



Under Embargo until Thursday, February 2, 2006 at 10:00 a.m.

Ontario and Michigan research networks achieve international connection

Windsor - A different kind of traffic is flowing over the US-Canada border today as Ontario and Michigan officially interconnect their high-speed optical research and education networks utilizing the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel. The direct fiber connection is believed to be a first across international borders for regional research and education networks.

The new cross-border link, passing through the tunnel infrastructure, was marked at an official optical fibre splicing ceremony at Windsor City Hall today.

Officials from the City of Windsor, the Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION) and Merit Network Inc. which operates Michigan's research and education network, presided over the symbolic splice of optical fibre.

"This link is of immense future value to Ontario and Michigan," said ORION President/CEO Phil Baker, who noted the connection will make it easier for researchers and institutions to collaborate and pursue new cross-border partnerships in science and learning.

"Merit's member institutions are very excited about this achievement," added John Camp, CIO of Wayne State University and chair of the Merit Board of Directors. "We see this as a critical step in developing a Regional Optical Network (RON) in the Great Lakes Region. A Great Lakes RON will eliminate geographic barriers for cross-institutional and cross-border collaborative research."

"This project is an excellent example of the knowledge-based, cross-border, regional approach that the Windsor/Detroit area is becoming known for worldwide," said Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis. "The speed-of-light exchange of information by optical fibre is crucial to the continued growth of our region's communications capacities, and for education, research and development in all sectors. My congratulations go to everyone on both sides of the border who have put this vital link together."

Research partnerships that can be facilitated by the new link range from collaborations in automotive design to environmental research. Ultra high-speed networks provide more efficient connections enabling distributed high-performance computational clusters and devices, applications in data mining, life science research and joint participation in global scientific projects.

As part of the growing global cyber-infrastructure, advanced research and education networks like those managed by ORION and Merit have become critical infrastructure for next-generation science and learning.

This new Detroit-Windsor connection has the capacity to transmit large amounts of data at very fast speeds. It can transmit the equivalent of a full data CD in just under a second. There are also plans to boost the capacity from the current one Gigabit per second link to multiple wavelengths creating one of the most advanced optical infrastructures of its kind in the world.

Officials also see this link as a first step toward creating a new Great Lakes and Atlantic Research Alliance, involving ORION, Merit and advanced networks in New York and Quebec. A similar cross-border connection is being finalized between Fort Erie, Ontario and Buffalo, New York.

Baker and Camp acknowledged the critical support of the City of Windsor and the Detroit and Canada Tunnel Corporation, which owns and operates the tunnel infrastructure.

"The Tunnel Corporation is pleased to have had a part in facilitating this international collaboration between these two research and education networks" said Neal Belitsky, Executive Vice President & General Manager of the Detroit and Canada Tunnel Corporation.

Baker also acknowledged the critical support of the University of Windsor and the Windsor Essex Development Network (WEDnet), a part of the Centre for Smart Community Innovation. He also acknowledged the Government of Ontario, a key contributor to the project.

About ORION

The Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION), a not-for-profit organization, is Ontario's leading-edge research and education telecommunications network. ORION connects Ontario's universities, colleges, medical and other public research facilities, and a number of school boards to one another and to the global grid of research and education networks. Learn more at www.orion.on.ca.

About Merit

Merit Network Inc. (Merit), a non-profit corporation governed by Michigan's public universities, owns and operates America's first regional research and education network. Founded in 1966, Merit supports the high-performance networking needs of Michigan's universities, colleges, K-12 schools, libraries, state government, health care and other non-profit organizations. Through Merit, Michigan's research and education organizations have access to leading-edge network research, state and national collaborations, and international peering connections. For more information, please visit www.merit.edu/.

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