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Clever steps to a connected future

18th June 2010

IT IS time for Michael Whereat to hand over the foster child he has been raising for the past four years.

The moment was marked with a symbolic cutting of the cord at an event last week.

"I call it the umbilical cord of the past," Mr Whereat, council's economic programs manager, said.

The Clever Networks fibre optic/wimax wireless network was officially launched last Friday, when Senator Mark Furner cut the copper cord.

"It was the culmination of all the governance and management processes to get the program under way," Mr Whereat said.

"It was about saying that the responsibility for delivering the commercial benefits to the region has now shifted to the private partners (Allegro Networks and Mach Technology). It will be their job to implement it over the next 15 years.

"These are early days and they have experienced financial stresses like anyone else, but they will be the ones to provide business-grade services to the businesses of the Sunshine Coast.

"They are offering alternatives – there is now competition in the marketplace that wasn't there before – and the quality of service is the same or better."

Mr Whereat has taken the Clever Networks project through council amalgamation and seen it create a partnership with the Federal Government, the University of the Sunshine Coast, private partners, Matthew Flinders Anglican College and Reed Property Group.

"It has been a lot of hard work. We had to get through a lot of legal challenges in terms of approvals from State Government," he said.

"But, unless we had done this work, we wouldn't have had the level of awareness that we do across the region today that we do need to have world-class broadband services here to be able to compete in the international market."

Wireless aside, Mr Whereat is charged with the task of getting the recently endorsed economic development strategy rubber on the road – the actions to back up the words.

"The strategy council has today sets the framework, but the most important part is the implementation plan," he said.

"We have set a timeframe and said we won't do some things this year, but there are some things that are priorities this financial year, in the next few months and today."

He said immediate priorities were ensuring the right infrastructure was in place to foster a digital economy for all residents, not just businesses; clean tech and environmental technology initiatives such as biodiesel use by council vehicles, lightweight building materials, solar panels, using waste for energy and bringing the Coast's sporting groups together to work with council more effectively.

"It's about practical, real outcomes. We are not looking for just another policy.

"We have a desire to help those who are under pressure. The world economic crisis had a big focus from the Australian government last year, but the reality is the financial pressures and burdens are really being exposed now.



FINISHED JOB: Council economic programs manager Michael Whereat is proud of the completion of the Clever Networks fibre optic/wimax wireless network, which was officially launched last Friday.

Jason Dougherty/The Daily

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"We need to respond, but council can't do everything. A large proportion of our work is putting in place the enabling solutions. And Connecting The Coast is an example of that.

"The Noosa and Maroochy councils put that together because we recognised the university had needs they couldn't meet. So we provided a leadership role."

He is one of those rare bureaucrats who has some first-hand knowledge of the realities of business.

He has spent 11 years in local government and is a planner, earning his qualifications as a mature-aged student after other careers in hospitality and transport.

"I have an avid interest in communities and how planning for communities can give them confidence in business decisions," he said.

"Where governments are unclear, business decisions aren't made. Even if businesses don't like a government decision, if it's clear, it will inform business decisions one way or another."

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