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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services

### **\$5.2M GRANT PROGRAM HELPS BRIDGE DIGITAL DIVIDE**

VICTORIA – Details of a \$5.2-million grant program to deliver more Internet connectivity to homes, businesses and communities in rural and remote areas of British Columbia were announced today by Labour and Citizens' Services Minister Iain Black.

“The Connecting Citizens Grant Program will assist in finishing the last, vital steps in bringing Internet service to dozens of rural and remote communities,” said Black. “This investment is part of our ongoing commitment to bridging the digital divide in B.C.”

The Connecting Citizens Grant Program was announced on Sept. 26 by Premier Gordon Campbell at the annual Union of B.C. Municipalities convention. Grants totalling \$2.2 million will be available in the first year of the three-year program, providing up to \$50,000 per community where expanding Internet service can be demonstrated.

Through Network BC, more than 320 of the 366 communities have last mile connectivity to the Internet. “Last mile” infrastructure includes wireless equipment, towers and supplies to connect local buildings to an Internet gateway. The Province will continue to leverage its telecommunications buying power to expand high-speed Internet services and cellular coverage in rural and remote B.C.

“British Columbia is one of the most connected provinces in Canada, with about 92 per cent of residents having access to broadband Internet,” said Black. “Network BC’s Connecting Citizens program will assist in breaking down the last barriers to broadband connectivity in our province.”

Network BC, part of the Ministry of Labour and Citizens' Services, is focused on the strategic use of telecommunications, including sustaining and increasing connectivity for rural and remote communities. In 2006, the Network BC initiative won international recognition when named Laureate of the Computerworld Honours Program and finalist for the program’s 21st Century Achievement Award alongside the New York City Police Department, Amber Alert, Network for Good, and the U.S. Air Force.

For more information on the Connecting Citizens Grant Program or to access application forms visit: [www.network.gov.bc.ca/grant\\_form.htm](http://www.network.gov.bc.ca/grant_form.htm)

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