



Innovative thinking: Toronto's waterfront (pictured) is undergoing a hi-tech transformation

Future-proofing Toronto

THE TORONTO WATERFRONT'S USE OF SMART TECHNOLOGY – INCLUDING A HIGH-SPEED FIBRE OPTIC PIPE AND THE LATEST IN CLOUD COMPUTING – IS SECURING THE CITY'S FUTURE AS A HI-TECH DESTINATION. JAMES GRUNDTVIG REPORTS

Cities are becoming smarter as leaders from around the world start to share ideas on sustainability, best practices and innovation. Take Toronto, which is revitalising its waterfront with C\$35bn (\$34bn) investment over the next 30 to 40 years.

Government agency Waterfront Toronto is steering the project, looking at the challenges of energising 8 square kilometres of mostly brownfield land. Waterfront Toronto CEO and president John W Campbell says: “[We wanted to] do something different, something that would last well into the future.” He adds: “The project will be guided by our triple bottom line approach: by good design, increasing sustainability and creating [a better] quality of life for Torontonians.”

Between C\$6bn and C\$8bn will be spent on infrastructure, with the seed capital coming from Canada's federal, provincial and municipal governments. Unlike other regeneration projects, this one has a new twist: a high-speed fibre-optic pipe combined with IBM's Smarter Cities technology. This will enable residents and businesses to interact with one another even before they move in by gaining access to the network, part of IBM's SmartCloud strategy.

Smart infrastructure

“As we work to revitalise Toronto's waterfront, our investments in smart infrastructure are keeping Toronto globally competitive for top jobs and top talent,” says Mr Campbell. “These communities will be ‘living labs’ for the design and demonstration of the latest technology applications in fields as diverse as data visualisation, digital media, mobile, technology-enabled healthcare and education, building sciences and facilities maintenance.” This makes the need for speed and access in telecommunications of paramount importance.

“With high-performance buildings, smart

infrastructure and cutting-edge technology applications that find new ways to deliver essential services, Toronto's waterfront will be synonymous with innovation,” adds Mr Campbell.

He says that having high-speed fibre-optic telecommunications was not enough; the project had to include a portal for the users to access and connect with each other virtually. “The company we selected was Element Blue, an IBM business partner, to build the portal with its operating system,” says Mr Campbell, who adds that it had to be platform-agnostic, allowing it to be used by Linux, Windows, Apple and other systems.

“The best way to capture that was the need to build and host the portal beyond the network provider and make sure that it is bullet-proof,” says Mr Campbell.

Pacesetters vs chasers

An IBM Center for Applied Insights study of cloud decision-makers grouped organisations on their level of cloud adoption into pacesetters, challengers and chasers. Pacesetters – the enterprises that have deployed cloud technology on a broad scale – reported competitive advantages in terms of strategic reinvention, better decisions and deeper collaboration. The pacesetters surpass chasers – those more cautious about cloud technology in early stages of adoption – by 79% in terms of locating and leveraging expert knowledge and by 136% in terms of the reinvention of customer relationships. And with double-digit margins, pacesetters outperformed chasers in the use of cloud technology for analytics, mobile, big data and social business.

As Mr Campbell sees it: “By working to make broadband affordable and accessible to everyone in the community, intelligent communities can help bridge the digital divide and create inclusion and prosperity for all.” ■