

Free broadband is socially profitable

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I was a signatory to this letter from a majority of the members of the Council of the [Progressive Economy Forum](#) in the [Guardian](#):

We write to support the proposal from the Labour party for a public programme to provide rapid internet service to the entire population ([Broadband 'communism'? They said that about the NHS](#), Journal, 19 November). This project would have a high social and economic rate of return, especially at current borrowing rates.

Since it would be socially profitable, the objection that the proposal is an election "giveaway" should not be taken seriously — that is not an objection raised for other infrastructure projects such as airports and motorways.

Arguments from self-interested corporations that a public sector programme would discourage private sector investment should be seen as unfounded special pleading. This pleading also ignores the fact that this network would create many more opportunities for web content providers to profit in a space where something approaching a real market operates, and is, therefore, decidedly selective in its view. Finally, to claim that this is an activity more appropriate for the private sector is a political assertion that fails to take account of the manifest failure of private companies to provide a broadband network accessible to all.

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