

# *Cuba Takes Steps to Offer More Internet Access*

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San Jose, May 28 (RHC)-- Authorities in the western province of Mayabeque are setting up infrastructure to expand Internet connection at the community level, as part of the Cuban national program aiming at increasing access to Information Technologies.

The local initiative in the municipalities of Guines and San Jose de las Lajas aims at opening WiFi services in public spaces, said Pedro Cotilla, a specialist with Cuba's Telecommunications Company ETECSA.

The new public access to the Internet can be done through local accounts available at ETECSA offices and by using a code card at a cost of 2, 5 and 10 Cuban convertible pesos -- similar to dollars -- for one, two and four hours connection, respectively. These prices were lowered by half recently, as part of a promotional effort to encourage people to keep the accounts active, although they are still considered high.

Lowering connection prices will happen progressively and in tune with the country's capacity to make them more available, said the expert, who noted that despite the high rates, the initiative has been welcomed by many who flock to computer clubs and ETECSA Internet rooms set up by the communications company.

The WiFi access in the Mayabeque province is the first to be set up in community areas since the initiative began in tourist areas, like hotels and around ETECSA Internet rooms, in specific administrative areas of Havana City.

Cuba expects to advance its Internet program to 50 percent of homes by 2018, according to recent announcements.

Meanwhile, current efforts to re-establish relations with the United States have encouraged initiatives by U.S. telecommunications companies that will benefit the Cuban strategic Internet project.

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