Unlocking the Value of Public Sector Information

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Why Here, Why Now?
19th Century: Transportation

Railways, Roads, Ships, ...
In the 20th: Electricity and Computers

Electrical Power, Phones, Radios, Computers ...
In the 21st: Information

Code, Content, Data ...
Information is Ever Increasing in Importance

- Many businesses built on processing and analysing info
  - E.g. search engines
  - E.g. financial services (banks, insurance etc)
- Crucial even to those that don’t depend on it directly
  - How many businesses don’t need some geospatial/weather/... info
- Average citizen too!
  - Transport planning
  - Democratic participation
  - ...
Production and Distribution of Information in the Knowledge Economy
Public Sector Controls
Some of the Key ‘Utilities’ of that Economy

Core infosets: legal, geospatial, meteorological, socioeconomic ...
What Questions Do We Face?
The Questions

For digital, upstream and non-personal PSI:

1. Who should pay to create + maintain it?
   • Should information be free to users?

2. What regulatory structure should support this?

TO MAXIMIZE TOTAL SOCIAL WELFARE
1. Who Should Pay

*Three* Options:

1. Government: fund from general government revenues
2. Updaters: charge those who make changes to the dataset(s)
3. Users: charge those who use the dataset(s)

Generally, should:

- Fund via option 1 + 2
- Charge users at marginal cost ($\approx 0$ for digital data).
- Updater charges esp. attractive (where possible ...
Governance and Regulation

• Needed WHATEVER charging policy you do
  • Cost-recovery is not any ‘better/easier’ than marginal cost
• Require Governance/Regulation that is:
  • Transparent (for Competition)
  • Independent (for Commitment and Competition)
  • Empowered (for Effectiveness)
    • A single clear source of authority and responsibility
    • Often not clear who’s in charge ...
• Governance/Regulation isn’t rocket science
  • Relatively cheap and huge benefits
  • Can look to experience over last 20 years with telecoms etc
  • First steps: proper detailed accounts, proper transfer pricing etc
Conclusion
We are Living in the Information Age

Threshold of a new era

Already: prominence of pure info companies, Google etc
To Unlock the Power of Public Information

Make bulk (upstream) data **OPEN**

Free to use and reuse
To Make this Happen

- Charge updaters or pay from general govt funds
  - Charging updaters may be ‘politically’ easier

- Need better governance/regulation
  - Government has an unusually central role:
    - Supplier, User, Policy-maker, ...
  - Key to ‘getting it right’