
For Written Answer on : 12/07/2018
Question Number(s): 609 Question Reference(s): 32212/18
Department: Communications, Climate Action and Environment
Asked by: Brendan Smith T.D.

QUESTION

[Ref No.: 32212/18]

* To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the progress expected in 2018 in the upgrade of the broadband telecommunications infrastructure throughout counties Cavan and Monaghan; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -
Brendan Smith.

* For WRITTEN answer on Thursday, 12th July, 2018.

(1075 Received on 9th July, 2018.)

REPLY

The Government's National Broadband Plan (NBP) aims to ensure high speed broadband access (minimum 30 megabits per second) to all premises in Ireland, regardless of location. The NBP has been a catalyst in encouraging investment by the telecoms sector. Today, 7 out of 10 of the 2.3 million premises in Ireland have access to high speed broadband. By 2020, 9 out of 10 premises will have access to a high speed broadband connection. This is being achieved via a combination of commercial investment and a State led intervention.

In April 2017 I published an updated High Speed Broadband Map which is available at www.broadband.gov.ie. This map shows the areas targeted by commercial operators to provide high speed broadband services and the areas that will be included in the State Intervention Area under the NBP.

The Map is colour coded and searchable by address/eircode:

- The AMBER areas represent the target areas for the proposed State led Intervention under the NBP and are the subject of an ongoing procurement process.
- The BLUE represent those areas where commercial providers are either currently delivering or have plans to deliver high speed broadband services.
- The LIGHT BLUE areas represent eir's commercial rural deployment plans to rollout high speed broadband to 300,000 premises as part of a Commitment Agreement signed with me in April 2017.

There are approximately 42,000 premises in Cavan. Some 17,000 (40%) fall within the AMBER area and will be served under the State led Intervention. Approximately 20,000 (49%) of premises are in a BLUE area and are or will be served by commercial providers, while some 5,000 (11%) are LIGHT BLUE and fall to be served by eir's planned rural deployment.

Of the approximately 33,000 premises in Monaghan, some 15,500 (48%) are AMBER, approximately 15,500 (47%) are BLUE and some 1,700 (5%) are LIGHT BLUE.

Information on the categories of specific premises can be accessed on my Department's website www.broadband.gov.ie by entering the relevant eircode.

Information on eir's rural deployment is available at <http://fiberrollout.ie>. A copy of the Commitment Agreement is available on my Department's website www.dccae.gov.ie. eir continue to pass premises as part of this deployment.

Data for Q1 2018 recently submitted by eir to my Department indicates that the company has passed some 145,000 premises nationwide as part of its ongoing deployment. eir has signalled that there would be some knock-on effects to the 2018 milestone targets due to the severe weather impacts of both storms Ophelia and Emma.

I have met with the senior management in eir and expressed to them the importance of implementing measures to catch up with milestone targets as a priority.

My Department is in a formal procurement process to select a company who will roll-out a new high speed broadband network in the State intervention area. That procurement process is now in its final stages.

For those premises currently awaiting access to high speed broadband, practical initiatives will continue to be addressed through the work of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce to address obstacles and improve connectivity in respect of existing and future mobile phone and broadband services.

Under this Taskforce, engagement between telecommunications operators and local authorities through the Broadband Officers is continuing to strengthen. These Broadband Officers are acting as single points of contact in local authorities for their communities. The appointment of these officers is already reaping rewards in terms of ensuring a much greater degree of consistency in engagements with operators and clearing obstacles to developing infrastructure. The Department of Rural and Community Development maintain a list of Broadband Officers, a link to which is available on my Department's website at <https://www.dccae.gov.ie/en-ie/communications/topics/Broadband/national-broadband-plan/Pages/NBP-Information-Leaflets.aspx>.

For Written Answer on : 24/07/2018
Question Number(s): 2066 Question Reference(s): 33901/18
Department: Communications, Climate Action and Environment
Asked by: Brendan Smith T.D.

QUESTION

[Ref No.: 33901/18]

* To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment his plans to introduce a universal service obligation on mobile telephony providers in relation to the need to provide adequate and up to date mobile telephone coverage throughout the entire country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Brendan Smith.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 24th July, 2018.

(2004 Received on 18th July, 2018.)

REPLY

The current EU and national regulatory framework for telecommunications allows for the application of a Universal Service Obligation (USO) in respect of fixed voice services. This framework has, in my view served consumers well over several decades and ensured that householders can get an affordable fixed voice service, regardless of where they are located.

That existing framework for telecommunications relates solely to voice telephony and Functional Internet Access (28.8 kilobits per second). There is no provision in European or national regulation for a USO in relation to mobile voice services.

The Proposed Directive Establishing a European Electronic Communications Code COM 2016/590, which is expected to come into force in late 2020, aims to incentivise and encourage increased investment in high speed broadband networks, and contains a provision that would allow Member States to apply a USO for high speed broadband, in specific circumstances, where such networks are available.

Mobile operators are however rolling out 3G and 4G networks across Ireland following ComReg's 2012 Multiband Spectrum auction, with at least one operator now having over 90% population coverage of 4G services.

For Written Answer on : 24/07/2018

Question Number(s): 2067,2068,2070 Question Reference(s): 33902/18, 33969/18, 34042/18

Department: Communications, Climate Action and Environment

Asked by: Brendan Smith T.D., Mattie McGrath T.D., Sean Sherlock T.D.

QUESTION

[Ref No.: 33902/18]

* To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment if his attention has been drawn to the inadequate mobile telephone coverage in many parts of counties Cavan and Monaghan; if he, his Department or the Communications Regulator will engage with mobile telecoms providers to ensure that customers in that area are provided with improved coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Brendan Smith.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 24th July, 2018.

(2005 Received on 18th July, 2018.)

To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment the status of measures being taken to improve the quality of mobile phone coverage; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Mattie McGrath.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 24th July, 2018.

Ref No: 33969/18

To ask the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment when mobile coverage in an urban area (details supplied) will be rectified under the Mobile Broadband Taskforce..

- Sean Sherlock.

* For WRITTEN answer on Tuesday, 24th July, 2018.

Maryborough Hill, Cork routinely has no mobile signal no matter what the provider

Ref No: 34042/18

REPLY

I propose to take Questions Nos 2067, 2068 and 2070 together.

Providing telecommunications services, including mobile phone services, is a matter for the relevant service providers operating in a fully liberalised market regulated by the Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), as independent Regulator. I do not have statutory authority to require commercial companies to rollout services and make specific investments in particular locations. The ComReg consumer helpline is accessible at consumerline@comreg.ie and I would urge consumers who feel they have not received an appropriate response from service providers to make contact with the Regulator.

Notwithstanding ComReg's independence, I recognise the frustration felt by Irish consumers where telecommunications networks are not always delivering the services people expect. Accordingly, I specifically included in the Programme for Government a commitment to a Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce. The Taskforce worked with key stakeholders to produce a report in December 2016, available on my Department's website, which contained 40 actions to alleviate some of the deficits. The Implementation Group I co-chair with Minister Kyne is overseeing implementation of the actions and comprises all key stakeholders responsible for delivery. This includes ComReg, which attends as both an action owner, and in an observer capacity in its role as the independent Regulator.

Minister Kyne and I published the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce Implementation Review 2017 on 21 February 2018, which comprehensively outlines the progress made in 2017 on the actions identified by the Taskforce. Of the 40 actions, 29 have been completed, with work on the remaining 11 carrying into the 2018 Work Programme. Following close engagement with stakeholders at the National Stakeholder Forum, an additional 23 new measures have been identified for delivery in 2018, that will lead to improvements for consumers across Ireland.

In terms of addressing mobile coverage blackspots, various initiatives are under way:

- My Department and the Department of Rural and Community Development have worked to achieve a greater consensus around site selection for telecoms infrastructure and therefore improve mobile phone coverage.
- Both Departments also worked with a pilot group of local authorities to identify the issues associated with mapping local blackspots. This pilot exercise has been completed, with all local authorities having been asked to map local blackspots and identify infrastructure that could potentially be used to provide additional coverage on an economic basis. This exercise is ongoing, and has been included in the 2018 Taskforce Work Programme. It is planned to have a dedicated GIS resources in place to support this.
- A working group has been established with the remit of investigating the feasibility of developing standardised policy for accessing and utilising State assets for the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure.
- ComReg is delivering a composite national coverage map, which will, in tandem with its work on handset testing and activities to raise consumer awareness, allow people across Ireland to optimise the services available to them.
- Following a consultation process ComReg has developed a licensing scheme which will enable households and businesses to use mobile phone repeaters to boost signals into their premises and bring immediate improvements in mobile coverage.

All of these initiatives should assist in enhancing the quality of mobile phone and data services, particularly in rural areas.

In tandem with the work of the Taskforce, the release by ComReg of the 3.6GHz radio spectrum band, which has been identified at EU level as a primary band suitable for the introduction of 5G, will also contribute to addressing increasing mobile data demands and improve mobile coverage. Mobile operators' commercial investment has also resulted in improved services, following ComReg's 2012 multi-band spectrum auction. At least one operator now has in excess of 90% 4G population coverage.