

Over the past several years the Kansas City metropolitan area, has demonstrated a commitment to unique partnerships that explore new networking technology or civic impact. Throughout the Kansas City region, over 20 municipalities have reached agreements with fiber-to-the-home providers, like Google Fiber and AT&T, that require an innovative flexible orientation toward public-private partnership and making public assets available for improved network capacity—and ultimately citizen experience. The Kansas City area also serves as the home of Sprint, who is providing Wifi connectivity for a Cisco Smart+Connected Community project along a downtown streetcar line under construction. The “smart city solution” will rely heavily on wired and wireless ICT solutions and offer better management tools from a civic/municipal perspective.

But the more exciting possibilities lie in the “living lab” whereby data and technology are opened up to entrepreneurs, academic researchers and others in the community who are invited to participate in driving better civic outcomes from the infrastructure. We also have engineering infrastructure firms like Black & Veatch and Burns & McDonnell, who are working on using connectivity to enable smart water, smart energy, smart transit—and other such “smart” efficiency-driven networks that combine big data analytics, ubiquitous sensor networks, and seamless connectivity. An emerging opportunity embraced by many civic stakeholders is around smart pavement and autonomous vehicles. We are currently preparing a highway pilot and exploring a smart transit corridor concept with the Missouri Department of Transportation, local technology partners, University of Missouri-Kansas City, the City of Kansas City, Missouri, and other local civic organization

In addition to the major infrastructure plays that require the city to engage in large-scale public-private partnerships, we have more grassroots efforts to employ digital connectivity in better ways throughout the city. We are working closely with the Open Technology Institute’s Commotion Wireless project to bridge the digital divide in underserved areas. One of the barriers to projects like this is the noise created on current publicly available spectrum.

The potential for new applications and innovation on hyperlocal community networks seems an untapped market; and especially promising for disaster relief and resilient city programs in the event that traditional networks fail. One take on this idea is to build an independent, self-contained neighborhood network—a “digital green space”, as it were—running on equipment owned at a household or business level and a network managed at a community level. We have explored solar energy solutions as a way to further keep such a local network resilient in the face of damage to the energy and telecommunications grid. Having dedicated spectrum and a broader coalition of partners to explore such opportunities could accelerate these projects.

Finally, the ability to operate across two states is another characteristic that allows the Kansas City market to serve as an effective test bed. My organization, KC Digital Drive, was established as a regional liaison for digital city/smart city projects.

My personal background includes four years as the founder and managing director of KC Digital Drive. During that time, I’ve worked with US Ignite since its inception to build the gigabit ecosystem in Kansas City and nationally. I’ve been a key leader in Kansas City’s participation in the IEEE Smart City Initiative, the Global Cities Teams Challenge, and Mozilla’s Gigabit Community Fund. I am also the founder and curator of the Gigabit City Summit. Prior to KC Digital Drive, I’ve worked in the private sector in research, strategic planning, and product innovation. I run a consulting business called Curiolab, and I have a master’s in social science from the University of Chicago and a BA in history from University of Dallas.