

Connecting Devon and Somerset Programme Update

Joint Rural Broadband Working Group

This briefing summarises the progress made by the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) Programme Team since the last meeting of the working group in October 2012.

Procurement and Contract award

Following receipt of State Aid notification, work to finalise the procurement was concluded and contracts were signed on 29th January 2013.

The contract, worth £94m, aims to deliver high-speed fibre broadband to at least 91% of premises by the end of 2016 and to ensure a minimum of 2Mbps broadband speeds for all premises.

BT's £41 million financial contribution will bolster the public sector investment, which includes £10 million from Devon and Somerset County Councils, £32m Government funding from Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) and contributions from other public sector partners.

The combination of rural, urban and coastal geographies will offer various engineering challenges, but the most predominant technology will be fibre optic broadband. Most of the programme area will receive Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC), where the fibre runs from the telephone exchange as far as the nearest BT street cabinet. It can deliver download speeds of up to 80Mbps and upload speeds of up to 20Mbps.

Fibre to the Premises (FTTP), where the fibre runs all the way to the home or business and which can deliver the top current download speed of 330Mbps, will also be available in certain areas.

Openreach will install the fibre network which will be open to all communications providers on an equal wholesale basis. Devon and Somerset consumers and businesses will therefore benefit from a competitive market, bringing choice and affordable prices.

BT is already in the process of rolling out fibre broadband to homes and businesses in some areas of Devon and Somerset as part of its commercial plan to reach around two-thirds of UK premises.

Fast Start meeting

The CDS programme team held their 'Fast Start' event for highways, planners and power companies on the 14th March. Representatives from some of the partner authorities and district councils were also present.

The 'Fast Start' concept has been recommended by BDUK to ensure the fastest most successful start possible on a BDUK Call-off contract. It comprises a series of parallel activities and is centred on a "Fast Start Meeting" that brings together the key stakeholders to set out what are the critical factors necessary in making the programme a success.

During the event, the programme team in conjunction with private sector partner BT outlined some of the complexities involved in the survey work, planning and roll-out phases of the project. The survey work will produce a detailed deployment plan for each phase and will determine how each area will link to the existing national fibre infrastructure. The event included presentations from the programme team, who also set out the main objectives of the programme. A set of presentation slides can be downloaded from the Connecting Devon and Somerset [website](#).

Next steps

Following the Fast Start event there will be a series of workshops and meetings with district planning officers and highway traffic management officers, to ensure the rollout is a collaborative process. BT engineers and contractors will be working closely with highways and planning officers to keep disruption to a minimum, matching scheduling wherever possible with existing, planned roadworks.

Survey work will include, the examination of existing infrastructure, particularly ducts which will be used wherever possible; power requirements for new street cabinets; securing wayleaves and adherence to planning regulations. There are stringent guidelines for the positioning of street cabinets, which take into account geography, positioning and visibility, as well as proximity to junctions and road signs. Special consideration needs to be given to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Survey work within the programme area has already started and is expected to last between 6-9 months. The first cabinets are forecast to be deployed and ready for service by the end of 2013.

Business and communities support – Get up to Speed!

The first stage of the business support programme, Get up to Speed! has been running since November 2012 providing introduction and awareness raising events and one to one mentoring for businesses throughout Devon and Somerset. In total approximately 750 business assists have been completed since the start of the programme.

At the same time Cosmic have been trialling a range of community initiatives that will be deployed alongside the rollout.

Get up to Speed! will now be working in tandem with the first phase of the infrastructure roll out schedule due to be announced later in the year.

Rural Communities Broadband Fund (RCBF)

The programme team has been working with Dartmoor, Thurlestone and Exmoor to progress these three RCBF bids. However following discussions at a National level between BDUK, DEFRA and BT in relation to the scheme, progress has been halted until a number of important issues can be resolved.

The CDS team shares the frustration with this lack of progress and we are working hard with BT, BDUK and DEFRA to understand the current log-jams and how we can assist to clear these issues. Once we have a clearer understanding of the situation, we will be in a position to communicate further with the communities involved. We may also ask your support to lobby at national level to bring about a practical resolution.