

[washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

Alexandria Goes Wireless

Post

Thursday, June 16, 2005; A28

ALEXANDRIA'S free wireless Internet service for part of Old Town is up and running. The network, covering eight blocks of King Street, will serve as a laboratory for new technologies that could reduce costs and increase efficiency in years to come. Among the wireless innovations the city is exploring are sensors that can tell if a traffic light has stopped functioning and report instantaneously to traffic monitors. Advances in parking meter enforcement, fire truck and ambulance dispatching, and even trash collection could arise out of a citywide wireless network, but first Alexandria officials want to try out the new devices in a small area to see if they would be worthwhile investments.

The government could have decided to keep the network private, but it chose instead to open the connection to public use. It's a happy confluence between government necessity and public utility: The city gets a place to test advanced systems while residents get a useful and attractive amenity. Because the network is available to anyone in range, it is not secure -- meaning information sent over it is considerably more vulnerable to prying eyes than it would be on a network protected by passwords and firewalls. The connection is also not expected to work indoors. These limitations mean that for businesses and residents alike the city's free wireless access would not be a viable alternative to subscribing to an Internet service provider, so the question of government competition with private enterprise doesn't arise.

Critics say that Alexandria taxpayers shouldn't have to foot the bill for a service that only a small number of residents may use. But even if usage does turn out to be low, there is a benefit for the city's taxpayers in their government testing expensive systems on a small scale. The project's estimated start-up costs are about \$20,000 -- less than 30 cents per Alexandria household -- and monthly bandwidth costs hover around \$650, or about 11 cents per household per year. Also, the availability of a free Internet connection may prove to be a boon for Old Town, attracting more city residents and tourists to businesses there.

Besides, lounging in the sun and enjoying the breeze while checking e-mail or updating a blog is the modern version of sitting on a park bench reading a good book. A free wireless Internet connection suggests that the city is cutting-edge. Already, Arlington and Silver Spring have plans to create free wireless zones of their own. This is the sort of municipal experiment we hope will spread.

© 2005 The Washington Post Company

Advertising Links

What's this?

Wireless Government - Free Trial

Mobile Apps for Pocket PC's, Laptops & Tablet PC's. Sync remote workers, consolidation & workflow.

www.adessosystems.com

Accela, Wireless e-Government Solutions

Accela develops integrated solutions for local and state government, including Web-

Advertisement

VONAGE
THE BROADBAND PHONE COMPANY™

PHONE
SERVICE..
AT A BETTER
PRICE?



based, wireless, and GIS centric applications.
www.accela.com

Wireless Government Tools from IBM

Let IBM help meet government needs head on. End-to-end information systems solutions catered to your agency's challenges. Defense, postal, safety and security and many more. Let us help.

www.ibm.com