Artscape presented that group's upcoming work to examine factors affecting the development of cultural clusters and process by which this development occurs.

In the afternoon, attendees participated in three break-out groups to focus discussion on (a) economic, (b) environmental and (c) social and cultural impacts of broadband infrastructure at the community-level. Specifically, each group was asked to identify a few important impacts that should be examined, to explore what indicators and measures should be used to evaluate those impacts, and then to suggest methods that might be suitable to gather measurements.

Two of the three groups had general discussions on issues and challenges of community-level impacts research; two of the groups were able to itemise a number of impacts, indicators, measures and measurement methodologies. Notes taken during each of the group discussions are attached.

The following points of interest were common to at least two break-out groups' discussions:

- It is essential to consult the community at the outset of any impact study to ensure participation of and buy-in by the community, and to ensure the evaluation of impacts that are relevant for the community as well as the infrastructure supplier.

- To effectively communicate with the community, and indeed to effectively carry out an impacts study, it is important to clearly define and distinguish terms such as *goals*, *outcomes*, *impacts*, *indicators*, and *measures*.
- It was noted that there was a distinction between the impacts of the physical infrastructure itself and the impacts of the use of the infrastructure.
- Both materially through the impacts and indicators identified, and more subtly through participants' vocabulary, there was a bias towards evaluation of *positive* impacts, and at times it was evident that positive impacts were being presumed.

### **Next steps**

- The results of the workshop will be used to further scope out a study being planned to establish baseline information and to subsequently measure community-level impacts during and after an actual broadband installation project in New Brunswick being funded by Infrastructure Canada and others. Members of the research team from Industry Canada plan to visit community members to discuss available sources of data and existing structures for data collection, as well as to continue the discussion on selection of impacts and indicators to be measured. The research team will inform the Impacts Working Group of its progress.
- The results of the workshop also provide good knowledge foundation for impacts research more generally, and links with external researchers that can assist the Working Group as it moves forward on activities under its Research Action Plan.

March 16, 2005