NEWS
FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

Above: a latest autonomous car concept, from Toyota. The European Commission has adopted a European strategy on cooperative intelligent transport systems (C-ITS), which it says is a 'milestone towards cooperative, connected and automated mobility' – see bit.ly/2jddsPX

INTERNET GOVERNANCE
CONCERNS ABOUT THE INTERNET

The Internet Society has urged the global community to redouble its efforts in addressing the wave of unprecedented challenges facing the internet. The organisation's CEO, Kathryn Brown, speaking at the 11th Internet Governance Forum in Mexico, said: "The open, trusted, global internet has delivered on its promise as a tool to change lives, enhance growth and provide essential human services – but the progress is uneven and threatened by challenges that have grown."

The lack of affordable access to the internet and the disparity in levels of access across the world remain key challenges. Internet growth rates are slowing, resulting in a deepening digital divide between those with access and those without. In addition, issues such as blocking of content, privacy, mass surveillance, cybercrime, hacking and fake news are all contributing to what is now a growing global erosion of trust among users. "Multiple security issues are damaging user confidence and have emerged as the existential threat to the future of the internet. We must act now to reverse this trend," added Brown.

As internet adoption and connectivity continue to grow, with 45% of the population online, so do the number of cyber-attacks. Mexico ranks as the second country with the largest number of cyber-attacks in Latin America after Brazil, with a 40% increase in reported cyber-attacks in 2014 alone.

"We still have time – but there is urgency," she concluded. "We must work together now to solve these significant emerging challenges facing the internet, using the value in the multi-stakeholder model and the power of collaboration to offer solutions for connecting the unconnected and increasing user trust."

■ The Internet Society, with Microsoft, has completed a series of meetings on internet fragmentation, which has become an important issue in the context of the global internet. The Global Commission on Internet Governance has also published a volume on internet fragmentation.

■ The Global Commission on Internet Governance has issued another paper, 'Corporate accountability for a free and open internet'.

■ The Global Network Initiative (GNI) has released a policy brief with recommendations for governments and companies to protect and respect free expression and privacy rights when responding to the challenge of alleged extremist or terrorist content online. See bit.ly/2d2Bc6K

CHILDREN
GLOBAL KIDS ONLINE

A majority of children say they learn something new online at least every week, but large numbers still face risks online, according to a report by a new initiative, Global Kids Online, produced by the UNICEF Office of Research and the London School of Economics. The project, launched at the Children's Lives in the Digital Age seminar held at UNICEF in New York, aims to build a global network of researchers investigating the risks and opportunities of child internet use, and a website is making research tools freely available worldwide. Another finding is that although a majority of children value the internet as a learning tool, they are rarely able to use it at school or to receive guidance from their teachers on how to use it. For details see: globalkidsonline.net

CANADA
BROADBAND IS BASIC

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) has declared that broadband internet service is now considered a basic telecoms service for all Canadians, and is setting 'ambitious' new speed targets and creating a fund that will invest up to CND$750 million over and above existing government programmes. The targets are:
● Speeds of 50 (mbps) download/10 mbps upload for fixed services
● An unlimited data option
● Latest mobile wireless technology not only in homes and businesses, but also along major roads.
   Further, service providers should ensure that contracts are written in clear language, and should make available tools so consumers can easily manage their data usage; and all wireless service providers will have to offer mobile service packages that meet the needs of Canadians with disabilities. See bit.ly/2hebsJR

PRIVACY
LEVELLING THE FIELD

The European Commission has proposed a new regulation on privacy and electronic communications that it says will update existing rules and offer more business opportunities. The current e-privacy directive only applies to telecoms operators, so rules will also cover new providers such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Gmail and iMessage and, once consent is given for communications data, both content and/or metadata, to be processed, traditional telecoms operators will have more opportunities to use data. See bit.ly/2i99Kd5

EUROPE
ANALYSING THE COMMUNICATIONS CODE

There has been broad support for the European Commissions's proposed Electronic Communications Code, including from BEREC, the body of European regulators. It welcomes the introduction of an explicit connectivity objective alongside the promotion of competition, the internal market and consumer interests, while explaining that in practice, some of the new provisions on access regulation might not help the achievement of those objectives. Sectoral regulation, it adds, is only one of many levers – "It cannot, on its own, incentivise investment in high-capacity networks or indeed demand."

BEREC also welcomes the inclusion of a range of over the top (OTT) services in the framework, but is concerned that the proposal to fully harmonise consumer protection regulation will prevent regulators and member states from responding to emerging challenges in their respective markets, or indeed from deregulating where justified.

Also welcome is the proposed harmonisation of minimum competences for independent regulators, and the strengthening of the independence obligations. "However, the proposal to transform BEREC into an EU agency not only risks increasing the bureaucracy and cost of European telecoms regulation, but also undermines the benefits of the proposed strengthening of independence at the national level." Details: bit.ly/2i5cgRo

■ Mobile body, the GSMA, has published a position paper on the draft code. It calls for longer spectrum licence durations; 'realistic' coverage obligations and when assessing competition issues in the context of spectrum licences, member states should apply the same standards as they do in the significant market power framework. See: bit.ly/2h1rGp4

CYBERSECURITY
WHITE HOUSE URGES COOPERATION

The US government and the private sector must cooperate to improve the security of digital networks, a US presidential commission on cybersecurity recommends in a report. The commission, created by President Barack Obama last year, also recommends that the president and Congress accelerate the pace at which technology is updated in the federal sector and that the president appoint an ambassador for cybersecurity for efforts abroad. "Technological advancement is outpacing security and will continue to do so unless we change how we approach and implement cybersecurity strategies and practices," the report says. Among other recommendations, the report urges the US to seek harmonised international cybersecurity policies and global norms of behaviour. The report is at: bit.ly/2h5UMDU

RADIO
NORWAY TURNS OFF FM STATIONS

Norway has turned off its FM radio stations, making good on a decision made in April 2016, and following a radio digitisation mandate issued by the Storting (the Norwegian parliament) in 2011. The cost of transmitting national radio channels through the FM network was eight times higher than with the DAB network, and broadcasters were spending large sums on parallel distribution.

The government notes that DAB is far less vulnerable to transmitter failure in extreme conditions, permits tunnel reception of all channels, and allows simultaneous transmission of emergency messages on all channels.

A number of criteria were set for the switch-off, including 90% population coverage and affordable systems for cars.

IN BRIEF

ITU OPENS UP

The ITU started the new year by launching an access to information policy, committing to make more information and documents held, managed or generated by the ITU openly available online. It aims to bring public access to information for the ITU's main conferences and meetings in line with other international organisations like the World Bank, UNDP and UNESCO.

FTC TARGETS IOT

The Federal Trade Commission has filed a complaint against Taiwan-based computer networking equipment manufacturer D-Link, alleging that inadequate security measures taken by the company left its wireless routers and internet cameras vulnerable to hackers and put US consumers' privacy at risk.

BAND IN PLAY

EU law makers have agreed legislation that will require every country to allocate, by 2020, spectrum in the 700 MHz band for use by wireless broadband providers. It aims to bring long-term regulatory certainty and is 'essential' for uptake of 5G.

5G CHALLENGE

The Future Communications Challenge Group has sent a report to the UK government that advises on what the country should do to be a world leader in 5G. The government has recently announced £1bn of funding to boost the UK's digital infrastructure. Report: bit.ly/2iiPowy