The Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2

Background

The Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2 (SRP2) is a joint investment of £17m by the Department for the Economy (DfE), the Department of Culture Media and Sport, through Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) and BT.

The project aims to provide superfast broadband in areas where the choice is poor or broadband speeds are low. Some of these are in rural and remote parts of Northern Ireland. Following procurement, BT was appointed and work began in February 2015. It is scheduled to finish by December 2017 and, when completed, it will bring more choice and improve speeds to over 38,000 premises.

Areas where improvements are planned

The implementation of the project will be delivered across four phases, with each phase requiring extensive surveying, planning and re-engineering of a copper based network and changing it into a fibre rich broadband network.

The programme has challenging time constraints in that all works must be completed by the 31 December 2017. Completion dates of the four individual phases may change if unforeseen difficulties arise e.g. planning permission, access to power and way leave agreements. For some areas, even when improvement work is complete, there is no guarantee that every premise will be able access faster broadband services due to technical limitations with the technology being used to deliver services.

The implementation of the Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2 will result in the provision of new fibre optic telephone lines from existing exchanges to either new roadside cabinets or fibre nodes adjacent to premises. This will provide superfast fibre based broadband through the telephone line or directly into the home or business.

The project will be delivered at an open access level providing households and business the choice of a supplier from several competing broadband companies in the area which offer superfast broadband.

The deployment process

The deployment of services is determined by an engineering methodology that seeks to achieve the greatest value for money and the highest number of beneficiaries. It takes account of a number of factors including technical feasibility, quality of existing infrastructure in the area, reasonable costs and number of anticipated customers.

Contact
E-mail: telecomspolicy@economy-ni.gov.uk
Voicemail: 028 9052 9352
Web: www.economy-ni.gov.uk

Benefits of using Superfast Broadband Services

For Businesses

Activity	Benefit
Handle Large Data Files	Online data storage - save space and money on physical data storage
Enjoy high quality voice and HD video calls	Interact with colleagues, suppliers and customers worldwide
Use cloud computing	Paying only for what you use
Remote working	Improving work/life balance for staff
Collaborate with remote users	Save time and travel expenses
Integrate voice and data networks	Improve information sharing

For Homes

Activity	Benefit
Upload photos, video files	Save space and money on physical data storage.
Enjoy high quality voice and HD video calls	Interact with family, and friends across the world
Downloading web pages	Faster downloads of web sites
Remote working	Improving work/life balance for staff
More devices able to access the Internet	Better experiences for users
Stream TV, films,	Watch TV & films when you want
Education	Access to a broad range of educational material

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How will roll-out be planned?

The roll-out will be delivered in four phases. Extensive initial planning and survey work will be carried out by BT. The roll out plan will take into account many factors including local demographics and geography, planning requirements, the existing engineering infrastructure and the availability of suitable technologies to provide a service. It's not possible with a programme of this size to plan every area at the same time so some areas will be enabled before others.

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2. How will people find out when their area is due to get superfast broadband?

Information will be published on the NI Direct website, when the survey and design work has been carried out, to identify the postcode districts within which improvements are expected to be provided through the Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2. This is expected to take a number of months.

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3. How is one area selected in preference to another?

Following public consultation and a review of industry plans, DfE identified the post codes that could benefit from intervention.

Every individual address within those post codes is modelled by BT to estimate the speed each could receive.

The BT modelling process looks at the viability of providing a fibre solution to all those addresses. Clusters of premises and associated cabinets are identified, taking into account two factors:

(i) the financial and technical constraints resulting from the existing network, the limitations of the equipment, and the resulting speed performance delivered to the customer

(ii) the best possible use of public funding to improve superfast broadband coverage for the maximum number of premises, while achieving best value for money.

Once this is complete BT consider various options for delivery of fibre-based services including re-engineering of network, provision of fibre, new cabinets, cables poles, etc and their estimated cost and performance.

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4. Postcodes nearby or surrounding me are included in the Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2 but mine is not – Why?

The BT modelling process firstly identifies the cost and performance estimates for the intervention area. These premises are clustered together to optimise the coverage and provide best value for money, depending on the technical and financial constraints that exist. These constraints are generally based on the existing network and the limitations of the equipment.

The modelling optimises the best and maximum coverage with value for money for the Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2. Accordingly, this will result in some structures and therefore postcodes or parts of postcodes falling outside of the project.

For those individual properties that are not included in the rollout of Superfast Rollout Programme Phase 2, there are currently other technology options available. A factsheet containing details can be found at https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/broadband-and-mobile-northern-ireland-fact-sheet

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5. What are the benefits of fibre broadband?

Fibre broadband is a new type of broadband that uses fibre optic cables to help increase the speed of your broadband connection. It is often referred to as 'super-fast broadband' or 'next-generation broadband' as it offers faster speeds than have been available to date using older generation networks. It is available to both home and business users.

There are generally two types of fibre broadband connections

Fibre to the cabinet (FTTC)

Fibre-to-the-Cabinet (FTTC) involves running fibre optic cables from the telephone exchange or distribution point to an existing or new roadside cabinet (green box) which then connect to a standard phone line to provide broadband. This is combined with a copper cable from the cabinet to the home or business which uses Very-high-bit-rate Digital Subscriber Line (VDSL) or similar technology that can deliver much faster speeds over shorter distances.

FTTC broadband can deliver services offering a downstream line speed of up to 80 Megabits per second (Mbps) and upstream speeds of up to 20 Mbps.

Not everyone will receive the maximum speed as it depends on the length of your phone line to the cabinet which is providing your broadband service.

Fibre to the home / premises (FTTH or FTTP)

Fibre-to-the-Premises (FTTP), also often referred to as Fibre-to-the-Home (FTTH) provides and end-to-end fibre optic connection the full distance from the exchange to the home or business premises and can deliver faster speeds than FTTC as there is no copper leg at all.

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6. Is it possible to tell me when my premises will benefit

We aren't able to tell you exactly when your premises will benefit for a number of reasons:

- it's not always straightforward because of the rural and remote nature of the project;
- extensive surveying and planning is required as we transform our network into a fibre rich next generation infrastructure;
- due to the age of the existing network, sometimes unexpected challenges arise e.g. ducts carrying the cables may have collapsed or have been damaged in other ways over the years, meaning that problems have to be sorted out before any fibre can be laid;
- highway, planning and wayleave (consent) applications also need to be considered and can sometimes result in significant delays relating to a specific cabinet;
- new cabinets require power supplies which involve us working with the local power supplier who in turn may require wayleaves from one or many landlords; and
- we have to contend with our weather. If it gets too cold (below 3c) or wet it can create problems laying the concrete plinth for the cabinet to stand on and the provision of new underground duct.