

## **Power lines may be next connection to Internet**

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Until recently, another method of Internet connection was literally way above people's heads: Utility wires.

The concept is known as Broadband over Power Lines, or BPL for short, in which power wires serve as a mode of transportation for e-mail and Internet traffic.

Utilities nationwide ran 20 such projects to about 250,000 homes last year, said Allen Hepner, executive director of the Washington-based **New Millennium Research Council**, which released a report about BPL last week.

"BPL is becoming a much bigger factor in 2005," said Joseph Fergus, president and chief executive of COMtek, which owns and operates the nation's first citywide BPL network. The network, in Manassas, Va., connects with more than 1,000 homes and businesses, Fergus said.

BPL can operate at speeds comparable to high-speed Internet, said Robert Olsen, an electrical engineering professor at Washington State University.

That means the technology could be a good way to quickly bring high-speed Internet into rural areas.

"This does provide for other areas that are on the wrong side of the digital divide," said Barry Goodstadt, vice president and senior consultant of Harris Interactive, based in Rochester, N.Y.

It's likely that BPL will be coming to a utility pole near you, but it's going to be a while. Florida Power & Light Co. has been testing the technology and is trying to determine its value to customers as well as to the utility, FPL spokeswoman Karen Vissepo said.

"We'll put together a strategy based on these findings, and we'll take it from there," she said.