Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Mobile Phone & Broadband Taskforce

Meeting Minutes

November 2022

Prepared by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
and the Department of Rural and Community Development
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Minutes of the Mobile and Broadband Taskforce

Date: Wednesday 16th November 2022

Venue: Herbert Park Hotel, Ballsbridge

Time: 12:00 – 14.00

State Attendees: Minister of State Ossian Smyth, T.D. (co-Chair), Ciarán Ó hÓbáin (D/ECC), Fintan O'Brien (D/RCD), Jake Ryan (D/RCD), Eamonn Confrey (D/ECC), Peter Burke (LGMA), Garrett Blaney (ComReg), Barbara Delaney (ComReg), Eoghan O'Brien (D/HLGH), Colin Fulcher (D/HLGH), John Coppinger (D/Transport), Noel Madden (Galway County Council), Simon Howe (Tipperary County Council), Torlach Denihan (TII Ibec), Aoife Doyle (TII Ibec), Sinead Kavanagh (Cellnex), Colin Cunningham (Cellnex), Joe Bishop (Vodafone), Amanda Glancy (SIRO), Rory Ardagh (SIRO), Deirdre Ardagh (Three), Bláthín Harnett (Virgin Media), Garrett Quinn (Phoenix Tower International), Mark Wilmot (Phoenix Tower International), Brian McHugh (Vantage Towers), Eamon Farrell (Vantage Towers), Aisling O'Donoghue (Sky Ireland), Joe Lavin (NBI).

Virtual Attendees: Ronan Lupton (ALTO), Dan Lewis (Eurona, representing WISPs), Orla Twomey (ASAI), Kevin O'Donoghue (D/ECC), Edel Murray (D/HLGH), Stephen Flynn (RMO), Mark Hughes (Tesco Mobile), Matthew Madden (Virgin Media).

Observers: Jane Dooley (D/ECC), Etain Hobson (D/RCD), Ciara Doherty (D/RCD)

Secretariat: Rachel Lawless (D/ECC)

Dept. Officials: Timothy Ollry (D/RCD), Andrew Sullivan (D/ECC), Rory Hinchy (D/ECC), Breda Callan (D/ECC), Eamonn Parkes (D/ECC), Antonia Martin (D/ECC)

Apologies: Minister Heather Humphreys T.D., Catherine Eddery (OPW), John Gunnigan (NBI), Pat O'Sullivan (eir), Morag Pollock (Towercom), Mark Carpenter (Sky).

First Session – State Actors

1 Opening Remarks for State Stakeholder Session – Minister of State Ossian Smyth

- Minister of State Smyth opened the meeting, extending his thanks to all the participants for providing timely updates on their progress in relation to their allocated actions on the Taskforce Work Programme.
- It was outlined that the first session of this meeting was for State Stakeholders to converse freely and openly regarding the work of the Taskforce, and to provide their progress updates.

2 Progress Report on Work Programme

- All of the action holders were requested to provide an update on the status of the actions assigned to them.

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (D/HLGH)

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (D/HLGH) provided an update on each of their actions:

- Action 1 (Ensure appropriate enforcement of Article 8 of the BCRD, by promoting the installation of ducting at new builds which specifically supports fibre broadband rollout, made accessible at all locations within the new build) - These regulations are currently being drafted by DHLGH alongside the relevant technical guidance to transpose Article 8 of the BCRD. The next steps required are to finalise these documents, hold a consultation followed by their notification and implementation. It is anticipated this work will be completed in Q1 2023.
- Action 2 (to update the Taskforce on the review of the Planning and Development Act) - This review is progressing in line with the timelines set out by the Attorney General's Office. A working group of planning law experts has been convened by the AG and significant engagement is ongoing with this group and officials in DHLGH. It is anticipated that a Bill will be brought to government by the end of this year. There is ongoing engagement between DHLGH and DECC to ensure issues relevant to telecommunications deployment are being considered. This remains a medium term action and further progress is anticipated in 2023.

- Action 3 (to update the Taskforce on measures to address the ownership of ducting and chambers, shared with D/Transport) – DHLGH will continue to engage with colleagues across local and national government to understand the nature and scope of the issues to be examined:
    - with regard to new ducting infrastructure in new developments;
    - with regard to existing ducting infrastructure where ownership is contested or unclear;
    - with regard to multi-unit developments;
    - Other related issues identified during the exercise.

  In Q2 2023, DHLGH will revert to the Taskforce with a summary of the issues identified and the steps required to address them, including (if necessary) the reframing of the action to allow for discrete parts to be assigned to specific stakeholders.
- Action 4 (review and update of Planning Guidelines) - Engagement has commenced between DHLGH and DECC regarding the review of the Telecommunications guidelines. A scoping document, including relevant policy development, technological advances, operational issues arising on the ground, and potential offshore interactions (if any), has been prepared by DECC, to initially establish a common understanding of the issues and inform the scope of any review of the guidelines. The AGO is currently reviewing the Planning and Development Act, once this review is completed this will impact upon the next steps for this action.

Department of Transport (D/Transport)

The Department of Transport (D/Transport) provided an update on the actions they are responsible for:

- Action 9 (develop a standard approach and guidance document in relation to ducting, shared with LGMA) - A review of the work carried out to date by Broadband Officers has taken place, the next step is to procure consultancy services to draft a guidance document on the required standards. It is anticipated that this work will conclude in Q1 2023.

Minister Ossian Smyth also took this opportunity to remind D/Transport that they have been asked to nominate a member of Transport Infrastructure Ireland to represent that group on the Taskforce.

Department of Environment, Climate and Communications (D/ECC)

The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications provided an update on Action 7:

- Action 7 (supporting the local government to drive efficiencies in the telecoms infrastructure - A funding scheme has been developed by the National Broadband Plan team in DECC to assist Local Authorities and the Roads Management Office (RMO) to process planning applications from NBI. The fund for 2022 is €2 million to be distributed among all 31 Local Authorities and the RMO.

This funding has been drawn down by all Local Authorities and officials from D/ECC are hosting regional meetings to better understand the issues at hand.

The LAs are using this funding for a variety of different purposes depending on their needs including upgrading IT systems, hiring graduate planning staff, and to improve processing times for 254 licences.

Department of Rural and Community Development (D/RCD)

The Department of Rural and Community Development (D/RCD) provided an update on Action 6:

- Action 6 (continue to refine and enhance the Broadband Officer role) - There has been engagement between DRCD and the CCMA on this matter throughout 2022. Both parties are closely aligned in terms of priorities for the role of the BBO going forward. The BBOs have played a key role in developing telecoms infrastructure nationally and have driven the uptake of digital technologies for public benefit. A first draft of a role profile has been produced and will be agreed and progressed in 2023.
- D/RCD expect there will be a more substantive update at the next meeting.

Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg)

ComReg provided an update on their actions including Action 8, Action 11, Action 12 and Action 13:

- Action 8 (Make fixed radio links information publicly available and in a downloadable format via the Siteviewer resource, to provide greater overall transparency to relevant stakeholders regarding services deployed in certain areas) - An IT solution is currently being developed and is expected to be completed in Q1 2023 after public consultation is carried out in Q4 2022.
- Action 11 (ComReg will continue to enhance its national outdoor mobile coverage map, incorporating data updates on a regular basis and additionally the mapping of 5G outdoor mobile coverage, which will significantly enhance information available to consumers) - The outdoor coverage map and app continue to be regularly reviewed. In Q3 ComReg updated its map to include 5G data. The map will continue to be updated quarterly.
- Action 12 (launch consumer information campaign aiming to improve awareness of the basics of new technologies) - Preparations are underway for a public and consumer information and awareness campaign. The campaign strategy will be developed in Q4 2022/Q1 2023.
- Action 13 (assisting the State in steps to further improve geographic mobile coverage) - The matter of MBSA is before the courts and ComReg awaits a determination on the substantive legal challenge. The Court of Appeal varied the High Court stay order on ComReg's MBSA2 process on 8 November - allowing the regulator to run the auction and the rest of the award process, up to a point just before the award of licences to successful bidders in the auction – pending judgement in the substantive appeal which is due 31 January, 2023. ComReg published an Information Notice on 9 November informing the market.

County and City Management Association (CCMA)

CCMA provided an update on Actions 5 as D/Transport had already provided an update on Action 9. Action 9 is co-owned with the Department of Transport, and Action 5 is co-owned with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Planning.

- Actions 5 (bring all elements of the planning permission application and determination process fully online across all Local Authorities, via establishment

and full implementation of the e-planning system) - A successful pilot of the e-planning project has been carried out in Tipperary and Galway County Councils. It is anticipated that further rollout will occur in another 11 Local Authorities in Q4 2022 and nationwide in 2023.

Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ASAI)

The ASAI provided an update on Action 10:

- Action 10 (conduct a data analysis exercise to examine the main areas of telecoms advertising that consumer complaints and provide guidance) - An exercise to capture the required data and an analysis of the key words and main themes of advertising is underway. This action is on track to be completed in Q1 2023.
- If appropriate once the research is complete the ASAI will provide guidance to the Telecoms Industry on the outcome of the research.

3 AOB

- Jake Ryan from D/RCD stated the intention of the Taskforce to reinstate bilateral meetings with all Action holders in advance of meetings in future.
- Minister of State Smyth praised the work of all involved and the willingness of all members to work together.

Second session – Industry and State actors

1 Opening Remarks for Industry Stakeholder Session – Minister of State Ossian Smyth

- Minister of State Smyth opened the second session of the meeting, welcoming Industry members attending both online and in person.
- The Minister sought agreement on the draft Terms of Reference, which were agreed by all.
- The Minister provided a brief overview of the updates from State Action Holders for the benefit of Industry members.

2 Industry Stakeholder Discussion

Torlach Denihan, Torlach Denihan, Chair of Telecommunications Industry Ireland (TII) of Ibec, provided an update on Actions 14 and 15:

- Action 14 (Industry will examine its processes regarding non-standard orders for a fibre broadband connection with a view to identifying and implementing actions it will take to provide information more effectively and consistently to customers who are currently unable to receive high speed broadband.) - Dedicated points of contact have been established to provide up to date and accurate information to Broadband Officers and the Departments regarding the deployment, upgrading and availability of commercial services, and any related issues. They and other relevant industry personnel will join future meetings of Broadband Officers and provide updates on plans for the deployment, upgrading and availability of commercial services (commercially confidential information excluded) and discuss issues of mutual concern.
- Action 15 (Industry will examine its processes regarding non-standard orders for a fibre broadband connection with a view to identifying and implementing actions it will take to provide information more effectively and consistently to customers who are currently unable to receive high speed broadband) - Industry has examined the case studies provided by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications regarding non-standard orders for a fibre broadband connection with a view to developing communications for retail service providers that take account of the themes raised by the case studies. These communications will cover the application of the relevant processes for

such orders, address the themes raised in the case studies and provide answers to frequently asked questions on these themes.

3 Minister of State Smyth opened the floor to comments from Industry

Torlach Denihan of Ibec raised a number of issues that the Telecoms Industry are concerned about including:

- The timeline for D/HLGH to provide guidance on ducting issues.
- The need for planning guidelines to be updated and for a timeline to be provided on when this will occur.
- Concerns in relation to energy outages this coming winter. Businesses have prepared Business Continuity Plans however if access to the grid is limited or Telecos are told to greatly reduce their consumption this could cause issues.
- The possibility of putting together a Rural Mobile Connectivity Scheme to address blackspots.

Ronan Lupton (ALTO) reiterated the points made by Torlach and informed the Taskforce that TII and ALTO are consulting in advance of all Taskforce meetings on actions and more general issues.

Colin Cunningham (Cellnex) raised the issue of outdated planning legislation, supporting the need for progress to be made by D/HLGH on Action 4. He raised a number of other matters including concerns about ESB resilience and rural mobile coverage.

Jake Ryan (D/RCD) provided an update on the planned Annual Forum and timelines for meetings in 2023.

Item	**Indicative date**	**Comments**
Stakeholder Forum	Mid-February	
Bi-lateral meetings with Stakeholders	March	Confirm status of existing actions and identify and agree new actions.
Drafting of 2022 annual report and 2023 work programme	March/April	

MPBT meeting 1, 2023	Late April	Sign off on 2022 annual report and 2023 work programme.
MPBT meeting 2, 2023	Late November	Progress updates and 2024 timelines.

Minister of State Smyth introduced Noel Madden from Galway County Council and Simon Howe from Tipperary County Council to give a presentation on the Shared Infrastructure Project in Liberty Square, Thurles.

4 Presentation from Broadband Officers on Shared Infrastructure Project

- Noel Madden and Simon Howe gave a short presentation on the Shared Infrastructure Project in Thurles, County Tipperary.
- Noel outlined the benefits of shared ‘in-ground’ infrastructure in reducing street clutter, reducing the need for road openings and for encouraging collaboration between Local Authorities and the Telecoms Industry.
- This project is a pilot which will hopefully lead to the production and publication of guidelines and standards for the installation of ducts and chambers to be shared by multiple telecoms providers.

5 Closing remarks

Minister of State Smyth closed the meeting by thanking all who attended and provided updates.