



M-WAG predicts 'death of distance'

15th February 2008

By Steve Evans in Barcelona at MWC

The Mobile WiMax Acceleration Group (M-WAG) has announced that the 2.5GHz mobile WiMax pilot network will be launched in Maidstone, Kent.

M-Wag is a collaboration of companies aiming to demonstrate the business case for mobile WiMax ahead of Ofcom's auction of the 2.5GHz spectrum. Mobile WiMax aims to provide fast and secure mobile broadband connectivity at a reduced cost.

The network is expected to go live in April and will cover an area of 7.5 square kilometres in central Maidstone. It will cover 75,000 people and 4,500 businesses, including over 70 coffee shops that could benefit from the wireless network.

The trial will see three base stations with three sectors deployed in the area, aiming to deliver data uploads speeds up to 2Mbps and download speeds up to 10Mbps.

Keri Haslam, chair of M-WAG, said: "The Maidstone 2.5GHz network is the next step in M-WAG's strategy to assemble the mobile WiMax ecosystem and demonstrate the business case for the technology. By delivering a live network operating with real world applications, we can showcase and prove the benefits of mobile WiMax while gathering vital information on the user experience. Mobile WiMax is ready now and presents a great opportunity to operators, service providers, businesses and consumers alike."

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Publication: CBR online
Date: 15 February 08

Haslam spoke about the potential of the technology to improve the CCTV system in a city. "Using fixed CCTV can be very expensive. The cost of digging up the road, laying the cables and maintaining the system can be huge. With this technology, it is possible to redeploy the cameras as and when they are needed. For example, at night the cameras can be positioned where there is a lot of nightlife, and during the day the can be moved to where more people are," he said.

The technology can also be used to help the emergency and security services. According to Haslam, services are often reliant on local news services for pictures of an incident. This can cause problems because they cannot control the images that are taken. A mobile CCTV system could combat this problem.

Haslam is more confident about this upcoming auction than the 3G auctions and 3G's subsequent failure to take-off in the way many experts had predicted. He said: "3G was over-hyped and did not do what a lot of people wanted it to do. Handsets were developed too slowly and the technology simply wasn't there. A lot of licenses were bought as a defensive mechanism, companies wanted to stop other companies from acquiring them. There was too much emphasis placed on a quick return on investment."

He does expect the new licenses to herald a new era for mobile technology. "We believe that we will see the death of distance where a true global market will emerge. Standardisation of prices will make it easier and cheaper for people to use mobile devices," Haslam said.

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