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INTRODUCTORY SPEECH FROM MIDI-PYRENEES REGION

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Midi-Pyrénées region is one the largest French regions and has a specificity:

- 43% of the population is located around Toulouse in the Haute-Garonne department, corresponding to only 13.9% of the territory surface
- The rural area is bigger than in most other French regions, characterized by a low density and a dominance of mountains areas.
- It is a region set between two mountains (Pyrénées and the Massif Central), which does not allow easy communication axes.

Because of its demography and its geography, Midi-Pyrénées necessitates a high level of public services to compensate for a difficult accessibility. In this respect, the region sees a multiplication of small equipments generating fixed costs that cannot be mutualized.

This is particularly true for digital infrastructures which are a regional big challenge. Digital services are expending in all socio-economic domains and broadband access is thus a key development factor. Many applications are developing in the areas of e-health, e-administration, e-education, e-commerce etc. will soon require HD video, HD visio-conference and high volume data transfer. Accessing to such new services will be mandatory to answer the needs of the citizens in a territory as large as Midi-Pyrénées. Furthermore, key economical actors of the region already confirm their need for Very High Speed networks.

The Midi-Pyrénées region has thus initiated in 2003 a regional plan "Midi-Pyrénées Haut-Débit", in coordination with the national and departmental authorities. In this context, the region has accompanied the deployment of urban networks at departmental level. This effort was worth 12 M€.

In 2005, the region has turned its action towards the Digital Divide issue, through a call for projects addressing towns and aiming to deploy broadband access with the most adapted technology. The region has accompanied 267 towns with a 2.6 M€ regional budget, representing 38% of the total costs.

In parallel, the Region has supported projects managed by the departments (Conseils Généraux) with European Regional Development Funds (ERDF). The region has also supported 3 projects who benefited from EAFRD in the frame of a national call for projects.

In summary, since 2003, the Region has dedicated 14,6 M€ for digital infrastructures deployment.

The effect of the public efforts focused on digital divide areas, combined to the appearance of satellite offers technically and financially adapted to the need, has largely contributed to the improvement of the broadband deployment in Midi-Pyrénées. However, the 2010 territorial diagnostic still shows that 15% of the region house-holds have only access to offers below 2 Mbps and that serious imbalances exists within the region.

Consequently, the local, regional and national authorities have elaborated in 2011 a regional digital deployment strategy which defines a common vision and common principles

- ultimately aiming at Very High Speed broadband deployment within 15 years
- while recognizing the need to intervene in the short term in the under/un-served areas.

The related initiatives shall fit the following common framework:

- Engage a public initiative only in lack of private investment
- Develop a progressive deployment up to Very High Speed networks on the whole territory: public stake-holders consider that in the mid to long term, the fiber must directly access the final user. In the meantime, to care for the under/un-served areas, solutions enabling 10 Mbits offers at the horizon 20225 will be looked for.
- A priority shall be given to economic development.
- The evolution towards Very High Speed shall be anticipated.

In this context, the Midi Pyrénées region adopted in 2011 a “Very High Speed Strategy (plan très haut débit), fitted with a 50 M€ budget over 10 years, and aiming to accompany local bodies in their deployment projects including fiber deployment up to the end-user. The Region will support projects fitting the SDTAN (Schéma Directeur d’Aménagement du Territoire) elaborated at department level (Conseils Généraux). The elaboration of the first SDTAN has pointed out the need for technology mix to achieve realistic project in term of deployment schedule and public investment. Above all, the right data rate shall be looked for.

Although it was at first an inaccessible source of budget for Midi-Pyrénées, Président Malvy has succeeded in convincing the EC about the Midi-Pyrénées exception (urban node while mostly rural) and has obtained the eligibility of TIC (including broadband networks) to ERDF. Projects concerned shall allow at least 30 Mbps, but solutions offering less than 30 Mbps while planning for 30 Mbps at the horizon 2020 are eligible as well. The region has decided to focus its ERDF support overs areas presenting economic development perspectives, hospitals, schools, universities and research centers.

Beside, because EAFRD funds can be used to fund broadband deployment in rural areas, the region will also use its Plan de Développement Rural Régional to support the same type of infrastructure.

Midi Pyrénées region is convinced that the Digital divide will be closed if public authorities look for the right data rate for all, mix technologies and mobilize several sources of funding. If not addressed, the digital divide issue is sustainably condemning a large part of the territory to add numerical isolation to the already existing geographical physical isolation, thus excluding any possibility for a dynamic demography ad an economic development.