Delivering a Connected Society

A National Broadband Plan for Ireland

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Foreword

High speed broadband is core to competitiveness. As a knowledge services oriented economy trading worldwide our workforce needs to be better connected than most in the world. However, ensuring fast connectivity is not only about jobs. It is also increasingly a key conduit of modern society – entertainment, learning, health and citizenship.

This Government is committed to delivering high speed broadband throughout Ireland as soon as possible.

Accelerating broadband rollout is not a new idea and we have seen progress in recent years. However, demand for bandwidth is increasing fast and now is the time to take a significant leap forward.

Our commitment is to high speed broadband availability across the country during the lifetime of this Government – specifically:

- 70Mbps - 100Mbps to more than half of the population by 2015;
- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases much faster speeds, to at least a further 20% of the population and potentially as much as 35% around smaller towns and villages; and
- A minimum of 30Mbps for every remaining home and business in the country – no matter how rural or remote.

These are dramatic increases in speeds – particularly for those outside urban centres who often can only access 1Mbps or 2Mbps today. The faster speeds will come from ongoing industry investment, the release, this year, of spectrum for 4G mobile services and from State investment to address market failure. Notwithstanding the constraints imposed on the exchequer at present, Government will intervene where – but only where – it is evident that the market will not deliver. Ireland’s population is more broadly dispersed than that of many other countries so reaching the target will require State investment to encourage the private sector to offer services which would not otherwise make commercial sense.

In this National Broadband Plan we are setting out how we will do two things - firstly to invest State money to accelerate fast broadband roll out in less densely populated areas and secondly to get the environment right so that private industry will invest swiftly all over the country.

We have taken great care to consult with stakeholders on this issue. I have engaged intensively with the telecoms sector to understand their views leading to the Report of the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce. We consulted publicly on that report before bringing this Plan to Government.

By launching this National Broadband Plan we are moving to the next stage. In the plan:

- We explain where we are going to spend money and why;
- We commit to the minimum broadband speeds that people will be able to access all over the country; and
- We set out the range of additional steps Government will take to make sure that private investment flows speedily.

I look forward to considerable engagement with private and public sector stakeholders to ensure this Plan is implemented swiftly so that a Connected Society is delivered within the lifetime of this Government.

"Pat Rabbitte TD
Minister for Communications, Energy & Natural Resources.
30th August 2012."
Introduction and Context

This Plan sets out the strategy to deliver high speed broadband throughout Ireland. Specifically, it will facilitate broadband download speeds of 70Mbps with a minimum of 40Mbps generally available and 30Mbps available in harder to reach rural areas. A great deal of the acceleration will happen in the early years of the Plan through the commercial delivery of minimum speeds of 70Mbps to 50% of the population by 2015, with the expectation that speeds of up to 100Mbps will be available to the majority of premises in this category.

This Plan will deliver on these targets by leveraging investment from both the private and public sectors. The total funding involved for any State intervention is indicatively estimated at €350 million, €175 million of which will come from public funding sources with the other €175 million from the successful commercial bidder(s) emerging from a public procurement process. State funding will only arise where it is clear that the market will not deliver. The precise cost to the State will be subject to the outcome of the procurement process chosen. The source of the State’s contribution will be subject to further consideration and may include the proceeds from the sale of State assets, the National Pensions Reserve Fund and the Strategic Investment Fund.

In order to drive commercial rollout of high speed broadband, the Government is committed to a range of actions that will facilitate the more efficient rollout of infrastructure including addressing planning and road opening challenges, assisting in getting citizens and businesses online, measures relating to spectrum policy and maximising the use of State assets where possible.

The National Digital Strategy will also be published before the end of 2012 and will be a key platform to stimulate demand for broadband services, thereby enhancing the commercial investment case. It will also address social inclusion and economic growth potential by targeting citizen and SME engagement with the Internet. Measures to enhance the role of State infrastructure and services will also be addressed. The release of 4G spectrum auction, new regulatory arrangements for Next Generation Access (NGA) and technological and market led developments will all influence the direction of this Plan over time.

This Plan will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to take account of new developments at all levels of broadband connectivity (international, backhaul, metropolitan area and local access). Developments will be monitored with a view to identifying and addressing any potential issues. A High Level Implementation Group will be established to oversee progress on delivery of the objectives of this Plan.

Next Generation Broadband – A Priority for Government and the EU

This Plan provides for a greater level of ambition than that set out in the European Commission’s Digital Agenda for Europe with at least 30Mbps connectivity being available to all citizens well ahead of the target, and a substantial proportion of the country being able to access considerably higher speeds. Delivery of high speed broadband is a strategic priority under the Programme for Government. It is also a key deliverable under the DAE. The DAE requires all Member States to publish national broadband plans by 2012 to facilitate the achievement of high speed broadband targets. The specific targets identified under the DAE in respect of broadband are (i) basic broadband to be available to all citizens by 2013, (ii) speeds of 30Mbps to be available to all citizens by 2020, and (iii) 50% of EU households subscribing to speeds of 100Mbps by 2020.

1 It should be noted that achievement of this target will be dependent on demand for such speeds.
**Importance of Delivery of High Speed Broadband**

Ireland has made significant progress in recent years in terms of broadband connectivity at all levels: international connectivity, backhaul networks, Metropolitan Area Networks (MANs) and local access networks. This progress is reflected in improved broadband availability and take-up with the number of broadband subscribers increasing from 602,000 to over 1.666 million over the last five years (see tables 1 and 2). There have also been significant improvements in the quality and speed of broadband connections (see table 3). Further progress is needed however, given the importance of digital engagement for Ireland’s economy, jobs and society generally. High speed broadband is a key enabling infrastructure in this regard and will contribute to Ireland’s economic recovery. Studies have shown that the Internet accounts for as much as 6% of GDP in advanced economies. Not surprisingly, 9 out of 10 SMEs surveyed by Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg) believe that the Internet has had a positive influence on their company in terms of better communications, time savings, productivity gains and increased sales. Provision of quality high speed broadband across Ireland should ensure that such opportunities are fully harnessed and that Ireland reaps the benefits of a truly digital economy.

*This Plan provides for a greater level of ambition than that set out in the Digital Agenda for Europe, with at least 30Mbps connectivity being available to all citizens well ahead of the target, and a substantial proportion of the country being able to access considerably higher speeds*
Further progress is needed given the importance of digital engagement for Ireland’s economy, jobs and society generally.

Table 2 Irish Broadband Subscription by Mode of Access 2007 - 2012 Q1

Table 3 Percentage of Residential and Business Broadband Subscriptions by Contracted Download Speed - 2012 Q1
Socio-economic Considerations

A socio-economic analysis undertaken by independent experts[^2^], in conjunction with the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources (DCENR), found that potentially substantial economic and socio-economic benefits could be realised through the rollout of high speed broadband. It emphasised that the benefits would depend on levels of take up and the extent and patterns of Internet usage among households and businesses. Increased demand for high speed applications will in turn support demand for high speed broadband although it noted that most high speed applications currently require download speeds of around 15Mbps to 20Mbps.

The analysis concluded that the primary benefit of rolling out high speed broadband services would be time savings, enhanced communications, increased sales and productivity gains that would arise through access to higher speeds. It also noted that high speed services can realise benefits in relation to foreign direct investment by boosting the attractiveness of regional locations outside the main urban centres and facilitate more flexible working arrangements. In the ever changing world of work, more people expect to work from home, and in the global economy, at times that are outside of normal office hours in Ireland.

Accordingly, improvements in Ireland’s broadband provision will boost the State’s relative international competitiveness and attractiveness in the technology area, particularly in newer growth areas such as cloud computing, digital media and gaming. Other positive impacts identified include better access to education services, labour market access and future delivery of eGovernment services such as eHealth. Overall, the analysis concluded that targeted State intervention could achieve positive economic returns, positive socio-economic benefits and a positive benefit-cost ratio. Moreover, it would both directly and indirectly create significant numbers of new jobs.

State intervention will be aimed at areas where it is most needed. Given the plentiful availability of connectivity at international, backhaul and metropolitan area levels at present, the focus of this Plan’s procurement process will be on the ‘last mile’. In other words, homes and businesses in areas where high speed broadband is not available will be addressed by the State intervention under this Plan.

Next Generation Broadband Taskforce

In order to consider how the delivery of high speed broadband by commercial market operators could be best facilitated and what the most appropriate role of Government should be in addressing potential market failures, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources convened the Next Generation Broadband Taskforce (NGBT) in June 2011. The NGBT, comprising high level industry experts, published its report in May 2012[^3^]. Following publication, the report was subject to a public consultation process during which over 50 submissions were received from a wide range of stakeholders which generally welcomed and endorsed its findings. A number of high level issues were raised through the submissions received including criticism of the level of broadband currently available in some areas of the country; acknowledgement of the work being done to stimulate demand and facilitate digital inclusion and the need to continue to support this; and the possible role that could be played by State entities in the rollout of high speed broadband infrastructure.


National Broadband Plan

This National Broadband Plan is informed by the findings of the report of the NGBT, the outcome of the public consultation process and subsequent economic and technical analysis. It builds on previous policies and interventions to address market failure since the market was first liberalised. Previous intervention projects led to services becoming available for the first time, or led to significant improvements in the quality of services available. The ‘Global Crossing’ and ‘Kelvin’ projects for example, enhanced our international connectivity considerably. Backhaul connectivity was significantly enhanced by the provision of grant aid. The MANs provided state-of-the-art fibre connectivity to businesses in regional and rural towns, significantly enhancing the productive capacity of those towns and their attractiveness for investment. The Group Broadband Scheme enabled many proactive communities to become early adopters of broadband services. More recently the 100Mbps to schools project, with ultra-fast upload and download speeds, is providing a platform for innovative and speedy learning. The National and Rural Broadband Schemes are ensuring that practically all premises countrywide now have access to at least a basic broadband service. While previous policies and interventions have initiated and built momentum, this Plan aims to quicken the pace of progress in terms of the quality, reliability and speed of broadband connections.

Key Objectives

This Plan sets out:

- A clear statement of Government policy on the delivery of high speed broadband;

- Specific targets for the delivery and rollout of high speed broadband and the speeds to be delivered;

- The strategy and interventions that will underpin the successful implementation of these targets; and

- A series of specific complementary measures to promote implementation of Government policy in this area.
Table 4 below sets out the target speeds expected from commercial investment and Government intervention under this Plan.

**Table 4 National Broadband Plan Targets**

- 70Mbps - 100Mbps available to at least 50% of the population with a majority having access to 100Mbps;
- At least 40Mbps, and in many cases much faster speeds, to at least a further 20% of the population and potentially as much as 35% around smaller towns and villages; and
- A minimum of 30Mbps available to all.

*High speed services can realise benefits in relation to foreign direct investment by boosting the attractiveness of regional locations outside the main urban centres*
National Broadband Plan Deliverables

Members of the NGBT emphasised that delivery of the industry targets would depend on implementation of the various measures identified in its report. These measures cover a wide range of policy areas including demand stimulation; the removal of barriers currently perceived to hamper investment; spectrum policy; and the role of State entities and assets. The NGBT findings, and its conclusions on the speeds that can be provided through normal market activity, have been used as a basis to identify specific deliverables which are set out below for implementation over the period of this Plan. The key deliverables include legislative, policy and regulatory matters which will support commercial investment in high speed broadband as well as outlining the Government’s commitment to addressing those areas of the country where gaps in commercial service provision are likely to occur.

Investment

The NGBT identified the commercial investment trajectory for high speed broadband in Ireland and the gaps that are likely to emerge. More specifically, the Taskforce found that:

- 35% of the population already have access to speeds of 100Mbps via cable;
- From 2015 over 50% of the population will have access to speeds of 70Mbps and above with 41% having access to speeds of 100Mbps;
- By 2018 an additional 20% to 35% of the population will have access to speeds of 30Mbps through anticipated commercial investment; and
- In the absence of any Government intervention, there will be a gap in more rural and isolated areas with between 15% and 30% of the population continuing to have only basic broadband services (speeds are not expected to exceed 5Mbps in these harder to reach areas and could be significantly lower).

Following consideration of the findings of the NGBT and the outcome of the public consultation process, independent economic, financial and technical analysis was undertaken to identify and assess the options available to Government in terms of the targets for high speed broadband that would be appropriate. While some of the analysis emphasises the benefits being realised over the long term, rather than the short to medium term, the Government believes that it is timely to intervene now to secure the potential benefits. Industry has indicated that the market will provide speeds of 70Mbps to 100Mbps for 50% of the population and as a consequence the Government sees no need for State intervention for this cohort of the population. The Government, being mindful of the commitment in the Programme for Government to “co-invest with the private sector and commercial semi-State sector to provide next generation broadband to every home and business in the State”, as well as other national and economic analyses and the EU policy framework, is committed to the following actions over the period of this Plan:

- As far as possible, headline download speeds of 70Mbps will be available (with a minimum of 40Mbps generally available and a minimum of 30Mbps available in harder to reach rural areas). It is expected that the minimum target upload speeds will be in the region of 25% to 30% of the headline download speeds. These speeds are a central commitment of this Plan and will require State investment to deliver. This investment will focus on the 50% population band which is beyond the predicted scope of commercial investment in cable and high speed broadband rollout.
using fibre. It will also take account of higher speed wireless solutions provided commercially in this band, ensuring that the State funded investment will only arise where it is clear that the market will not deliver. In delivering on this commitment, Ireland will meet the DAE target (30Mbps available to all by 2020) well ahead of schedule;

- DCENR will undertake a full mapping exercise in respect of high speed broadband deployment, commencing as soon as the current spectrum auction process and ComReg’s decision on the regulation of NGA are completed in Autumn 2012. This exercise will formally define the levels of investment that will be met by industry and clearly identify those areas in which a State intervention will be required. DCENR will require the full co-operation of industry in completing this important exercise; and

- State Aid clearance will be sought from the European Commission in respect of any investment proposal that involves public funding. State Aid rules and EU competition law circumscribe national governments’ interventions in markets. The rules mean that governments may only intervene in limited circumstances. The impact of Governments’ interventions on commercial market operators must be kept to a minimum.

**Funding a State-led investment**

Any State intervention will involve co-funding with the private sector. It is indicatively estimated that the total cost of the above commitments will be €350 million, with an indicative cost to the State €175 million over the period of this Plan. The precise source of funding of the necessary State investment will be decided by Government and may include proceeds from the sale of State assets, the National Pensions Reserve Fund and the Strategic Investment Fund. The actual cost to the State will be determined by the structure and outcome of the procurement process consequent to the State intervention. Market developments will be closely monitored to ensure an appropriate form of procurement and best value for money. DCENR has commenced dialogue with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and NewERA with a view to identifying sources of funding for a State led investment in high speed broadband.

**Demand Stimulation**

The NGBT report highlighted ComReg statistics which showed that 35% of Irish households do not subscribe to a broadband service and that approximately 21% of Irish adults have never used the Internet.

Government policy, in line with our partners within the EU, is focussed on increasing overall ICT adoption rates among both businesses and citizens. This Plan includes a number of measures aimed at ensuring that citizens and businesses are given every opportunity to have both the access and the skills necessary to enable them to fully participate in the digital economy and society.

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**The National Digital Strategy will aim to bring citizens and businesses online and the Minister will appoint a Digital Champion to spearhead delivery of the Strategy**
With that in mind and following on from the recommendations contained in the report of the NGBT, the Government is committed to implementing the following measures aimed at stimulating increased demand for broadband:

- The NDS will be published by the end of 2012. It will put in place a blueprint for digital adoption in Ireland which will support new and existing business and help unlock the enormous creative potential that exists. Particular attention is expected to be paid to the potential of eLearning and eHealth. The NDS will also focus on delivering a more cohesive Government approach to dealing with digital issues.

- The NDS will aim to bring citizens and businesses online and the Minister will appoint a Digital Champion to spearhead delivery of the Strategy. This is in line with similar developments elsewhere in Europe.

- As part of the NDS, and in partnership with industry (both the telecommunications service providers and the content providers), the Government will co-fund a national awareness campaign aimed at presenting the compelling case around the benefits of the Internet to those not currently digitally engaged. A priority target in such a campaign will be Ireland’s SME sector.

- In addition to awareness raising, the NDS will also include specific measures to address barriers to the use of the Internet by SMEs. The Internet enhances business competitiveness, accelerates innovation and presents major opportunities to transform the Irish economy. As highlighted in the report of the NGBT, the Irish SME sector is losing business opportunities through its lack of engagement with the Internet. The Government is supportive of existing initiatives aimed at tackling this problem and will support further measures, from both the public and private sectors, aimed at facilitating increased digital adoption rates by Irish enterprise.

- The NDS will consider targets for take-up of broadband connectivity building on the strategy set out in this Plan as regards rollout of high speed broadband.

- The Government has recently published a new eGovernment Strategy. This document, which will be complemented by the NDS, focuses on the increased availability of online services to the citizen and includes mechanisms to improve the degree of integration and coordination in the delivery of public ICT services to citizens, including the possible future mandating of online interaction with selected Government services within a defined time period.

All second level schools will have 100Mbps connectivity installed during 2014.
The Government has already commenced the rollout of high speed broadband connectivity to all second level schools. Under this initiative all second level schools will have 100Mbps connectivity installed during 2014. This significant capital investment will run between 2012 and 2014 and will facilitate an important change to the way teaching and learning takes place in the classroom. It will also help equip our students with the digital skills necessary to compete for jobs in the digital economy.

Infrastructure Barrier Removal

Industry has indicated that it will deliver significantly higher speeds through the availability of newer technologies, new infrastructure and the innovative use of spectrum over the coming years. This will require considerable investment in the deployment of optic fibre infrastructure and new base stations. Where fibre is required to the premises, to the cabinet or for backhaul, road opening permits will be necessary. Where wireless installations are required there will be a need to secure the necessary planning permissions for installations and civil works to support these structures. Industry has confirmed that at least 2,000 new installations around Ireland may be required to facilitate the delivery of wireless technologies.

The more efficient and cost effective the various approval systems are for the rollout of telecommunications infrastructure, the faster industry can deliver the high speeds required. With that in mind and following on from the recommendations contained in the report of the NGBT, the following measures are being undertaken to ensure implementation of this Plan:

- A working group has been established by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTS) to address the policy aspects of any barriers that impact on the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure by agencies under its remit. The group is considering timely and standardised processing of permit applications for telecommunications infrastructure as well as applications for street infrastructure such as street cabinets and the installation of underground telecommunications infrastructure;

- DCENR will establish a working group comprising of industry representatives, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) and local authorities with a view to agreeing a code of enhanced communication between industry, local authorities and communities aimed at addressing public concerns in relation to broadband infrastructure;

- DECLG will issue guidance via a circular letter in Autumn 2012 to planning authorities in relation to the planning aspects of the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure. This guidance will address:
  - The current system of granting temporary permissions and the associated bond/deposit regime for telecommunications infrastructure;
  - Coverage restrictions and exclusion zones in county development plans; and
  - Appropriate regard being given by planning authorities to the planning decisions of An Bord Pleanála;

- DECLG is consulting on guidelines in relation to development contributions which suggests the introduction of waivers in respect of broadband infrastructure; and
A new unified online application system for relevant licences is under consideration for introduction in the first quarter of 2013.

This work will involve detailed discussions and co-operation with local authorities and industry.

**Spectrum Policy**

The use of radio spectrum as a platform for the delivery of fixed wireless and mobile broadband services is increasingly important, particularly given the challenges faced by Ireland in terms of demographics and spatial distribution patterns.

A wide range of issues relating to spectrum policy and management were considered by the NGBT which resulted in a number of recommendations and requirements, implementation of which fall to DCENR and/or ComReg.

In terms of spectrum policy, the Government is committed to:

- A review and update of spectrum policy, to be carried out on a consultative basis, which will set out the overarching public policy issues being pursued and intended policy outcomes. The revised policy will be set out in 2013;
- Modernisation of the existing wireless telegraphy legislation. While this is a complex area it is the intention to have comprehensive modern legislation in place by 2014;
- Continued engagement with industry to exchange views on national, European and international radio spectrum issues. This will be facilitated through a forum which will meet from time to time, starting in 2013.

While policy on spectrum is a matter for the Government and specifically the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, the day to day management of spectrum (including assignment of spectrum resources) is a matter for the ComReg. ComReg is independent in its functions, within the policy framework set by the Government and the EU. In addition to the Government commitments mentioned above, the Minister will request ComReg to consider the following issues:

- Arrangements to provide more certainty to the market in the final years of a spectrum licence term, thus removing any investment disincentive caused by uncertainty;
- Indefinite licensing regimes introduced in other countries and the impact of such regimes over the medium to long term;
- Timeframes and proposals for the introduction of an appropriate spectrum trading regime;
- Issues raised by industry, during the NGBT process, regarding spectrum sharing and pooling (particularly in relation to competition matters) and speedier access to non-harmonised bands;
- The introduction of an appropriate form of open session or multilateral engagement between ComReg and interested parties to facilitate deeper understanding of issues arising; and
- Taking a holistic economic view (including of externalities accruing to society and local economies) in order to reduce the total cost of ownership of spectrum licences for instances where network operators are mandated to build out network infrastructure in rural areas.
Potential Contribution of State Entities

A number of commercial State companies and non-commercial State bodies are already leveraging their existing infrastructure to actively provide infrastructure and services to the telecommunications market. These include Bord Gáis Éireann, the Electricity Supply Board, Iarnród Éireann, Coillte, the National Roads Authority and the Office for Public Works. The MANs which are owned by the State and operated by e|net are also providing middle-mile infrastructure and services for the sector. All of these assets have played an important role in the marked improvement in broadband services in recent years. It has been Government policy for some time that State entities should avail of all opportunities to facilitate the deployment of infrastructure to the telecommunications market. The laying of ducts alongside the Galway to Mayo gas pipeline; ducting as part of sewage works in Tuam; and ducting along national roads and motorways are just some examples of how this policy is being implemented.

Further opportunities may exist and the Government is firmly committed to exploiting any such opportunities with a view to accelerating the rollout of high speed broadband. The Government also recognises that non-commercial State entities may find it more challenging to bring their assets to market and will develop a model to assist these bodies in overcoming such challenges. Accordingly:

- The Minister has asked NewERA to assess the relevant assets owned and operated by State entities, both commercial and non-commercial, with a view to determining the extent to which the opportunities exist to enhance the rollout of high speed broadband on a commercial basis;

- Government Departments are being asked to consider property and other assets owned by the State, which have the potential to assist in the rollout of broadband services. Models for the deployment of key assets owned by non-commercial entities will be explored over the coming months, in consultation with the entities and industry with a view to optimising access for telecoms infrastructure;

- Industry is being asked to consider identifying what gaps exist in relation to infrastructure provision. This will feed into the assessment by NewERA of the role of commercial and non-commercial State entities. This information will also be of relevance to the discussions on planning and road openings in processes that have been established to address those areas.
In relation to the operation of commercial State companies, the Government notes that these companies are obliged to comply with the Government’s Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies, normal competition rules and EU State Aid rules. Commercial State companies must also comply with statutory obligations and are expected by Government to conduct business in line with their commercial mandate. Those commercial companies which operate in the telecommunications market must therefore compete with private sector operators, which encourages market-based pricing.

Where the need for legislation is identified arising out of the findings from the engagement with non-commercial State entities, this legislation will be brought forward.

**Policy and Regulation**

This Plan underlines the importance of some key policy principles required to facilitate an efficient high speed broadband market. Those principles are competition, investment certainty, and Government intervention only in the event of the market’s failure to provide adequate broadband connectivity. Equally important is the need for appropriate, technology neutral, regulation.

Effective regulation of high speed broadband services by ComReg will be key to facilitating innovation and promoting efficient investment by the commercial sector in new and enhanced infrastructure. ComReg, as the independent regulator, will have a key role to play in realising the objective of providing an effective investment regime for the rollout of high speed broadband. While the regulation of the market is a matter for ComReg operating in an independent manner, ComReg is required to exercise this function in accordance with the regulatory framework set out in legislation by the Oireachtas and in accordance with the EU regulatory framework. Having consulted with the industry and a wider audience on the Report of the NGBT, and bearing in mind the current constraints on Exchequer funds, ComReg has been asked to consider any provisions in the regulatory framework which could impede it in prioritising the provision of next generation broadband infrastructure on a commercial basis.
Implementation and Timeline for Delivery

This Plan is a comprehensive strategy to deliver high speed broadband across Ireland ahead of European targets. It is ambitious and covers a wide range of policy actions. The Plan aims to facilitate, as far as possible, early investment by industry and in so doing, to minimise the need for State intervention. It will do this by addressing a range of cross-cutting policy areas. It recognises however that the delivery of high speed broadband will not occur in areas of Ireland where populations are dispersed and the case for commercial investment cannot be made. In committing to this Plan, the Government has signalled its intent to address these gaps through a State funded initiative. The first steps in this regard are:

- The completion of a formal national mapping exercise to determine the exact position in relation to existing and planned broadband services throughout the country. The outcome of this exercise will inform a design and procurement process for State intervention. EU State Aid approval will also be required and will be informed by the mapping exercise. There can be no State intervention in areas covered by the National Broadband Scheme until the expiry of the contract in August 2014. The Government intends that any new initiative will be procured and ready to rollout by that date;

- The NDS will be published by the end of 2012 and will include a series of actions aimed at enhancing digital engagement across all sectors of society, focussing particularly on SMEs; and

- A High Level Implementation Group, chaired by DCENR, will be established to oversee the implementation of the deliverables identified under the various categories in this Plan. This group will include senior representatives from relevant Government Departments and agencies who will be tasked with driving the delivery of actions. The group will report regularly to the Cabinet Subcommittee on Economic Infrastructure on progress made on the delivery of actions identified in this Plan.
This Plan is a milestone in a complex and lengthy process. Telecommunications is a rapidly evolving sector and this Plan will need to be reviewed in light of technical, regulatory, policy and market developments. Further developments can therefore be anticipated, as well as outcomes from the various new work streams that have been identified. The High Level Implementation Group will carefully monitor implementation of this Plan and any changes which will inevitably arise from time to time. This Plan will be implemented in close co-operation with industry and with a range of Government departments and stakeholders. The collective aim is to deliver the full benefits of a digitally enabled society, an aim which can only be achieved where the essential underlying infrastructure is available to all.

This Plan is a comprehensive strategy to deliver high speed broadband across Ireland, ahead of European targets