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5 Questions with Christopher Tamarin

By Mike Rogoway, The Oregonian

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The holidays are a slow time at many businesses and state agencies, but not in the office of Christopher Tamarin, telecom strategist for the Oregon Business Development Department.

With new state broadband legislation on the books, and billions of dollars in federal stimulus money up for grabs, Tamarin is helping coordinate Oregon's efforts to expand the reach of high-speed Internet connections to communities and individuals that wouldn't otherwise have access to the latest and greatest technology.

This month alone, the governor appointed a new 12-member Broadband Advisory Council and the state won a federal stimulus grant to study broadband access in Oregon.

"Oregon, I think ranks fairly well for a big western state with a relatively small population," Tamarin said, but technology is always evolving and deployment will always be "a work in progress."

With society and culture increasingly plugged in to the Web, Tamarin said fast Internet access has become a must-have for everything from basic business transactions to watching popular TV shows.

He spoke recently with The Oregonian. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

The state won \$2.1 million in federal stimulus money last week to help sort out what areas have the greatest broadband need. Do you have a sense already of which areas are most wanting?

Intuitively, we would think that areas of lower density population are likely to be those that are most wanting. That's not always the case. Take Oregon for example.

There's small towns like Bandon, Coquille, Monmouth, Independence, Sherwood, Troutdale, that have fiber to the home. Portland does not.

Also, just this month Bend Broadband announced the launch of what they say is the fastest wireless Internet service in the country, offering service to communities like Sisters and Prineville and La Pine. For years, EZ Wireless has been operating one of the nation's largest Wi-Fi networks in the Boardman-Hermiston area.

So it does not break easily along rural-urban boundaries.

Tell me a little bit about the new Broadband Advisory Council. What's its role going to be?

The council will be developing legislative and public policy recommendations, and it also it has a reporting requirement. It's going to



Christopher Tamarin

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be reporting on the affordability and accessibility of broadband in Oregon, and also the use of the technology.

What the council does is it provides a forum for discussions of telecom issues in the state, and ultimately out of those discussions and research helps to formulate public policy going forward.

Is there reason to hope for more broadband stimulus money in Oregon?

Yes, there is hope for additional funds to be allocated. The grant that came for mapping was from the State Broadband Development Grant Program.

There are two other stimulus broadband fund programs.

One is the Broadband Initiatives program. There is \$2.5 billion nationally in that; that will be a mix of grants but mostly loans. There is also the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program. There is \$4.7 billion in that program nationwide for broadband infrastructure and community computing centers and education programs.

There are a lot of proposals for providing service in Oregon that are pending in those two programs. Grants and awards from those programs have just started being announced this month. I haven't seen any announced for Oregon, but I'm hopeful there will be.

All the funds are supposed to be awarded by September 2011, and they're intended for accelerated projects that can be completed in a short period of time after that -- I think it was 10 years following the grant awards.

You mentioned the new Bend Broadband wireless standard. What role is there for wireless in this? Obviously it's a lot less expensive than laying cables, provided it works properly.

There hasn't been a silver bullet, a single technology that's always the best or always the most cost effective. I think wireless is certainly a very exciting area of technology development. We're now transitioning from third-generation mobile technology to fourth-generation mobile services that are very capable of providing broadband access and data support.

I think we're going to see technological improvements and cost reductions across the board, in all different types of wireline and wireless technologies. I think we're going to see them all used, depending on the different area and topography. I think we'll see a very active role for wireless.

How might somebody in, say, Prineville use broadband five or 10 years from now in a way they're not today?

I don't know that we need to make a distinction between someone living in Prineville or somebody living in Portland. The need is essentially they same.

They're going to use it for work, if they have a small business they can engage in e-commerce that will allow small companies to compete effectively in national and international markets.

They're going to be able to use the service for education. They can use it for telework, to work remotely for an employer in another location. They'll be able to receive it to receive health care services and security services for their homes and businesses.

Whether you're a state, a business, a family or an individual, I think you're going to be at a disadvantage if you do not have access to these resources.

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