

Hon Shane Jones

Minister for Regional Economic Development



Hon Kris Faafoi

Minister of Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media

18 December 2018

MEDIA STATEMENT

Broadband extends to 99.8% of population

Regional Economic Development Minister Shane Jones and Broadcasting, Communications and Digital Media Minister Kris Faafoi have today announced significant additional rural broadband and mobile coverage across New Zealand, taking coverage to 99.8% of the population.

The additional coverage will roll out over the next four years due to the expansion of the Rural Broadband Initiative phase two/Mobile Black Spots Fund (RBI2/MBSF) programme.

“I’m really pleased to now see broadband and mobile coverage extend even further,” Kris Faafoi says. “I want New Zealanders to enjoy the benefits of connectivity whether in their business, relaxing at home or out and about across the country.”

“The \$40 million contribution for this project from the Provincial Growth Fund (PGF) announced last month, will ensure this vital technology will be available in some of the most far-flung parts of provincial New Zealand,” said Shane Jones.

Contracts with a total value of around \$130m have been entered into by Crown Infrastructure Partners (CIP) to provide improved broadband to around 10,000 rural households and businesses, and to provide new mobile coverage to approximately 365 kilometres of State Highways and 59 tourism areas.

For example, East Coast/Tairāwhiti, Hawke’s Bay, West Coast and Manawatū - Whanganui will have close to 100% population coverage of improved broadband at the conclusion of the expansion.

The West Coast will receive more than 100 kilometres of new State Highway mobile coverage¹, and Canterbury and Waikato will both receive nearly 50 kilometres of new mobile coverage. The new mobile service will be available from all three mobile operators (2degrees, Spark and Vodafone), improving public safety and tourism experiences.

The expansion will also boost tourism, with a number of tourism areas receiving new coverage including Pelorus Sound, Doubtful Sound and Hokitika Gorge. Key tourism

¹ In ‘black spots’ where there is currently no mobile coverage from any operator.

regions such as West Coast and Canterbury will have 23 tourist sites in total receiving new mobile coverage.

The tender process, which has been managed by CIP, is funded from \$105 million of existing funding allocated towards the RBI2/MBSF expansion and the additional investment of \$40 million from the PGF announced by the Ministers on 15 November.

“Of this total, approximately \$65 million will be spent in the regions that are the highest priority for investment in regional development from the PGF – Manawatū-Whanganui, Northland/Tai Tokerau, East Coast/Tairawhiti, Hawkes Bay, the Eastern Bay of Plenty and the West Coast” said Minister Jones. “All of this investment will be going directly into building new or upgraded digital connectivity infrastructure, which provides a critical base from which to build the economic growth we need in these areas”.

“As well, tangata whenua will benefit with approximately 54 marae having access to improved broadband”, he added.

CIP’s partnership with the Rural Connectivity Group (RCG) will mainly focus on delivering mobile coverage on State Highways and at tourism areas, with some rural broadband coverage as well.

“I am particularly pleased all three mobile operators will have services available from every RCG tower, as this will extend coverage for emergency services calling and will allow for emergency calls and information to be received by more people in more remote areas of New Zealand,” said Kris Faafoi.

“It is also great to see the commitment of our regional Wireless Internet Service Provider (WISPs) community, where eight new partners will join the existing nine WISPs in the programme, covering a further 8,400 rural households and businesses. The WISPs have great local knowledge in their communities and provide a high-class service to many rural households who would otherwise be without broadband coverage”.

Notes to editors: See attached Q&A for more detailed information. Also maps and further information can be found at CIP’s website: www.crowninfrastructure.govt.nz.

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