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Regional Test-Beds

Citizen First Trials: Mid-West Region, Ireland

Mid-West Region, Ireland

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1.1 Context of the Region

The Mid-West Region of Ireland comprises the counties of North Tipperary, Limerick and Clare. It is one of Ireland's eight statutory regions comprising of approximately 10% of the national land area and population of the country. The Region's population in 2002 was 339,591. The Mid-West Region comprises the City of Limerick, a number of principle towns such as Shannon, Ennis, Nenagh and Thurles. The Region is predominately rural in character with numerous smaller towns and villages.

Since 2002 through the coordination of the Mid-West Regional Authority (MWRA), the Mid-West One-Stop Shop Initiative was born out of the creation of the Regional Cluster (here after referred to as the Regional Steering Committee) and its consortium recognition of the commonalities of challenges facing each agency when trying to deliver services in the region. The buy in of the agencies, authorities is ensured by their membership in the cluster. The Irish government target of having all public services online by 2005 is also forcing all agencies to rapidly assess how to best deliver this services and the pilot will highlight new possibilities through the collaboration of other agencies in particular the meeting of all IT decision makers. The MWRA is working with the key Public Service Agencies in the region to engage rural communities to define their citizens' needs for services in there area. These will be delivered in local One-Stop Shops through the CitizenFirst Project, both physical and virtual, providing ICT-enabled citizen-centric delivery of integrated services in the empowered rural communities. As well as providing the on-line integration of services, the key challenge will be for the agencies to work together and engage with the communities, in defining and delivering the services. In turn, the Communities will be challenged to use their empowerment in an effective way to improve the quality of life and opportunities of their citizens.

A key driving force to the Mid-West One-Stop Shop Regional Test-beds is the Irish government's committed objective of having all key public services that are capable of electronic delivery, available online through a single point of contact by 2005. The model being developed for this purpose is the Public Services Broker, which will serve as a single point of contact for accessing all public services on a 24x7 basis. The Public Services Broker is being developed by the Reach Agency, www.reach.ie.

Another central objective of the Irish government that supports One-Stop Shop delivery of services is "development of knowledge based enterprises, the creation of an ICT-literate society; in achieving efficient and effective Government services; and in securing and maintaining Ireland's reputation as a world-class centre for research and enterprise." €200 million set aside under the NDP 2000-2006 for broadband infrastructure developments that will enable the sector to deliver. The Government's publicly stated desire is to see at least 500,000 broadband users by 2006. The government's has also invested €25 million County and Group Broadband Scheme, which offers even the most remote communities the chance of competing on level terms with the major cities. The Scheme has been running since March of 2004 and in 2005 each of the Regional Authorities have been brought on board which will be key to the successful role-out of the scheme. The Broadband For Schools project, jointly undertaken by the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Communications which will bring broadband to every primary and post primary school in the country – over 4,200 schools in total – by the end of 2005.

1.2 Objectives of the Regional Test-Beds

The Mid-West One-Stop-Shop Regional Test-beds will be developed in close collaboration with Cambridgeshire County Council and their Cambridgeshire Community Network (CNN) experience of engaging with local communities. This will result in an agreement with the relevant agencies and communities on the specification & design of the first citizen-centered/rural-community defined One Stop Shop in the Mid West Region.

The specific local objectives of the Mid-West Regional Test-Beds are as follows:

1. Identification of Citizens and their Community needs in the Mid-West through a baseline review
2. Agreement with local/public/commercial agencies and communities on the specification & design of the first virtual and physical citizen-centered/rural-community-defined One Stop Shop in the Mid West
3. Operation of four virtual and/or physical CitizenFirst Rural Community-defined One Stop Shops
4. Usage of the Mid-West CitizenFirst Community virtual and/or physical One Stop Shops at 25 users per day representing 15% usage of the services on offer

The identification of the objectives of the Regional Test-Beds at this stage of the Project will enable Partners to set a list of evaluation criteria that will prove useful during the demonstration phase of the Test-Beds.

1.3 Requirements of the Citizens/Communities

1.3.1 Requirements identified from baseline reports

The contribution by Partners to the analysis of the Regions through the preliminary research reports of Workpackages 1, 2 and 3 has identified a certain level of citizens and communities requirements in the Mid-West. For example in the Mid-West Region, only 26% of households hold a broadband account. This low take up in Broadband resulted in the introduction of the Regional Community Broadband Scheme supported by the Irish government.

Further requirements definition of the citizens and their communities will be undertaken through the development of the Regional Test-beds. One of the Mid-West Region's objectives is to identify citizens and their community needs. The MWRA will build on the results gathered through the baseline review undertaken in March/April 2005. These results and further consultation will feed in to the specification and design of the Regional Test-beds. Consultation with the agencies and communities will be central to the provision of the virtual and physical citizen-centred community One-Stop Shop portal.

1.3.2 Requirements identified by Regional Steering Committee

The Regional Steering Committee (RES), through its meetings prior to CitizenFirst, identified certain citizen and agency requirements. This initial requirements identification will enable the MWRA develop a first release of the One-Stop Shop Test-bed for demonstration. Further consultation with citizens and communities will help develop a more community driven Regional Test-bed.

1.3.3 Direct one to one consultation with Citizen and Communities

Through the County and Group Broadband Scheme the MWRA has been engaging with citizens and communities to identify broadband requirements and solutions for communities. This consultation with the communities will continue through the Initiative and the CitizenFirst Project to help build on the functionality of the One-Stop Shop Demonstration Pilots.

The engagement of communities and the staffs of the Public Agencies providing an integrated suited of services targeted at citizens needs through the virtual and physical One Stop Shops directly addresses the main citizen-centric objective of the Citizen First project to empower NWE citizens.

1.4 Description of the Pilots

A virtual One Stop Shop system will be implemented by MWRA from the experience of the EU IST Projects TITAN and CENTURi21 and the INTERREG IIIB Atlantic Area Project RuralTech. The results from Workpackages 1, 2 and 3, and the experience of the other Citizen First Regions will also feed into the Pilots.

The MWRA will work with the chosen agencies to have 4 virtual and/or physical Citizen First Rural Community-defined One Stop Shops operational by September 2005. The chosen agency at present is Clare County Council and its area offices located in Kilrush and Ennistymon are the chosen locations of the initial Regional Test-beds/Demonstration Pilots. The aim is to pilot the One-Stop Shop portal in these two locations in the Mid-West and evaluate their progress while also consulting with the citizens and the communities. The pilot will be officially launched in the Region in June 2005 by inviting a select group of Public Services Agencies, plus some Commercial Services Providers. The One-Stop Shop portal will be piloted in 2 other locations in the Mid-West. These locations will concentrate in areas of counties Limerick and North Tipperary and will be agreed with the MWRA by the Regional Steering Committee.

This major challenge will involve an awareness campaign for the citizens, to help both their communities and the staffs of the public agencies to engage in a way that will lead to the delivery of a suite of targeted citizen-centered services.

The measure of the success of this engagement and the relevance of the services will be their sustained use over the 2 years of the action pilot trials. The objective is that usage of the Mid-West CitizenFirst Community One Stop Shops will be at 25 users per day representing 15% usage of the services on offer by the end of the project in September 2007

Timescales:

April-May 2005: Set-up of Demonstration Pilots at Kilrush & Ennistymon, Co. Clare

June/July 2005: Launch of One-Stop Shop Portal, Ennis, Co. Clare

August 2005: Identification of 2 further Pilot locations in the Mid-West Region

September 2005: Four operational Community-defined One-Stop Shops
24 month operational phase
Continual internal evaluation and feedback from:
(1) Agency Staff & (2) Citizens
February 2006; August 2006; February 2007; August 2007

July-Sept 2007: Contribution to Guidelines & Sustainability Models providing One-Stop Shop experience of CitizenFirst Regions: Mid-West & Cambridgeshire

September 2007: Usage of the Community One Stop Shops at 25 users per day representing 15% usage of the services on offer