

Today, broadband connections to the Internet via mobile phones and other devices — mobile broadband — can be used for many data applications, from e-mail to multimedia streaming and file downloads. Mobile broadband has been a bright spot for the sector, especially in mature markets where the recession (and regulation) has had an impact on revenues for voice and short-message service (SMS) transmissions. Over the last 18 months there has been a huge rise in the adoption of mobile broadband globally, with customers using netbooks, dongles attached to laptops, or smartphones.

Several technologies are competing to deliver commercial mobile broadband services. One of them is high-speed packet access (HSPA). According to GSMA, there are now 321 HSPA networks in 120 countries worldwide, and 285 of these networks are commercially live, supporting more than 167.5 million connections. GSMA says that there are now more than 9 million new HSPA connections being added globally every month, compared to 5.5 million a year ago. Europe and the Asia-Pacific region each account for an estimated 3 million of these new connections, with North America contributing 1.3 million.

During the panel discussion, industry leaders stressed that competition, not regulation, should drive mobile broadband development. Robert Conway, CEO and Member of the Board of the GSM Association, recalled a letter which key players in the mobile industry had addressed to the leaders of the G20 countries meeting in London in April 2009. He said the letter had asked the G20 governments to meet the industry's requests for less intrusive regulatory regimes, and for the additional radio-frequency spectrum needed to extend the reach of mobile broadband services. Mr Conway said the mobile industry is forecast to invest USD 800 billion over the next five years, of which USD 550 billion will be spent on mobile broadband with the aim of connecting 2.4 billion people to the Internet.

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