

October 2006 IETF Report to ISOC BoT

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As this report is being prepared shortly before IETF67 in San Diego, I will refer the Board to Volume 2 Number 2 of the IETF Journal for the performance data reported at the Montreal IETF. The latest data will be reported in the Wednesday plenary in San Diego. As a summary, the productivity of the IETF (measured in documents) hit a peak in the first quarter of 2006, fell back for a few months over the summer, and is now rising again. Given that meeting attendance is roughly stable, we can assert that the IETF is institutionally sound and continuously productive.

The IETF remains crucial to growth and innovation in the Internet and it is striking that the major “official” industry initiative, the ITU Next Generation Networks program, is heavily dependent on IETF standards (including, but not limited to, SIP, MPLS and of course IPv4, IPv6 and the transport protocols running over them). It is rather critical that we retain control of the evolution of these basic protocols, so that they continue to be developed for the good of the Internet as a whole and not for any individual industrial bloc. The IAB is formally responsible for establishing liaison with ITU and other standards bodies, but much of the practicalities of such liaisons is in the hands of the IESG and the individual WGs.

It is common for journalists and senior managers to ask what is the IETF’s strategy. The reality is that apart from a certain number of basic organizational and architectural principles, the IETF as a whole does not have, and cannot have, a strategy. Individual technical areas can and do have strategies. Certain technologies clearly attain strategic importance (SIP is an example). Certain matters are strategic for the Internet (e.g., massive scaling up of inter-domain routing). But the IETF’s work product is individual technical specifications, and each of those is a tactical matter.

Over the last two years, the IETF has made good progress on its administrative reforms (via IASA) and on practical improvements (via its volunteer education, tools, and procedural (PROTO) teams). The IESG has made many efforts to improve its own transparency and internal efficiency. The Board may wish to be aware that there has been limited progress on formal changes to the IETF process. While many feel that some changes or clarifications would be desirable, the collective energy to reduce these to precise documentary form and obtain consensus seems to be lacking at present. The existing process documents are, despite some rough edges, apparently good enough. Similarly, the rough consensus process, despite occasional vociferous dissent, is generally very successful in creating widely accepted open standards.