

Alberta is connected like no other province.

With the province's SuperNet operational in all network designated communities, an impressive 86 per cent of the province's population now has access to high-speed internet - not to mention a new found ability to utilize the latest in medical and educational communication technology.

"Utilizing video conferencing for distance learning and remote medical instruction and monitoring are two examples of how Bell delivers applications over the SuperNet that make a difference in the lives of Albertans," said Stephen Wetmore, national markets group president, explaining how Bell - a prime contractor in building the network - will help the province in achieving its visionary goals of a technologically advanced society. "The network will now be continuously evolving, just like roads or any other infrastructure - for example adding a new school once it is built," said Luke Ouellette, restructuring and government efficiency minister. "While we're pleased to have met this final milestone, it's the future possibilities of the Alberta SuperNet that are truly exciting."

The idea of an information highway forever transforming, may boggle the minds of some, but Alberta now rests on the cusp of true innovation - where the SuperNet will make noticeable enhancements to every day life.

"East Central Health (ECH) is actually involved in a number of projects that depend on the SuperNet, which is now available, and we are currently hooking sites into the network across the region," said ECH communications officer Jim Durham.

With 60 per cent of the health region's sites wired to the network - only 13 sites remain to be connected - Durham emphasized the SuperNet is essential in the implementation of several high technology projects the ECH is in the process of completing.

The Rural Shared Health Information Project aims to share patients' information across Alberta using the arterial SuperNet system. Another project includes the Picture Archival and Computing System, which will allow health officials to transfer digital images such as x-rays, CT scans, ultrasounds, and other digital imaging systems to facilities throughout the province. Durham also noted that better video conferencing will be available in the SuperNet network, and VOIP phone technology will now be an option for the ECH, which would allow the health officials to use local extensions when making phone-calls within the health region.

The Battle River School Division (BRSD) started linking schools to the SuperNet last spring, and finished over the summer before the start of the new school year.

"The SuperNet increases bandwidth, this in turn leads us (BRSD) to supply a broader range of services," said BRSD technology specialist Ken Robitaille. "This summer we centralised [the division's] library services, and projects down the road will include things like video conferencing."

The SuperNet now links approximately 4,200 government, health, library, and education facilities in over 400 communities across Alberta. Another important aspect to the network is that it acts as a distribution mechanism for broadband services by private Internet service providers throughout the province and to rural retail customers. Bell Canada is the owner and operator of the Base Area Network (BAN), having constructed the SuperNet - the BAN includes 27 of Alberta's largest communities. The Extended Area Network (EAT) includes 402 communities in rural Alberta.