



Project Kelvin work underway

THE controversial new telehouse will be sited at Fort George - but will not mean that the city's connectivity to a cross-Atlantic cable is any faster than Coleraine or Belfast, it has emerged.

A total of eight towns in Northern Ireland and five in the Republic will directly connect to the new cable under the Project Kelvin scheme.

Earlier this year there was uproar in the city when it was announced that the telehouse would be situated at Coleraine when it had been believed that it would be built in Londonderry.

Although the company that won the Department of Enterprise tender said it was necessary to build it in Coleraine, a campaign resulted in a decision to build one in Londonderry.

After Ilex announced recently that it was seeking planning permission to site the telehouse at Fort George, Derek Bullock, Vice President of Network Operations Hibernia Atlantic, said it was up to various agencies in each region to promote their own areas.

He said: "Each point of presence (PoP) has exactly the same equipment, and the same services so it's up to each region to promote it."

Speaking on Radio Foyle, Mr Bullock said there would be little difference between connection speeds in Londonderry, Coleraine or Belfast: "Any business can connect into any site, it's up to each region to promote it on the international basis...The speeds we're talking about are very, very, very small, they're fractions of a millisecond. I mean each area is extremely, extremely fast and has the same kind of opportunities."

His comments echoed views he expressed earlier this year when pressed by a Stormont committee while the controversy was raging over the decision to site a

telehouse in Coleraine rather than Londonderry.

As the controversy spiralled, Mr Bullock was called to give answers to the Stormont Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

He told them: "I have said numerous times — people are not getting my point or, perhaps, I am not putting it across well enough — that there is a technical reason for building the telehouse in Coleraine. It is to do with signal amplification. The signal dies off after a certain distance.

"Our transatlantic cables have, approximately every 45 km to 65 km, sub-sea amplifiers and equipment that lies on the seabed and provides the power to amplify the signal. We are taking a cable from the midpoint between amplifiers on the northern cable to bring it onshore, and it is approximately 25 miles, or 32 km, to the shoreline. We have a physical limitation of 7 km — a 7 km radius in which we must re-amplify that signal. To do that, I must put in the same equipment that I put in to every other product in every other city. Therefore, we have to build a facility there. If that facility was not called a telehouse, it would be called a cable station. That facility still has to be there. It connects to the Saturn ring, and every point on that ring has the same transmission equipment. Every other carrier, customer and business can connect into exactly the same services."

In February, the Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster confirmed the telehouse would be located in the city.

However a cable landing station is still required in Coleraine.

Work began in May on the multi-million pound Kelvin Project cable site at the West Strand in Portrush, with work on the cable landing station at

Dundooan to begin shortly after the Portrush leg of operations has been completed. Hibernia Atlantic is due to complete all the work by the end of the year. There will be a period of testing before going live in March 2010.

The recent announcement by Ilex was welcomed by Minister For Social Development, Margaret Ritchie who said: "The construction of the Project Kelvin telehouse will represent the first physical development on Fort George and I hope it will be followed by many more major developments as we continue to advance our vision of making this site an economic driver that delivers jobs and prosperity for the people of Derry and the North West."

Telehouse is the generic term for a building in which carriers or Telecommunications Operators interconnect their networks. Londonderry's new telehouse will be a building where the cable is physically joined to the terrestrial network and where other service providers can connect.

Mark Durkan MP MLA also welcomed the announcement by ILEX.

He said: "The official confirmation of a planning application for the Project Kelvin Telehouse at the Fort George site is to be warmly welcomed. Given the key economic significance of this facility and the time sensitivity of Project Kelvin's delivery we want to see planning approval as soon as possible. ILEX and Hibernia Atlantic deserve encouragement and support in taking this project forward. It would be a welcome and overdue first delivery at the Fort George site for all the reasons previously argued. It offers great potential for the city and the region in terms of connectivity, competitiveness and future employment."