It gives me great pleasure to introduce this important and timely study, which demonstrates the extraordinary potential of telepresence, a critical new technology.

I have been intimately involved in the video communications industry since 1996. Over this period, our experience of video communications has appeared to be quite contradictory. There are many videophones that seem to work 100% effectively; we see them on TV news every day where people in different locations can communicate perfectly well. Yet business users have not been able to experience a quality of service that broadcast news providers had long ago perfected.

Fast forward to 2010 and things have completely changed. The technological advances made by companies in this space have resulted in the delivery of effective video communications. The implications are profound. As AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson has observed: “... work is an activity, not a place.” AT&T is a global leader in providing telepresence solutions, and the company talks intriguingly of bringing work to people, not people to work.

Let us be clear about what is happening here:

First, high quality video communications are now available. Telepresence works and this will have considerable impact on how we live and work.

Second, the potential for widespread usage of this technology is vast. Corporate uptake is already growing rapidly and an acceleration of usage globally is inevitable.

Finally, in my view it is vital that government and industry throughout the world accept this historic challenge to proliferate a credible alternative to business travel as quickly as possible.

If China and India develop a transport infrastructure like Europe or the United States, the emissions created over time risk having a hugely negative impact on climate change. If however the emerging economies can leap to the next stage of technology, without needing to copy the old 19th and 20th century systems, we will be better able to manage emissions growth.

At the US Climate Action Symposium in March 2009, the US Government Special Envoy for Climate Change Todd Stern highlighted how India with a billion people had only 55 million telephones as recently as 2002, but leapfrogged the wired service that developed countries had, straight to cell phones. As of 2009 350 million Indians have phones without the need for a universal wired service.

Can we achieve a similar critical dematerialization of communications through telepresence as an effective substitute for much repetitive business travel? We need to do it, and we now have the technology to do it. So my best guess is – to coin a phrase – ‘yes we can’.

Some argue that climate change creates limits to growth in the development of our economy. This report, The Telepresence Revolution, proves that responding to climate change issues will instead fuel the engine of growth.

This is an exciting time for video communications. And like any new technology, the change may lead to significant new investment opportunities.

Paul Dickinson
Chief Executive Officer
Carbon Disclosure Project