

Manchester plans free city wi-fi

Manchester could become the biggest free wireless internet hotspot in Europe under plans unveiled by the city council.

The network, inspired by projects in San Francisco and Amsterdam, would cover 90% of Greater Manchester and reach up to 2.2 million people. Councillors believe the initiative could make the city a leader in driving the UK into the digital age.

An open day inviting comments on the plans is being held on 15 December.

Interested businesses or individuals can contribute to the debate at the Town Hall event either openly or in confidence. The initiative is part of Manchester's bid in the government's Digital Challenge Initiative, a competition that will select a region to qualify for up to £3m in funding.

Competition spur

Although the proposals are not dependent on winning the competition, the prize would help offset the costs of the scheme.

The initiative is being led by the council's Digital Development Agency (DDA), which outlined plans for initial coverage of 100 square miles, rising to 400 square miles in the future.

Dave Carter, head of the DDA, said: "The government competition has spurred us into action on this and really made us think what an incredible effect on both the business and domestic lives of Mancunians such a network would have.

"It would help small businesses with web access and our citizens with access to information."

If the scheme moves forward, it would be the largest municipal wi-fi project envisaged for the UK.

Some private companies are already planning to create city-wide wi-fi networks in cities such as Manchester, Birmingham and London through the creation of hundreds of hotzones. Norwich is already pioneering a free wi-fi project which covers three sectors of the UK city and its centre.



Up to 2.2m people could benefit from the scheme

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