

National Assembly for Wales' Economy, Infrastructure and Skills Committee – Inquiry – Digital Infrastructure in Wales

SG Response to Questions on Mobile

1) How did the SG decide on these areas of activity? To what extent were they based on the views of the mobile network operators, or the SG's own research?

The areas of activity contained within the Mobile Action Plan represent the key issues which the mobile network operators (MNOs) expressed to the Scottish Government (SG) as being important in helping make improve the business case for investment in Scotland. The Action Plan transforms these issues into distinct measures to be taken forward, and for most of these, we are taking the lead in the UK – for example the development of a mobile infill programme for Scotland.

The Action Plan is the culmination of close engagement with the MNOs for a number of years – at both official and Ministerial level – to understand their key asks on Government and how collaborative working could result in improved coverage. This included two round table sessions with the MNOs (July and December 2015), chaired by the Deputy First Minister.

2) To what time-frame is the SG working to in terms of implementing these actions? What actions have been taken in the six months since the action plan was published?

At this stage, SG has set a timeframe to only the principal action arising from the Action Plan: we will set out proposals for 4G mobile infill by Spring 2017. This was affirmed in September 2016's Programme for Government. This work is being taken forward jointly with the Scottish Futures Trust (SFT).

Since publication of the Action Plan, SG and SFT has taken forward to progress all of its strands, however our principal focus has been related the development of mobile infill proposals, planning policy and the emergency services network.

A significant part of our work has been the continued engagement with MNOs and other relevant industry stakeholders to ensure their involvement from the outset in the development of the mobile infill programme, and to ensure that the programme aligns with their needs moving forward.

We have completed our consultation on proposals for further relaxation to the planning system in respect of telecoms and responses are currently being analysed. Proposals for legislative change will follow as soon as possible this year. We have

also worked in collaboration with the industry and other stakeholders to prepare new online advice on planning for telecommunications. This will be published to align with the legislative changes.

We are closely working with the UK Government's Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme team to agree an approach to ensure that the majority of new masts being built as part of the Extended Area Services will be constructed as multi-operator sites from the outset, thus offering potential wider benefits to Scotland in the future.

3) What results (i.e. levels of coverage) does the SG expect from these actions?

We are currently working with the MNOs and Ofcom to ascertain the baseline level of 4G coverage which will be delivered by commercial network rollout. This work is feeding into the development of the mobile infill programme and will help us determine the level of coverage which can be realistically achieved, given budget constraints. Our proposals for mobile infill, when finalised, will set out our initial coverage targets.

4) How and when will the SG review this strategy based on future levels of mobile coverage?

The Action Plan should be considered as SG's initial views on how industry and government need to work together to improve mobile coverage and we will consider the best way of monitoring and updating our mobile strategy as the actions are taken forward. As part of this work, we will also continue to liaise closely with Ofcom who monitor mobile coverage on a national basis. More widely, SG's forthcoming Digital Strategy refresh will affirm our mobile ambitions and will provide an update key areas of focus moving forward.

**Scottish Government
Digital Directorate
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