
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
Ministry of Labour, Citizens' Services and Open Government
TELUS

Work to connect rural B.C. underway

VICTORIA – Premier Christy Clark today announced that work has begun to expand connectivity in rural British Columbia under a 10-year strategic telecommunications services contract signed by the Province and TELUS.

“As part of my commitment to making British Columbia stronger and more competitive, we have secured this partnership to help expand high-speed Internet access to every community in the province, extend critical wireless coverage to highway corridors, and upgrade cutting edge communications technology in hundreds of schools and healthcare facilities,” said Premier Clark. “I’m pleased to say work is already underway to make these connections that will bring people better access to education, health information, business and economic opportunities.”

The contract with TELUS, the province’s largest private employer, will save the province an estimated \$400 million over its 10-year term. Under the terms of the contract, TELUS will provide telecommunication services to government and its public sector partners. This leverages rural benefits including the expansion of high-speed Internet in rural and remote communities and the expansion of wireless coverage along highway segments.

“We’re going to see a major expansion of Internet connections in rural and remote parts of the province over the next 10 years,” said Labour, Citizens’ Services and Open Government Minister Margaret MacDiarmid. “Expanding access to high-speed Internet will be an economic driver to rural communities in B.C.”

Since finalizing the contract on July 29, 2011, approximately 245 kilometres of previously unconnected highway segments now have new wireless coverage. Within five years, over 1,700 kilometres of new cellular coverage will be extended along highways across the province. As well, groundwork is in place to connect up to 450 schools with high-speed fibre optic cables over the next 10 years.

Work currently underway includes:

- Maintaining affordable wholesale Internet access for regional and local internet service providers in rural communities, so they can continue to provide local service to rural and remote British Columbians.
- Increasing Internet speeds up to ten-fold in many areas connected under a previous agreement between the Province and TELUS. Increased Internet speeds help regional and local Internet service providers to offer quality Internet to businesses, schools, and citizens.

- Working to address the connectivity needs of three per cent of citizens who live in very remote areas that cannot be served by land-based systems.
- Improving access to wireless services by installing sites providing coverage to more than 1,700 kilometres of primary and secondary highways. TELUS has already installed sites covering 245 km of highway, and expects to turn on at least 10 additional wireless sites by the end of the year. TELUS is working to secure appropriate sites and permits for dozens of additional sites on highway corridors across B.C. that will be complete within the next five years.
 - New wireless services now cover Pine Pass near Tumbler Ridge, Lytton, previously un-connected stretches of Highway 5 Coquihalla (Hope to Kamloops), Highway 97C (Merritt to Kelowna) and Highway 16 (from Terrace to Prince Rupert and Prince George to Terrace).
 - More than half of all 911 calls today are made on wireless phones, making rural highway connection an important public safety enhancement.
- A Strategic Investment Fund is being established, setting out a minimum of \$80 million for projects identified as strategic to transforming and improving service delivery for government, families and businesses around B.C.

“This partnership builds on the \$24.5 billion TELUS has invested across British Columbia since 2000, and will result in a further \$350 million to extend advanced communications technology into rural B.C. over the next decade,” said Darren Entwistle, TELUS President and CEO. “This undertaking is nothing short of transformational and will help to build healthier communities that can compete in the global economy, whilst supporting hundreds of local jobs. Importantly, it will ensure that our youth are able to pursue their ambitions by having equal access to education and that patients across B.C. benefit from new and emerging health care technologies.”

Currently, 93 per cent of British Columbians have access to broadband Internet and the goal is to expand high-speed connectivity to 100 per cent of British Columbians across the province in the next 10 years.

To learn more, please visit Network BC at www.network.gov.bc.ca or the Connecting British Columbia website at http://about.telus.com/community/english/about_us/for_our_customers/connecting_bc_program

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