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## Boston Public Wi-Fi Is Growing Organically

By W. David Gardner

Courtesy of [TechWeb.com](#)

Boston has so much of a good thing--a bunch of public free [Wi-Fi](#) hotspots for starters--that it's unlikely to implement a citywide, municipally sponsored free Wi-Fi network. That, at any rate, seems to be the consensus that came out of the Boston Wi-Fi Summit meeting Thursday night.

Mayor Thomas Menino said he looks forward to "a public-private partnership" to deliver wireless broadband to the city's residents.

Almost on cue, two Wi-Fi deployments offering free public Internet access were switched on in two Boston neighborhoods, West Roxbury and Roslindale Thursday. Colubris Networks, which supplied the hardware and software for the two districts, plans to spread public access to other Boston neighborhoods.

"Boston isn't a city where you'll see a single widespread citywide rollout like Philadelphia," said Michael Oh, founder of a Wi-Fi advocacy group that has promoted and installed some public access [hotspots](#) in Boston and neighboring Cambridge. Philadelphia and some other cities are installing single citywide Wi-Fi hotspots.

The Boston public Wi-Fi model has been growing organically, first via small neighborhood hotspots, then building gradually toward comprehensive coverage by multiple hotspots covering the entire city. "Right now, there's good coverage in the nicer neighborhoods and around the universities," said Oh, who pioneered early public hotspots in Boston. "A great place for future Wi-Fi will be in poorer neighborhoods."

Oh noted that the Boston approach should be acceptable to the current major providers of broadband in the city--Verizon Communications and Comcast. Those providers of [DSL](#) and cable broadband haven't spoken out directly on the issue, but they haven't supported the Philadelphia model in which the city is funding a single citywide Wi-Fi hotspot.

Bob Olson, director of marketing at Colubris Networks, said Colubris is providing the wireless hardware and software, as Wi-Fi is rolled out throughout the city. Boston's Main Streets, a unit in the city's Department of Neighborhood Development, is partnering with neighborhood businesses in 19 different districts to install public-access hotspots. The initial funding will be granted by the city, but major funding is expected to come from the sale of business advertisements on the neighborhood pages.

"We're rolling out neighborhoods one at a time," said Olson. "We're hoping to do all 19 districts. It's a similar program to the one we did in Washington." Colubris set up a network of public hotspots in the nation's capital. The company boasts some 1,000 customers and more than 30 percent of the hospitality market, which includes hotels and airports.

The Boston Summit has pulled together organizations and individuals from all walks of life. A charity, the Boston Foundation, has donated \$25,000 towards the effort to spread Wi-Fi throughout the city, while the city's Museum of Science has surveyed Wi-Fi implementations. In addition to Mayor Menino, Boston City Councilor John Tobin has been a Wi-Fi advocate. The deployment of the Colubris gear was carried out by Single Digits Inc. and Ascio Wireless.