



The Canton of Fribourg, Groupe E and Swisscom collaborate on the construction of a fibre-optic network

The canton of Fribourg, Groupe E, the Swiss French electricity producer and supplier, and Swisscom are to work hand in hand on the construction of a fibre-optic (FTTH) access network. The partnership aims to reduce costs for both companies and to offer every interested service provider the opportunity to use the infrastructure, therefore avoiding duplicate investments. It consists of setting up a single multi-fibre access network within an existing underground infrastructure and will allow a healthy level of competition in the area of networks and telecommunications services. Groupe E and its energy provider partners will develop energy-related services with the aim of achieving energy efficiency. The canton of Fribourg is clearly following its „High Tech in the Green“ strategy by supporting this project which will make the canton more attractive in both urban and rural areas. This is the first collaboration between an electricity company, an operator and a canton in Switzerland.

A fibre-optic network is necessary in Switzerland to meet the future bandwidth needs of both corporate and residential customers and to ensure Switzerland remains competitive. The model selected by Groupe E and Swisscom will allow the deployment of an open access infrastructure, thereby avoiding a structural monopoly on the fibre-optic network. Furthermore, pooling resources will allow the network to be built more quickly and in particular costs for partners to be reduced. Thanks to the collaboration, the two companies will also be able to connect rural regions to the fibre-optic network. High-speed Internet access and highly innovative data services will make both companies more attractive. Combining the "open access" model supported by Groupe E on the one hand, and Swisscom's wholesale offerings on the other will allow competition to develop while guaranteeing non-discriminatory and attractive access for all service providers. Customers are set to fully benefit from this collaboration, from both a service and economic point of view.

Groupe E and its energy provider partners will take advantage of the infrastructure to launch new and innovative solutions for energy efficiency which will enable sensible energy usage while improving the quality and security of energy provision in the area covered by Groupe E.

In line with the Canton of Fribourg's „High Tech in the Green“ strategy

By helping finance the project with a budget of CHF 5 million in the form of an investment fund as well as an interest-free loan of CHF 15 million (subject to approval by the cantonal parliament), the canton of Fribourg is clearly committing to its "High Tech in the Green" strategy. Installation of the fibre-optic network across the entire canton will make the canton of Fribourg more attractive while ensuring equality of service provision between urban and peripheral areas. A further benefit for the canton of Fribourg will be the fact that it can connect up municipalities, schools and all services throughout the canton.

Also in Neuchâtel and Vaud

Initial discussions are underway with the authorities in Neuchâtel and Vaud with a view to extending this project to the areas covered by Groupe E in these cantons.

Competition will benefit customers

Customers will be offered attractive services from various providers and the change of operator will be straightforward and quick. A simple click of the mouse or change of socket will be all that is required. Both companies are committed to a standard governing internal cabling in both residential



and commercial property. A common definition of sockets and types of optical fibre in particular must be drawn up in order to provide property owners and electrician associations with clear installation recommendations.

The declaration of intent signed by the canton of Fribourg, Groupe E and Swisscom should lead to the signing of a cooperation agreement following an evaluation phase. Two pilot projects for the purpose of evaluating the selected model will be implemented later this year in the Torry area of Fribourg and in Neyruz, the most sparsely populated area. Eventually the whole area covered by Groupe E will be equipped with a fibre-optic network.

Groupe E

Groupe E is the number one electricity provider in French-speaking Switzerland and number six in Switzerland overall. Founded on 1 January 2005 as a result of the merger between Entreprises Electriques Fribourgeoises (EEF) and l'Electricité Neuchâteloise SA (ENSA), Groupe E is headquartered in Fribourg and employs around 780 staff. Groupe E serves 460,000 customers, distributes 3 TWh of electricity a year and directly produces 1.8 TWh of electricity a year using its own installations, i.e. 10 hydroelectric power stations, 8 dams and 4 thermal power plants.

Together with six other Swiss electricity companies, Groupe E is a founding member of "openaxs", an association which promotes telecommunications networks based on fibre-optic technology. It aims to develop broadband networks in Switzerland while guaranteeing non-discriminatory access and complete freedom of choice for customers and users.

Swisscom

Swisscom is Switzerland's leading telecoms provider, with 5.4 mobile customers and around 1.8 million fixed-line broadband connections. In 2008, the company's 19,943 employees (full-time equivalents) generated revenues of CHF 12.2 billion. Swisscom has a presence throughout Switzerland and offers a full range of products and services for mobile, fixed-line and IP-based voice and data communication. Massive investments in network infrastructure ensure that this will remain the case in the future. Since the launch of Bluewin TV, customers too have become increasingly aware of the trend towards multimedia. Swisscom is active in one of the most attractive broadband markets in Europe via the Italian provider Fastweb. Swisscom also offers services for IT infrastructure outsourcing as well as the management of communications infrastructures.

Canton of Fribourg

Fribourg, which has a population of 260,000, of whom two thirds are French-speaking and one third is German-speaking, is clearly at the crossover between two cultures. The canton also has excellent motorway and railway connections, and residents can reach Basel, Berne, Geneva and Zurich within 100 minutes (1 hour 40 minutes). Fribourg has another special feature which is not to be found anywhere else in Europe: all schooling, from primary school to university is available in both French and German, and there is a wide range of bilingual educational offerings available. A large part of the canton's 1670.8 km² area is covered by mountains, lakes, forests and meadows. The canton aims to preserve its nature and wildlife through sustainable development. Both elements feature in the „High Tech in the Green“ strategy which envisages economic growth while preserving the environment. A number of renowned multinational companies have chosen to base their headquarters for their global and European activities in the canton of Fribourg with its diverse range of opportunities in research and development, state-of-the-art industrial production, international management and holding activities.



Press Release

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