



Kyuquot Connectivity Planning

Creative Economy Roadmap

## TRENDS WE'RE SEEING: PLANNING FOR THE NEW ECONOMY: COMMUNITIES TAKING CHARGE

Reliable, high-speed internet connectivity is now a basic utility, as important to most of our lives as electricity. However, small, rural, and remote communities are often at a disadvantage compared to urban centres when it comes to that basic information infrastructure. It's called the 'digital divide', and we're seeing communities proactively working to change that.

"The cost of not having rural and remote infrastructure is increasingly obvious," explained Victoria Smith, Strathcona Regional District Broadband Manager. "It's no longer a matter of simple access to information, it's about our capacity to attract young people, business and to access important health services, distance education and other vital use cases."

The Strathcona Regional District is leading the Connected Coast initiative, a \$46M project that will bring a new source of connectivity to more than 150 rural and remote coastal communities.

"With a new information highway coming, we need communities ready to tap into this significant investment, with the appropriate last mile infrastructure to leverage use to its full potential," explained Smith.

With financial support from ICET, the Strathcona Regional District (SRD) is embarking on a detailed **connectivity planning** process with eight rural and remote communities in the region. The community plans will identify last-mile solutions based on each community's unique digital aspirations. This information will then inform the technical design for last-mile infrastructure options.

This project is one of the first initiatives founded on the design principles in the Province of BC's Connected Communities framework. The project has already attracted significant interest from the Province and from other communities who wish to undertake a similar process.

Such is the case with Hornby and Denman Islands. The two islands have also received funding support from ICET for a **broadband strategy**, focusing on 'last mile' connections to homes and businesses. Like the SRD process, this community-driven approach is putting the community in the driver seat, defining their digital needs, aspirations and how to achieve them.

"The Islands have historically been 'have-nots' in the digital age," explained Karen Ross, Economic Enhancement Officer for the Hornby Island Community Economic Enhancement Corporation. "It was clear that communities that are ready, willing and able to receive infrastructure will be first in line, and our planning process means that we will be ready to play."

For Ross, connecting to fibre optic service serves all demographics on the islands. Improved health and emergency services are important for aging populations, while the digital network will provide urban

amenities with a rural lifestyle for younger entrepreneurs looking to the islands as their new home. Broadband opens up new opportunities for online education, new business innovation, and more.

Across the Strait in Powell River, proactive and innovative planning is taking a different shape.

With funding support from ICET, a grassroots coalition of community stakeholders have developed a **Creative Sector Roadmap**, to help guide the community transition from traditional industries to a more knowledge-based economy.

"When the mill closed, many of the workers were also in the creative sector as artisans, musicians and entrepreneurs," explained Julie Jensen, project lead from Vancouver Island University. "At the same time, there has been an influx of remote workers relocating here, and we're considering ways to leverage that economic shift

into something new."

The Powell River project featured extensive grassroots consultation with community stakeholders, to gain a clear understanding of what was needed to support the addition of new economic models.

"Tech entrepreneurs, home based workers and cultural creatives are generally a silent segment of the population," explained Jensen. "We needed a process that would draw them out and get them engaged."

The concept of the 'creative economy' came forward as the best way to engage all creative professionals, from film and television, to arts and culture, video games, digital media, as well as tech entrepreneurs, knowledge workers, and remote workers.

The project group used active research - a methodology that takes research out of a purely quantitative, academic environment and focuses on qualitative,

collaborative work with the subjects - to gather the input needed to form a plan.

Participants were invited to tech talks, video presentations, and cafe conversations. Nearly 80% of the participants were new to the region, and it was the format of the research that was credited with drawing those new home-based workers out to integrate them into the entrepreneurial community.

This **next phase** of the project, already underway with ICET support, will create an incubator to support tech and creative entrepreneurs and foster the broader development of an innovative, entrepreneurial culture.

"The momentum of this initiative is reflective of the strong grassroots involvement from the beginning," states Jensen. "We could not have done this without building the community first."