

SC DE SP Additional Thoughts

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Telecommunication solution RFPs

The south coast region is a “good news, bad news” story. We did very detailed review of the telecommunications infrastructure and DE components on the south coast. Within the foot prints of Coos Bay/North Bend and Bookings competitive broadband offerings exist. Step outside of those areas and the picture of broadband availability gets grim, especially for residents who might truly benefit from that access. Other cities along the south coast also have some degree of broadband but with no competition and limited deployment.

A review of the infrastructure as well as interviews with persons involved with education and business reflected relief with the offerings that are now available. But there is also recognition among some, but not all, there’s still much that could be done by way of making broadband service more widely available. Few seem to understand the future role of the myriad edge devices to be connected via the Internet.

In the assessment portion of the DE SP we discussed a number of telecommunications capabilities on the south coast for which we made no recommendations. Low Power FM and Low Power TV both did not seem a fit with the perceived direction of DE at SOCC. Both would require owning and operating a station or at least having the capability to produce content that works in that format. Cable TV community programming also did not seem a fit. The Cable TV format is now dedicated to government access content. SOCC needs to stay aware of opportunities that may come up with these approaches. In general they do not fit well with the desires of the non-traditional students that make up the vast majority of users of DE, that being to be neither place nor time bound.

The SOCC campus benefits from having Orca as its provider. Discussion with Karl Kennedy, Orca, and with Kat Flores, SOCC IT Director, indicated SOCC has a generous provisioning of broadband access. The contracted rate is for 10 Mbps but bursts to 30 Mbps are noted, and without additional charges. Bandwidth could be scaled upward, if deemed necessary. Telephony is also in good shape overall with the purchase 2 years ago of a new switch. As such consideration of VoIP doesn’t make financial sense at this time.

In the IT plans for SOCC is a wireless campus. SOCC IT already seems to have selected the product line from Cisco to deploy once funding is available. Kat indicates she believes the funding will be approved shortly.

The SOCC campus has two IPV rooms with the capability to use at least one other site (the Empire Hall/Performing Arts Center), as demonstrated at the DE Summit. The fiber-enabled campus means that expansion would be readily accomplished, at least from the infrastructure point of view. More robust servers might be required to meet that expansion. Given the projected use of IPV for DE, this seems sufficient capacity at this time. When the new IT/Media Center planning is considered, that would be the time to consider expansion of this capacity, perhaps adding a TV production studio as well.

Compared to a number of other community colleges in the state, the SOCC campus is in remarkably good shape with scalable solutions in place.

The Brookings “campus,” which will now be expanded to a new facility due to the passage of enabling legislation, is “quite happy” with the 3 Mbps+ wireless broadband capacity in place today (adequate to support IPV). Brookings has choices for broadband with Charter Communications now being a provider in that town. As the new facility is designed and built, it would make sense to revisit the telecommunications provisioning as part of that expansion. Charter would like to play a role in that future, as no doubt will Verizon and the wireless provider. Charter may very well be the provider of choice. As they continue to build out their network on the coast the opportunity to have a seamless connection with one or at most two providers for SOCC from Brookings to Reedsport could simplify network management. It remains to be seen what Verizon might do with their coastal fiber build. They are remarkably quiet on the topic.

Gold Beach now has Verizon DSL and frame relay based T-1 access. Charter has also now reached to Gold Beach from the south. There’s a new library to be built in Gold Beach. The Curry General Hospital system is now negotiating with Charter for a point-to-point fiber-based broadband solution between Brookings and Gold Beach. All of this means there could be opportunity for aggregating demand with the hospital, library, county government, and other public entities. This will require an assertive and persistent approach by SOCC principles to ensure inclusion of SOCC in the mix.

Further north in Port Orford they, too, are building a new library and co-locating it with the OneStop/family healthcare and social services center. In an August discussion with the librarian and executive director of the OneStop center, they indicated great interest is determining what, if any, role SOCC might play in the mix. This could be an opportunity to establish a learning center presence in Port Orford as well as to help get telemedicine to the area. Again, this will require an assertive and persistent approach by SOCC principles to ensure inclusion of SOCC in the mix.

Verizon services Port Orford as does Charter with an analog TV service but not with digital/broadband services. Charter has an interest in connecting Bandon and Port Orford to complete their coastal build. Their approach is one of “cost plus.” That means they have to see a business case vs. the “build it and they will come” model that has resulted in their huge debt and marginal ROI. Verizon seems to be mum on any plans for future investment on the coast. Charter on the other hand seems motivated and interested but requires a “nudge” (i.e., business incentive).

Reviewing the K-12 telecom status we find that the Coos Bay School District as well as the North Bend School District are in pretty good shape with competition from Charter and Orca available to serve their needs. Other districts do not fair quite as well, although in some instances they own their own fiber and manage their own networks. Refer to the Inventory of Couth Coast Telecommunications to see how this breaks out. All districts have at least a T-1 to their schools.

Bandon may soon (measured in years) benefit from a fiber to the premise project now in the early planning stages. ComSpan and PCINW seek to do that build and are bidding on the RFP. Charter is also looking to build out the Bandon area as well. Verizon already provides some DSL in Bandon.

Reedsport has some availability of DSL. Reedsport could also some day benefit from either Orca or Douglas FastNet expansion.

Curiously, throughout the region the use of IPV appears very low and with few plans to grow its use. Some cite the poor implementation of videoconferencing under SB622. Others cite the lack of content, demand, lack of coordination of bell schedules, training of teachers, and the growing use of online learning as reasons for the lack of interest in IPV. It's seen as more of a way possibly to provide in-service and administrative meetings. But there's even somewhat lackluster enthusiasm for those roles. Perhaps it was just the persons interviewed but a very similar message emanated from all quarters. We saw a number of dusty V-Tel units parked in corners, scavenged for parts or not to be found. One gets the sense that there is a very slow transition and adoption of EdTech in some quarters, perhaps even some resistance, but in any case directed more towards online modes.

It could be that there's just relief to have what they have in the way of high-speed access, given it took so long to get to where they are now. Generally, there's not a lot of enthusiasm for or awareness of the tsunami of EdTech communications demands and the re-engineering of the teaching delivery tools that will soon be flooding them. But without buy-in to the need to start that planning now, at best what can be done is to educate this population on the need to gain a more robust infrastructure than what they now have, especially in those more rural areas serviced solely by Verizon.

By the way, looking to Verizon to provide leadership for broadband growth likely will return marginal results. This does not mean they are evil or bad. They provide a solid telephony network for the coast. Rather their business model drives their broadband provisioning response. Verizon is a shareholder owned public company under market pressures to make money. They are at their core mass merchandisers of telecommunications services. This means that they will invest where they can get the fastest and best return on their investment. While under mandates, and to some degree subsidized through the Universal Services Fund, to provide telephony services into rural areas, they are not under similar mandates nor subsidized to provide broadband services. Like any other business of their scale they go where the best profits will be found. One hope is that the competition intruding into this area from Charter will stimulate their investment into broadband beyond the current level. This does not mean, however, that dialogue on south coast education needs should abate.

What to do about the access issues? First let's take a quick look at what wireless technologies might do to expand the ubiquity of broadband, keeping in mind that all wireless has to come to a land-based access point at some point.

Wireless technologies do not require digging up the streets or building out fiber plant. This can be seen as favorable not only from an aesthetics point of view (i.e., eye clutter from cables) but more environmentally favorable by not having to dig or hang fiber for the infrastructure. Wireless is not without its limitations, however. Trees, mountains, transceiver range, and available location for antennae structures can be barriers. However, where wireless can be deployed it does enjoy the prospect of shorter payback times on the investment with the possibility of more affordable rates.

Wi-Max is a rapidly emerging wireless modality that has a much greater range, robust, favorable to organics like trees, does some wrapping around rocks and mountains and provides the highest levels of security. One conceptual model for broadband that is now becoming a reality, is termed

“mixed modal,” that is to say, a fiber backbone, Wi-Max to provide reaching out great distances (middle mile) and Wi-Fi as the local distribution (last mile). But...this is just one way to distribute broadband services. One might just do a pure Wi-Fi implementation, depending on the circumstances or a pure Wi-Max implementation.

With in the broadband community are “cults,” each arguing theirs is the only way to go. The good news is that we now have choices to consider. Making those choices means working through the noise of vendors and weighing the merits of any solution against the challenge to be met. In some instances a low-cost Wi-Fi implementation using public shared spectrum may be the right choice. In other instances it may be prudent to purchase spectrum for the implementation.

A second part of the approach to telecom solutions asks questions of “who will do it and where will the investment capital come from?”

Just to set a frame of reference here take note that neither Orca nor Charter are profitable companies at this time. Telecommunications companies such as Verizon also make reasonable claims that the take rate for DSL is not providing them with a reasonable (i.e., high enough) ROI on shareholder investments. Outside of the region the highly touted Ashland Fiber Network is not now profitable or predicted to be so. They recently have formed an “options committee” to determine whether or not to sell the investment as taxpayers are not happy. Currently the AFN is subsidized through an increase in electric utility rates from the City of Ashland owned company. The track record for community owned telecommunications in Oregon has a very mixed set of outcomes; sustainability is not generally one of them. But it comes down to a choice communities make. A number of communities have determined that broadband is critical to their future and it is an investment they happily provide.

Private sector capital flows to where it gets a return on investment. Today in the absence of a national policy on broadband as well as an unwillingness of many communities to subsidize directly these investments, to build sustainable telecommunications there must be a demonstration of sufficient payback to make the case. Someone has to pay for it some how, somewhere and some time. If a community determines that it wishes to subsidize such an offering, current Oregon statute provides for the opportunity to create a utility tax district or to take money from existing revenue streams. The prevailing attitudes of south coast region Oregonians does not seem amenable to that approach. They barely seem to fund education, libraries, public safety, healthcare and other critical aspects of meeting public needs. It is not an area of great wealth in the taxing coffers.

One approach to fostering greater availability of broadband comes from community leadership and a banding together to demonstrate that there really is a business opportunity. This is also a way to bring together the best minds in a region to focus on developing creative solutions to somewhat intractable problems. Through this mechanism there is also the possibility of providing broad education to the public as to the problems and solutions.

There used to be a South Coast Telecommunications Group that met regularly, held Technical Summits at SOCC and held a seat on the Oregon Telecommunications Coordinating Council (www.ortcc.org). With the implementation of Orca and the leaving of the area by a vocal and energized community leader the group wandered off, as though all the telecommunications challenges of the south coast had been met. The seat on the ORTCC remains open and unfilled. The south coast needs to resume the telecommunications group and start representing the area

once again on the ORTCC. Participation in political process is important. That's how the Brookings campus funding just allocated came to life.

Under the auspices of the Oregon coastal Zone Association there is a coastal strategic plan for telecommunications being developed. The re-formed South Coast Telecommunications Group needs to ensure that they are a part of that effort. There is great opportunity in leveraging a regional approach to achieve local solutions. There is evidence that this is occurring and moving forward as demonstrated by the recent issuance of an RFI by the community of Florence. An RFP is now being issued. It's taken several years to get to this point. These matters do not occur overnight. This effort first started in 1999 and fell into quietude until this past year when spurred on by the coastal strategic planning effort, they resumed activity.

When probed on the value of this sort of community effort for the south coast, many of the same persons that complain about the lack of broadband are quite happy to let "someone else do it" or "maybe we should sue Verizon." NOT!!

The time for sitting back and waiting for a telco to solve a region's sorely needed telecommunications infrastructure issues are in the past. Broadband is now as critical to the economic development of a region as water, power, roads, and other aspects of a modern society. It's now up to the community leaders, especially those in economic development, to drive the development of critical infrastructure. This is not the role of a service provider, although some would like you to believe it is. Their role is to respond to needs and to provision services...at a profit. We need to direct the course of our economic and quality of life future, not some amorphous body in New York or Kansas with little or no interest in the lives of our residents.

Given this background, issuing RFPs does not seem to be the approach to take at this point in time to solve the telecommunications issues of the region. Rather SOCC could take the leadership position in re-forming the South Coast Telecommunications Group and working to re-invigorate the processes that will lead to solutions for the region. This means getting a coalition of folks to work together to define and jointly agree to needs, then issuing an RFP on behalf of that group. Siloed approaches are no longer favorably viewed by funding sources who seek demonstration of a community process. We refer here to a Community Technology development process -- a programmatic response in which information and communication technologies are directly and purposely applied to achieve development goals for individuals and communities. DE telecommunication needs are best addressed through this mechanism.

This resident of the southern Oregon community is ready and willing to provide introductions to others in the state with experience in these matters as well as to continue to provide council and guidance to that process as we've done since 1999. But in the final analysis, it will require persons from within the region to accept responsibility, get together and make this happen.

The PTFP grant proposal in Objective three has this paragraph:

"Based on needs assessment data, internal and external scanning and institutional technology audits, identify at least two potential telecommunications solutions (consider broadband, Web-based, cable, wireless, and IPV multicast technologies) and conduct feasibility and cost/benefit analyses for each. Explore issues of capacity and capability for each proposed solution. Secure bids from various technology and telecommunications vendors."

In the RFI of January 13, 2005, this was echoed with the addition of a possible RFI to facilitate the development of RFP's.

We did a very thorough needs assessment, pursued a number of possibilities, found most of the components suggested in the PTFP in place, identified strategies for pursuing weak areas, discussed the findings with other experts in the field and came away not seeing where an RFP process was applicable to this challenge at this time. Indeed, our investigation went to great lengths to identify RFP opportunities directly related to DE activity. Where there might be an opportunity for purchases, this is a matter of comparison shopping (for example, using the Internet) and making a purchase. This is not to say that there won't be RFP opportunities in the future but rather that this is not the approach to take at this time given the data. This also does not mean that there isn't opportunity to improve the status of DE related telecommunications matters on the south coast. Just that there are other steps that need to occur that go well beyond the scope of this strategic planning effort (e.g., investing the time and energy it takes to build necessary collaborations to move into the future).

I reiterate my availability to provide ongoing support to the south coast to move forward on these matters, especially when it can be an exchange of information or advice via email or telephone. In that instance it's a pro bono service I already provide to a number of other areas in the state and happily extend the offer to SOCC and any other entity on the south coast.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities for DE

There's money to be made in DE that goes beyond cost recovery. Some of those opportunities include:

- Niche opportunities for online courses leading to certifications in business and trades.

Here we refer the reader to the Strategic Plan Action Item 1.3 – Identify and expand DE business course offerings and Action Item 1.4 – Identify and expand DE course offerings in support of the trades.

- Develop partnerships with course offerings exchanged on a quid pro quo basis.

While not revenue generating per say, this could stave off some of the loss of revenue from that results when fees are paid outside of the region.

- Write and sell a book – “Online Pedagogy for Community Colleges Using WebCT version 6.0.”

A Web survey of resources available indicate a wide variety of dated materials and little or nothing for this new version of WebCT CE. SOCC will shortly be passing through this upgrade path. While doing so carefully document the process, pitfalls, lessons to be learned, approach to course construction and effective use of this new version of the product. Assemble the results and produce a training manual that goes beyond “button-pushing,” one that encompasses effective usage of the expanded tool set.

WebCT will have their own set of seminars and materials to sell. But there is a market for materials of the sort described here when presented from the point of view of someone who has real world experience.

ISTE may be a way to market the book.

- Develop a certification program in Distance Education teaching.

Interviews indicated a lot of interest in gaining insight and skills necessary to effectively and efficiently develop and deliver DE, whether it be online, IPV or blended. This program could be developed using the blended model. Once developed and road-tested in the region, there is a strong indication that this could be well received outside of the region.

Other opportunities to explore

- Outsourcing of applications hosting other than WebCT.

Not a very popular option due to the perception of threats to jobs or loss of local control, this is never the less something that needs to be considered. Here we're not talking about sending the applications to India but rather to an entity like DAS. For SOCC it may not mean the loss of jobs but rather an opportunity to hold the line on IT positions and to use those dollars that would go into expansion of technology and IT staff to serve students in other ways. The local control issue is becoming less and less of a good argument against the use of outsourcing. With the great Internet access at SOCC it's almost impossible for a user to know where the application is hosted.

Given the likelihood of continued financial pressures, leveraging dollars to serve students means that these hosting alternatives need to be carefully evaluated.

- ODE training offer

Oregon Department of Education has offered "free" training on site for use of IPV. Camille Cole has made this offer and is the person to be contacted for further information.

BTW – Camille and two others have developed an excellent IPV book that is being sold through ISTE's Website at <http://www.iste.org/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=1721&TEMPLATE=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm>. The book is titled "*Videoconferencing for K-12 Classrooms.*"

- SOCC IT strategic Plan

As SOCC looks to the future with its IT operation and the potential for constructing a new IT/Media Center, don't hesitate to get in touch. I've been through multiple projects of this sort and perhaps SOCC might benefit from a third-party evaluation or project management. These can be complex and distractive processes and it's often worth the investment in independent and experienced expertise.

DE budget

The accounting system apparently does not provide budgets by responsibility centers. That is to say, revenue sources from grants are carried outside of the DE budget. On the CD in the Excel

folder is a file SOCC DE BUDGET PRO FORMA that attempts a responsibility center approach and can be used for what if budget analysis. Assumptions are indicted within cells using the COMMENTS option. Interestingly, under the budgetary assumptions, the DE program can become self-sufficient at by the end of FY 2007-2008.

The budget proposed looks like the following but readily can be modified:

<i>Account Title</i>	<i>2004-2005</i>	<i>2005-2006</i>	<i>2006-2007</i>	<i>2007-2008</i>
Revenue				
Grants	-	-	-	-
44010Tuition	(80,640)	(169,500)	(220,350)	(286,455)
44560Fees - registration	(44,380)	-	-	-
44570Fees - Distance Learning	-	(60,800)	(79,040)	(102,752)
Total Revenue:	(125,020)	(230,300)	(299,390)	(389,207)
Personnel				
51111Management Salary FT	50,402	25,201	52,000	52,000
51218FT Faculty Other	-	23,958	24,000	24,000
51311Faculty PT	137,380	113,920	138,000	162,000
51316Teaching Aids PT	1,000	-	-	-
51362Outreach Coordinator	2,000	-	-	-
51411Class SAL FT	30,160	15,080	30,160	30,160
51515Specialist	33,825	33,825	67,650	67,650
Total Personnel Salaries:	254,767	211,984	311,810	335,810
52190Payroll Costs/Fringe Benefits	95,994	82,674	-	-
Total Personnel Salaries & Benefits	350,761	294,658	311,810	335,810
Operating Expenses				
WebCT Hosting	21,500	17,350	27,900	19,500
WebCT CE v. 6 Educational Mentoring Program	-	5,000	-	-
53111General Supplies	2,330	1,330	1,463	1,609
53118Class/Laboratory Supplies	2,750	3,700	4,070	4,477
53121Micro Computer Support	500	500	550	605
53128Textbooks	500	810	891	980
53211Operations Travel	850	600	660	726
53214Program Staff Development	680	2,430	2,673	2,940
53216Professional Development Travel	-	1,500	1,650	1,815
53312Printing Outside	-	2,000	2,200	2,420
53315Telephone/Long Distance	300	250	275	303
53317Facility Rental	11,000	-	-	-
53319Meeting Expenses	200	100	110	121
53321Other Purchased Services	300	300	330	363
53328Film/DVD/Video	-	500	550	605
53331Dues/Fees	783	1,280	1,408	1,549
Total Operating Expense:	41,693	37,650	44,730	38,013
Total Personnel and Operating Expenses:	392,454	332,308	356,540	373,823
Revenue, Personnel and Operating Expenses:	267,434	102,008	57,150	(15,384)