



Minister Arlene Foster with the Hibernia Atlantic team, from left to right it is Bjarni Thorvardarson, CEO of Hibernia Atlantic, Derek Bullock, Vice President of Network Operations, Stephen Swift, Director of Business Development, Mike Saunders, Vice President of Business Development. The Minister is holding a jointing unit - full name "Tyco Millennia joint".

Ulster Business talks to Derek Bullock of Hibernia Atlantic about the £30 million project to connect Northern Ireland directly to the United States via an undersea cable that will revolutionise telecommunications for businesses here...

Gonna get US connected

Derek Bullock stares at an international map of global undersea communications cables and puts his finger on the north coast of Ireland.

The latest map, showing a truly connected world beneath the waves, has a gap between a cable running across the top of the North of Ireland and its nearest point of landfall, the seaside town of Portrush.

But all that's about to change and with it the economic dynamic of Northern Ireland and the border areas of the Republic as a £30 million project to link this cable into the region's communications network begins this month.

Bullock is the vice-president of network operations for global corporation, Hibernia Atlantic, a New Jersey-based company which lays and manages submarine communications cables around the world providing businesses

and governments security through diversity.

"The new cable, which lands on the West Strand in Portrush, will revolutionise telecommunications and data transfer for businesses throughout the northern half of the island of Ireland," he said. "If anything says Northern Ireland is open for business it is this because suddenly the world becomes truly accessible and at frighteningly high speeds which deliver real savings and economies of scale.

“When it comes to moving data around the global economy, time is of the essence and a few fractions of a second faster can make a world of difference to a company’s bottom line.

“Add in the security achieved through an undersea cable and suddenly you have a package which is incredibly attractive to industries which have not yet targeted the region for investment because a secure enough high-speed connection has not been available at the right price.”

In particular, Bullock pinpoints industries like entertainment, biotechnology and financial services.

“These industries require very high speed data transfer over a secure platform both for the transmission of information between two or more points and for the off-shore storage and backup of that information,” he said. “That’s why it is common to find data centres locating along the cable network because they provide direct and secure access to a global communications superhighway.

“So, for example, the recent announcement by the First and Deputy First Minister that HBO is to come to Belfast to make a pilot episode of a new series, has been made possible by the undersea cable and the data transfer speeds it employs. The global entertainment industry now has an alternative location for doing business!”

The Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland, the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources in the Republic of Ireland and the European Union, have jointly

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funded the cable’s installation, known locally as Project Kelvin.

It hasn’t been without its difficulties with industry and commerce and politicians in the North West fighting vigorously to have the cable’s tele-house situated in Londonderry rather than in Coleraine as originally planned.

“Thankfully many of the issues surrounding this debate have been resolved and the telehouse will be located in Derry city,” said Bullock. “A common misconception has been that the location of the telehouse almost guarantees jobs for that area.

“But that’s simply not true, with the location of the telehouse irrelevant to job creation. Anyone, anywhere with a connection to the cable has the same opportunity to invest and secure employment growth. That’s the beauty of this cable. Whether you are in Derry, Coleraine, Monaghan or Newry you have the same equal opportunity to tap in and get to work. No one place has an advantage over another.”

Bullock looks again at the map and ponders the timetable for the cable landing in Portrush.

“Next month people on the North Coast of Ireland will see a massive ship anchored off the West Strand at Portrush. It’s operated by the world’s biggest undersea cable laying business, Global Marine,” he added. “It will lift the Hibernia Atlantic cable, currently running across the top of Ireland into Great Britain, splice it, and attach 24 kilometres of new cable. It will then lay the new cable into the West Strand and onwards to a landing station in Coleraine, from where it will connect it to the existing Northern Ireland communications network.

“Suddenly Northern Ireland becomes directly connected to the continental United States with high speed fibres that provide secure and fast communications for businesses already located here and in the border counties of the Republic, and for those companies who wish to do business here because it has become practically possible as well as more cost-effective.”

Once landed, the cable is secured, attached to the fibre communications ring that circles Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic and then emerges again at a telehouse to be built in Derry City.

“When all of this is completed around late autumn then Northern Ireland can begin to write a new chapter in its economic history.”



The above map shows how the cable will link into the Northern Ireland network.