E-Government - A Vision for New Zealanders

" New Zealanders will be able to gain access to government information and services,
and participate in our democracy,
using the Internet, telephones and other technologies as they emerge."

What is e-government?

A worldwide revolution in information and communications technologies is occurring. The Internet, the personal computer, and the mobile phone are fundamentally changing our lives – affecting the way we work, learn and interact.

E-government is a way for governments to use the new technologies to provide people with more convenient access to government information and services, to improve the quality of the services and to provide greater opportunities to participate in our democratic institutions and processes. E-government presents New Zealand with some tremendous opportunities to move forward in the 21st century with higher quality, cost-effective, government services and a better relationship between New Zealanders and their government.

Already, there are examples of e-government in New Zealand. They range from the New Zealand Government Online website (http://www.govt.nz), to being able to register a new company on the Internet (http://www.companies.govt.nz.) or to getting comprehensive statistical information about New Zealand from Statistics New Zealand's website (http://www.stats.govt.nz).

The task for the Government is to build on these individual initiatives and develop them into a comprehensive plan for achieving the benefits of e-government more widely on behalf of all New Zealanders. The planned development of e-government will improve the ability of all people to participate in our democracy. But, left to develop by itself, it has the potential to create new divisions in society between those who have the skills and tools to use the new technologies to participate in our democracy and those who do not. The Government is not prepared to allow this to happen.

How will e-government improve the quality of government, and peoples' participation in it?

E-government will improve government in four important ways.

- *It will be easier for people to have their say in government.*

  For example, consider a situation where a Ministry proposes to make changes to the way it provides a particular service. It could outline the proposed policy changes on its Internet site and seek comment from people who have something to say about those services, and the proposed new policy. The feedback could then be used to refine that policy.

- *People will get better services from government organisations.*

  For example, instead of joining a queue to register a motor car, the owner will be able do it from his or her home and at any time of the day on any day of the week. This will be of particular benefit to those thousands of New Zealanders who do not live in the main centres of population. This will improve flexibility, speed and access to government services, and it has another potential benefit – lowering the cost of government.

- *People will receive more integrated services because different government organisations will be able to communicate more effectively with each other.*

  For example, as a result of an accident, a person may need to talk to several different government organisations – the public hospital, ACC and WINZ – outlining their personal circumstances and needs to each organisation. If the three organisations have the ability to share information and integrate their services, the person need only go through that process once instead of three times.

- *People will be better informed because they can get up-to-date and comprehensive information about government laws, regulations, policies and services.*

  For example, if a person wants to transport an oversize load of materials by truck or trailer from one side of town to the other, he or she has to get a hold of the appropriate road safety regulations, which are available only in a printed form. Making that kind of information available on the Internet will improve peoples' ability to go about their leisure or work-time activities safely and within the law.

What are the important issues the Government needs to take into account in developing ways of using information and communications technologies to improve New Zealanders' participation in our democracy?

- *Opportunities can be lost because no government organisation takes the leading responsibility to oversee and coordinate development of e-government for the benefit of citizens.*

  The Government has already allocated this important task to the State Services Commission (SSC). The SSC is creating and resourcing a unit with specific responsibility for e-government.

- *People may be quickly divided into two groups – those who have the skills and tools to use the new technologies and those who do not.*

  The purpose of e-government is to bring people together – not to push them apart. The Government must plan e-government in such a way that:

  - conventional means of access to government are maintained for those people who need them;

- community access to the Internet is available for those people who, for any reason, can not access it from their homes; and

- educational and public information programmes are used to help New Zealanders, young and old, in using the new technologies.

- *There are concerns that Governments can know too much about people and could use that information inappropriately.*

  To guard against this risk, the Government intends to:

  - review, and strengthen where necessary, all legislation designed to protect peoples' privacy; and

  - provide safeguards around the sharing of people's personal information among Government agencies.

- *Governments can become impersonal*

  The Government's vision – New Zealanders will be able use telephones, personal computers and the Internet to gain access to government information and services and participate in our democracy – provides a focus on people. Planned adoption of e-government will improve peoples' ability to participate in government, and will improve the state sector's ability to provide effective and efficient services. But it is still only a means to an end. The end is improving the lives of all New Zealanders through good government supported by effective and efficient organisations staffed by people devoted to serving the public.

- *People are disappointed because governments promise much and deliver little.*

  The Government's approach to implementing e-government in the interests of improved participation and services will be well planned. There will be no overnight and dramatic developments, but rather a more staged approach with developments building on those that have gone before.

If developments are staged over a number of years, how will people judge what progress has been made towards achieving the Government's vision?

Within the next five or so years, people should be able to do the following:

- Electronically register information with the Government – for example, births, deaths and marriages – at a time and place that suits them;

- Conduct their financial dealings with government organisations electronically;

- Complete and send all government forms from one place on the Government's Internet site;

- Have their say on a wide range of government proposals and policies through the Internet;

- Benefit from high quality health care from a public health service that provides integrated and personalised services from GP to specialist to hospital to pharmacist based on individual patient record management made possible through comprehensive and highly secure information sharing and analysis;

- Have confidence that effective controls backed up by good legislation will safeguard privacy;

- Benefit from the reduced costs and time involved in property transactions because land survey and title information is available electronically and transactions can be registered the same way;

- Notify changes of address, so that one entry on the Internet can ensure multiple Government agencies are notified automatically.

These five-year goals are examples of the types of benefits e-government will deliver to New Zealanders. The technologies supporting these changes will develop continually.

The Government's role is to take charge and lead those developments for the benefit of people, rather than have those developments take charge.

How does the e-government vision fit in with the Government's other social and economic goals?

The e-government vision supports two important goals. They are:

- *Restoring trust in government and providing strong social services.*

  The e-government vision will play an important role in achieving this goal. It will:

  - increase collaboration between government organisations;
  - strengthen the relationship between people and the state through greater opportunities for participation; and
  - provide the state sector with an opportunity to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their services to the public while, at the same time, reducing the cost of delivery.

  Those three factors will help restore trust in government and provide strong social services.

- *Helping grow an inclusive, innovative economy for the benefit of all.*

  The e-government vision is all about inclusion – the ability of all people to take part in our economy. It also fits well with similar developments in business and commerce. Together, e-government, e-business and e-commerce will play an important role in the development of an economy based on the combined impact of the knowledge and skills of all New Zealanders.

  E-government will be an example of an innovative use of developing technologies. E-government will provide an important means of helping present and future New Zealanders to understand and use tools of vital importance to the economic and social prosperity of individual citizens and the nation as a whole.