

DIGITAL HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

NW Sutherland



Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



DIGITAL HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS

YOUR AREA

The Digital Highlands and Islands project is changing the face of broadband connectivity across the region. It is part of a £410m Scotland wide investment to help rural communities and businesses get better connected.

Every part of Scotland wants access to better broadband, but many rural areas wouldn't have been reached by commercial roll-out of fibre. Operators said it wasn't viable to invest in the capital and operating costs.

In the Highlands and Islands, only around one in five homes and businesses will see superfast broadband provided through the market. All of these locations are in our highest population centres.

HIE wants the region to be digitally connected. It is leading a £146m project to take coverage far beyond commercial reach, delivering access to

84% of premises by the end of 2016. Funders include the Scottish Government, Broadband Delivery UK, HIE itself and private sector partners BT, which secured the contract to deliver the project on the ground.

The project is designed to bring better broadband to as many people as possible, as quickly as possible within the budget available. It has also been modelled to reach as deep into the Highlands and Islands areas as possible. It is bringing fibre optic cabling to areas where it has never been installed before.

For HIE, it's about more than infrastructure. Working with partners, and with funding from the European Regional Development Fund, we are delivering a range of workshops, events and business initiatives across the region to help people make the most of being online.



NORTH WEST SUTHERLAND

Work has already started to bring next generation broadband to NW Sutherland.

To get it to the area, we first have to build a high speed core fibre network. which will bring the capacity needed to deliver services.

Without its creation, none of the local cabling can happen which will bring better broadband to people's homes and businesses. It is likely to be 2016 when the first premises can order.

There is significant community interest in what's happening. This newsletter provides an overview of the position at the start of 2015, and details of where residents and groups can keep up to date with progress.

THE CORE NETWORK

The main network could be compared to a fibre highway which provides the core capability vital in bringing next generation broadband access to the area. The NW Sutherland stretch forms a part of almost 750 miles of new network being built across the region, including almost 250 miles of sub-sea fibre linking our island communities.

Its development opens up a whole range of new opportunities for the area. It provides vastly improved data capacity or 'backhaul' which is needed by operators, including fixed and mobile providers, for a wide range of services.

So what about access to broadband?

The main fibre network in itself does not provide the services. When it's in place, the next stage of the project is to build the local access.

This stage of roll-out will see the BT engineers lay more fibre cable locally and build a variety of local structures to provide the services.

The most common structure is a green cabinet. The fibre goes to it and then broadband is delivered through the existing copper telephone wires to people's homes. This is called 'Fibre to

the Cabinet' (FTTC). It works best where homes are closer together, because speed and quality deteriorate as the length of the line from the cabinet increases.

Another way of delivering services is called Fibre to the Premise (FTTP) where fibre goes through nodes and splitters and ultimately directly into the premise.

What about in our area?

It's a bit soon to say exactly which homes will be reached in 2016. Additional survey work carried out when engineers are working in the area will look to maximise coverage.

Initial modelling has been designed to bring the best broadband to as many people as possible.

We have a Digital Scotland interactive map (see 'more info') which gives a broad indication of the areas which currently fall within the local access programme, and the timeframes for roll-out. Areas in NW Sutherland due to see roll-out start in 2016 include Lochinver, Scourie, Kinlochbervie, Durness, Tongue, Bettyhill, and Melvich.

QUESTIONS

The main network is running past my door - can't you just link me in?

Unfortunately no. The main network is designed to provide backhaul. To get services you need to link into a local access network.

I live in an area where roll-out is happening but I'm worried because I don't have a green cabinet close to me or actually I might even be connected to the exchange - does this mean I definitely won't get services?

No. We are building hundreds of new structures as part of the project - they will provide new fibre connections for both those who are currently connected to a cabinet or those who are connected to their exchange for telecoms.

How can I tell if I am going to get it or not?

There are details and maps on the HIE website which give an overview of areas where roll-out is planned, and on progress.

Bringing next generation technology to NW Sutherland is a huge step forward and we anticipate providing access to better broadband for more than 1,000 NW Sutherland premises as part of this roll-out.

Until we start working in your area, and know exactly what your local access network is going to look like, we can't say with certainty which premises will be reached. In every area we look carefully at how we reach as many people as possible.

For places where we can't reach your door in this roll-out, the development of the core fibre network does make finding a solution more likely.

We are working to try to extend the coverage beyond 84%, this includes revisiting the technology we are using, and considering new technology coming through (for instance wireless links to cabinets, or fibre to the remote node) to see if we can deliver services to more people within the area.

We have some really poor broadband just now, surely it would be more efficient to just connect us all just now?

There are many people across the region who would feel the benefit from better broadband. Every community can put forward a strong case. The project has been designed to reach as many of them directly as is possible - but we won't reach everyone in this first phase.

There are places in the Highlands and Islands which are very sparsely populated and/or where homes are significant distances apart. Even with support, the installation and operating costs of FTTC or FTTP technologies aren't the most viable option for the public purse.

This does not mean these homes have been forgotten or we can't help communities look at available options.

As roll-out progresses we are looking at how new technology coming through might help us tackle some of the challenges. And Community Broadband Scotland has been put in place by the Scottish Government to provide support to areas unlikely to benefit from the current roll out.

If broadband is a priority for you as an individual there are commercial options, both fixed and satellite, which may be open to you now.

How can Community Broadband Scotland help in areas where it looks unlikely we will be covered by this roll-out?

Community Broadband Scotland has been established to work with communities least likely to benefit from the Digital Scotland roll-out. Their advisers can work with community groups, or a number of community groups working together, to look at the options for community led broadband initiatives.

CBS can fund up to 89% of capital infrastructure costs for a community broadband scheme. They provide help for communities to get information on the best technical options and with business planning, including identifying if there is sufficient demand to cover operating costs.

CBS is already helping communities, many of whom are bringing people together across quite large geographical areas, to find short and long term solutions for better broadband.

These solutions can be designed to connect into the fibre backhaul when it is available - so you can still benefit from fibre based services - just using a different method.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Interactive Map

www.digitalscotland.org/whereandwhen

Digital Highlands and Islands

www.hie.co.uk/digital

hidigital@hient.co.uk

Community Broadband Scotland

www.communitybroadbandscotland.org