



ESCAP and ITU set to produce a map of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway

In the Asia-Pacific region, underspending in infrastructure has resulted in a lack of a seamless, reliable and affordable regional ICT infrastructure. At present, interregional and intraregional Internet traffic is routed through submarine cables operated by international consortia, with heavy reliance on Internet exchange points in the United States of America and other technologically advanced countries. Not surprisingly therefore, international backhaul costs for the region can reach up to five times those in more developed regions of the global economy.

As regional integration accelerates, there are, however, encouraging signs that policymakers are increasingly focused on setting the right regulatory and policy environment to address connectivity gaps. Attention is now on the need for the region, with its large landmass, to shift to a cost-effective roll-out of broadband infrastructure that is comprised of a judicious mix of land- and sea-based fibre-optic cables and transnational initiatives. Satellite-based communications under special circumstances also form part of the mix.

Despite this growing recognition that the digital divide needs to be closed if ICTs are to achieve their transformational potential, there is a dearth of information on the nature of ICT infrastructure gaps. In particular, information is missing on the geography of network infrastructures for broadband, the so called information superhighways. To gain a better understanding of the situation, ESCAP's ICT and Development Section in partnership with [ITU](#) has started to develop a regional map of the connecting land-based infrastructure networks throughout Asia and the Pacific. After extensive discussions, ITU and ESCAP agreed on modalities to allocate responsibilities and coordinate their efforts to keep costs down and benefit from mutual synergies.

This activity received strong support from ESCAP's Committee on ICT, which held its third session from 20 to 22 November 2012. The Committee further recognized that gaps in connectivity would require regional solutions.

Consequently, the map will merge geographic information on the routes of fibre-optic cable networks, with regional land transport routes that have been constructed or are planned under the ESCAP-administered Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway agreements. The development of these maps will

a) provide an important factual source for the further assessment of the benefits and costs in synchronizing future deployment of fibre-optic cable across sectors, including highway and railroad construction. As most of the cost of deploying fiber-optic cables is associated with physical engineering, it is anticipated that coordinating it with the construction of new roads and railway could entail significant economies of scale. For example, by a Presidential Executive Order, since June 2012, all Federal Agencies of the United States are required to assist telecommunication carriers in synchronizing their broadband deployment projects with the physical construction of roadways and properties. This approach is expected to reduce the cost of constructing fibre-optic terrestrial cable by up to 90 per cent.

b) guide discussions on the promotion of a regional cooperation framework on regional connectivity in ICT.

The resulting maps will be available online. They will be highly interactive and be put through a consistent process of data verification and updating, subject to the continued availability of funding. In undertaking the first phase of work, ESCAP gratefully acknowledges the generous funding support of the Korea Communications Commission (KCC) and the Development Account (Tranche 8) of the United Nations.