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Google strikes deal to bring faster web content to Cuba

28/03/2019



In a move likely to spark controversy in Washington, Google and Cuba have agreed to allow direct connection between their internet networks, potentially paving the way for an undersea cable that would join the Cuba to the US mainland.

The “peering” agreement with the state telecommunications company Etecsa will enable high-speed use of Google content such as YouTube videos, people close to the situation said, even as the administration of US president Donald Trump seeks to isolate the country.

In order to be fully realised, they added that the new project will also require physical infrastructure, such as a cable linking Havana to Miami. This would enable faster internet connections for all web content in Cuba.

“If you control for geopolitical factors, the laying of a cable is technically easy,” said one of the people, adding that Google and Cuba had formed a working group to examine options. “It could be done in less than a year.”

Among the geopolitical factors that could delay further progress is an increase in pressure by the Trump administration on Havana.

The “peering” that Google and Etecsa have agreed is a process by which two internet networks exchange traffic without having to pay a third party to carry that traffic. That can lower costs, a saving that could be passed on to Cuban consumers once a physical connection is established.

That mooted new physical link, which would carry all internet content, could come via a fibre-optic cable laid between Cuba and Google stations around Miami, or through an already-extant cable such as Arcos, which circles the Caribbean and links countries such as Colombia, Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic.

Cuba's sole physical connection to the internet is currently via the Venezuelan undersea telecommunications cable Alba-1.

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