DIGITAL DIVIDE - A West Auckland Focus

Introduction

This document was inspired by a conversation between members of the CW Board when discussing likely community impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown. It seeks to answer some of the key questions that were posed at that time. It is entirely based on accessing relevant material from the internet and most sources have been recorded. It should be noted that a number of the sources, especially maps were of broader coverage but have been trimmed for our context. Therefore, a reader from another area could use the same sources and create data relevant to their place.

Executive Summary

The concept of universal digital access is widely discussed. It is implied by Article 19 in the UN charter and has been made law in some countries, like Estonia. In general, New Zealand ranks well as a provider of digital access and resource, although our domestic broadband access is a weakness. There are some key demographic categories that suffer from lack of digital access and the census data would indicate there are specific categories in the 3 Local Board areas that we serve (Henderson Massey, Whau and Waitakere Ranges).

A comprehensive report on the issue for New Zealand was published in 2018 by InternetNZ and there are good maps provided by agencies or providers that show the status of mobile coverage or broadband progress. It is pleasing to note that in August 2018 plans were announced to increase coverage (see item bottom half of pg7) and there would be a benefit to our region.

The one area identified by this research where more work is needed is identifying easy to use, cost effective equipment.

It is acknowledged that whilst editing this piece the NZ Government announced an assistance package for children being schooled at home – TV channels, devices and modems to allow 70-80,000 to connect.

1. Is Digital Access a Basic Human Right?

A report (https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/17session/A.HRC.17.27_en.pdf) released in June 2011 by the United Nations argued that disconnecting individuals from the Internet is a violation of human rights and goes against international law. "The Special Rapporteur underscores the unique and transformative nature of the Internet not only to enable individuals to exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression," according to the report's summary, "but also a range of other human rights, and to promote the progress of society as a whole."

A survey of 26 countries conducted by the BBC in March 2010 found that nearly four out of five people (79 percent, to be exact) believe that access to the Internet is a "fundamental human right."

Some countries have taken things one step further. Estonia passed a law in 2000, for example, that declared access to the Internet a basic human right. France followed in 2009.

In Summer of 2016, the United Nations Human Rights Council released a non-binding resolution. The resolution reaffirmed that "the same rights people have offline must also be protected online". Recent practice of the UN treaty-based bodies indicates growing interest in ensuring access to the Internet. In addition, Internet-related recommendations formulated under the Universal Periodic Review mechanism are as numerous as those related to the right to food and the right to water – both of which are well-established human rights.
It comes under article 19 which is summarised as “Working on two interlocking freedoms: the Freedom to Speak, and the Freedom to Know”.

Conclusion – It is implied but NOT specified in the current list.

2. Which country leads in providing Universal Access and how does NZ rank?

In Jan 2019 a report was issued by the World Wide Web Foundation, an organisation set up by the inventor of the web, Sir Tim Berners-Lee. It says that while half the world’s population now uses the internet, a desperate lack of skills and stagnant investment mean the UN’s goal of universal access, defined as 90% of people being online, may not be reached until 2050 or later.

The assessment highlights the dramatic digital divide that has opened up between those who take the internet and its benefits for granted and “those who are side-lined because they either lack the skills to be online, cannot afford access or live in a region with no connection.”

Comment - These were the same factors we were discussing.

Out of interest, according to a world league table of Broadband Speed produced in 2019 following research designed and compiled by Cable.co.uk, and gathered by M-Lab, an open source project then top ten countries are: Taiwan; Singapore; Jersey; Sweden; Denmark; Japan; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Switzerland and San Marino. New Zealand was ranked 17th (and Australia 51st).

Unusually, an interesting article on leading countries for Internet use/connectivity is found on a BBC Travel site! http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20190630-five-countries-on-the-frontline-of-tech

Written in July 2019 they rate the top 5 countries as:

1. Estonia - The government-sponsored e-Estonia programme has introduced e-voting, e-health, e-banking, and even e-residency, which allows non-citizens to apply for a virtual residency that entitles them to an identity card, banking services, payment processing and the ability to form a company.
2. Finland - The web is so important for the Finns that in 2010 the government made it a legal right for every citizen to have broadband access – the first country in the world to do so.
3. Israel - dubbed 'Start-up Nation', Israel's internet is fast, cheap and reliable. Few citizens, including the elderlies, are ever far from their social media or comms apps.
4. Canada - availability of government services online and unrestricted access to online services gives entrepreneurs a leg up, making it easy to start and manage a business from anywhere.
5. South Korea -has super-fast internet speeds, and coupled with the government’s open internet access, has allowed citizens to enjoy uninterrupted video streaming, video chats and fast downloads of games.

What is interesting about the table above is that NZ is in the top 10 for 4 out of 5 categories. Where we miss out is in the “Internet speed at home”

Conclusion – NZ has, in general, a high level of digital capability.

3. What can we learn from NZ Census Data?

Firstly – there was no question about internet access in the 2018 census. No help there!
Secondly – it may be thought that one of the issues with the low response rate would have been the fact that it was the first to be available online. The Independent Review conducted for NZ Govt disagrees –
The Internet Collection System (ICS) was a success. It was secure, stable, and easy to use with over 80% of forms (dwelling and individual) completed online by the end of census collection operations. This well exceeded the expected target (70%) Report of the Independent Review of New Zealand’s 2018 Census.

But we can look at key demographic factors. In a report on the Digital Divide (see section 4 on this page below for a link), InternetNZ says: The groups of New Zealand society most at risk of digital divides are:

- people living in rural communities
- people with disabilities
- migrants and refugees with English as a second language
- families with children in low socio-economic communities
- Māori and Pasifika Youth
- offenders and ex-offenders
- seniors and older New Zealanders.

In the 3 local Boards we have some of those situations: Henderson Massey has twice the Maori population (6.6%) than the other 2 (3.3%) and nearly 3 times the Pacifica (14.0%) compared to Auckland (5.3%). It also has a very high Asian population (25%) compared to Auckland (13.7).

Waitakere Ranges is very rural and has one of the lowest populations by land area in Auckland – 170/Sq km compared to 1818 on average for Auckland. It has nearly twice as many Europeans in all that space than the other 2.

Whau has, surprisingly, the highest percentage of those 65 & over (12.1%) compared to the others (WR 10.4% and HM 10.3%) It also has the lowest European number (31%) so has the highest combination of other ethnicities with a staggering 38% Asian!

**Conclusion – there are some key factors likely to affect the areas that we serve**

4. **What analysis exists about the Digital Divide in NZ?**

In May 2018 InternetNZ issued a fascinating report – “Solving Digital Divides together” well worth reading this one! – which captures a lot of the conversation we were having. [https://internetnz.nz/sites/default/files/submissions/Solving_Digital_Divides.pdf](https://internetnz.nz/sites/default/files/submissions/Solving_Digital_Divides.pdf)

The Conclusions (pg. 18) are:

-We are calling for a nationwide target for universal access to the Internet. To get there, we need collaboration across New Zealand, including Government and civil society, to remove the systemic obstacles that are keeping people from progressing on their journey towards digital inclusion. This paper includes recommendations for us all to start this work together in 2018.

-New Zealand needs political responsibility for success, and a collective target of universal access.

We think that closing digital divides is the best investment Government can make. We want to see responsibility and accountability from central government, and the support of civil society and local communities.

-Together, we need to find digitally excluded people: We want to use InternetNZ’s digital divide map (see below), reach out to communities, and find people who are excluded.

-We need to collect and curate data on digital divides: Like the example of the UK Digital Inclusion Dashboard, New Zealand should be tracking digital divide indicators closely, so we can see if meaningful change is occurring.

-We all should be piloting initiatives which close digital divides and scaling up successes.

[Digital Divide Map](https://digitaldivide.nz/) - is an interactive map with 3 key measures: Infrastructure Availability, Access to Infrastructure and Digital Skill level. You can access from that link all the detail of how they assess that. You can click on “How do we measure” to get info. Below is a screenshot showing the map and the 3 measures for Oratia...
Checking on a random selection of West Auckland suburbs they all scored HIGH for Digital inclusion.

5. What about our ability to access by broadband or mobile?

On the SPARK website is a map showing status of Fibre Roll Out. That is pasted below:

Note that there is bar (adjustable) in the top right which shows a date. The next screenshot is with that moved forward to Dec 2021. Only big change one can see is that Laingholm gets connected!

Community Waitakere – Research piece “DIGITAL DIVIDE – a West Auckland focus” April 2020
What about the Mobile coverage?  
[https://www.nperf.com/en/map/NZ](https://www.nperf.com/en/map/NZ) provide a map where you select the provider. New Zealand only has 3 networks: 2 degrees, spark and Vodafone. Each map is pasted below.

2 degrees

Spark
None of them great – especially as you travel West in our region!

In February 2018, OpenSignal (an independent mobile analytics company) reported the availability of 4G only mobile services in New Zealand at 69%, or 65th out of 88 countries.

In August 2018 the Commerce Commission released a report
It states - In terms of overall coverage, the 3 networks offer mobile services to more than 97% of New Zealand on a population basis, with 4G coverage at around 95%. According to MBIE, the geographic coverage of the mobile networks in New Zealand in 2017 was around 50%. (that figure is referenced in another article)

18th Dec 2018 - Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones and Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media Minister Kris Faafoi announced significant additional rural broadband and mobile coverage across New Zealand, taking coverage to 99.8% of the population. The additional coverage will roll out over the next four years due to the expansion of the Rural Broadband Initiative phase two/Mobile Black Spots Fund (RBI2/MBSF) programme.

Unfortunately, the map provided in the link is of very poor quality. As far as could be determined the key is as follow:
Bright Blue Dot - Tourism Expansion Contract
Brown Dot - RBI2 Household Expansion Contract
Light Blue Dot – RBI2 Household and Business base contract
Purple Square – Marae New Coverage contract

It would appear that there is a plan to improve things in the West – Waitakere area especially
6. Is there an affordable and simple “Switch on and use” (Plug & Play) device?

10\textsuperscript{th} March 2020, Tech Radar reviewed “Best budget smartphone 2020: the top cheap mobiles around” They decided the Huawei P Smart (2019) is the best cheap phone you can buy right now. Sadly – this item was not found for sale in NZ. [https://assistedlivingtoday.com/blog/best-tablets-for-seniors/](https://assistedlivingtoday.com/blog/best-tablets-for-seniors/) from 24\textsuperscript{th} March recommends the Apple Ipad 9.7 which retails at over $1000!

**Conclusion – Don’t know! Needs further work.** It was not possible to find a recent NZ based review of cost effective, easy to use digital devices. It is suggested that others with an insight from a Digital Supply industry may be able to assist.

But reading related items did identify that there are organisations that try to assist with learning How to use a Digital Device. From the Digital Inclusion website - [https://digitalinclusion.nz/](https://digitalinclusion.nz/) Attached is a map showing where there are places that will help. Nothing West of Ranui!

![Map showing digital inclusion services in Waitakere](image)

Clearly aimed at those who have a Gold card, is SeniorNet which according to its website: “brings older adults and technology together in a friendly, fun and stress-free way.” The local Co-ordinator for West Auckland is based at the RSA in Henderson and has an email address if we wanted to contact her. [http://www.seniornet-west-auckland.org.nz/](http://www.seniornet-west-auckland.org.nz/)

😊 Bonus of this research:
As an aside – when reading one article it provided a link to [https://www.broadbandcompare.co.nz/](https://www.broadbandcompare.co.nz/) This allows someone to compare offerings. That caused a search for mobile contracts and this site was found [https://www.glimp.co.nz/mobile/compare](https://www.glimp.co.nz/mobile/compare)
So, there are ways to find out!

Steve Parker – April 2020