



Report 08.938
Date December 10 2008
File WRS/09/01/01

Committee Wellington Regional Strategy Committee
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Broadband Update and Regional Broadband Plan

1. Purpose

To update the WRS Committee on progress with the Broadband Project and agree a Broadband Plan for the region that sets out the rationale for and implementation needed to achieve broadband objectives.

2. Significance of the decision

The matters for decision in this report **do not** trigger the significance policy of the Council or otherwise trigger section 76(3) (b) of the Local Government Act 2002.

3. Broadband Investment Fund update

The Government's Broadband Investment Fund (BIF) was last reported to the Committee in August, where the Committee agreed to support a regional Expression of Interest (EOI) to the fund. Councils also agreed to the EOI individually. The region's EOI was submitted on 30 September and was successful. We received approval on 6 November to proceed to the next stage which was to be a full application by the end of February 2009.

However, as a consequence of the General Election, the BIF process was put on hold on 13 November, pending decisions on its future by the new government. We expect that Ministry of Economic Development officials will strongly recommend continuation of the BIF, perhaps with some adjustments to criteria, because it:

- is a logical first phase of a fibre-to-the-home plan, which would need to be staged and implemented over a period of years
- maintains momentum for this infrastructure area that needs urgent attention, and utilises the considerable planning and research already undertaken
- stimulates the inevitable discussions that will be needed with incumbents if duplication of infrastructure is to be minimised
- allows for regional circumstances, such as different potential partners.

Broadband investment remains a flagship project for the National-led government, and there is no indication their enthusiasm is diminished. The issues are more around how it will be implemented and local government's role. Restarting the BIF process "as-is" would be one option. A decision in mid December would add a month to the timeframe. Adjustment of criteria could add 2-3 months in terms of developing them and then allowing for reworking of bids. A complete change would add at least a year, especially if additional consultation was required.

The Broadband Operational Group is continuing with its planning because this work is very likely to be needed whatever the future scenario. In addition to working with potential infrastructure partners we are continuing work on policy changes to facilitate new infrastructure investment, such as allowing access to assets and use of new technologies, and developing consistent RMA approaches across the region. An officer workshop on these issues was held on 1 December.

4. Broadband Plan

The development of fast, affordable broadband in the region is highlighted as a priority for the Wellington Regional Strategy. The Strategy documents however do not contain much detail about the benefits of broadband, the rationale for public sector intervention, or how plans for broadband will actually be implemented.

Even though there is some uncertainty around the final form of central government funding, there is a need to articulate these things so that a discussion in the community around broadband is maintained. In particular, all councils are engaged in the first stages of planning for their 2009-19 Long Term Council Community Plans. Discussing the importance of broadband, and a new role for councils in it, should be part of that process. A Broadband Plan will provide some of that material.

In addition, and as noted above, broadband infrastructure is a clear priority for the new government. A Broadband Plan will assist in working with the Government to achieve common objectives in this area.

The Broadband Operating Group has prepared two regional broadband plan documents for consideration by the Committee.

Attachment 1 contains the recommended Wellington Region Broadband Plan.

Attachment 2 contains the Background Report to the Wellington Region Broadband Plan.

5. Communication

If adopted by the Committee we will publish the plan in the New Year. A media statement will be prepared to go with the release of the plan. The WRS website and the regional broadband website will be updated with a copy of the plan.

6. Recommendations

That the Committee:

1. ***Receives the report.***
2. ***Notes the content of the report.***
3. ***Adopts the Regional Broadband Plan in Attachment 1.***

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Attachment 1: Wellington Region Broadband Plan

Attachment 2: Background Report to the Wellington Region Broadband Plan