

EORN Board - Cell Project Next Steps Key Messages

Overview

- EORN is so pleased that both the federal and provincial governments will each provide one-third of the funding for the \$213 million project, or \$71 million each.
- This is a significant and long-awaited milestone that allow the project to move forward.
- The EOWC and many members of the EOMC are contributing to the \$10 million municipal share. Mobile carriers will provide the balance of the funding.

Goals

- We want people to be connected where they live, work or travel. That means we will improve cell coverage in demand areas, which means where there are major roads, houses or businesses.
- The goal is to have 99% of these demand areas covered so that residents and visitors can make a call on their cellphone or send a text. This is critical to us for basic public safety.
- Across 95% of the demand area we are aiming for coverage that would also allow people to use typical mobile apps and watch standard-definition videos. This is most commonly how people use their smartphones and other devices.
- Across 85% of the demand area, we are aiming for coverage that would allow people to stream HD video. There is less demand for this level of coverage at this time, but we want to start establishing the service level where we can.

How the project works

- EORN will partner with mobile carriers to build new infrastructure. The carriers will be selected through a Request for Proposal process and will deliver the services directly to customers.
- This RFP/procurement process involves issuing the RFP, evaluating the proposals and then negotiating contracts.
- While EORN developed a conceptual design as the basis for costing the project, the final design will depend on the outcome of the RFP process.
- To deliver better services, the project will include some new cell towers, as well as expanding equipment on existing infrastructure and also much smaller sites that project shorter range coverage.
- We also have the foundation in place. EORN built a fibre optic network to improve broadband access across the region. This fibre backbone can also support improved mobile services by providing added capacity to carry the data.

Timeline

- With the funding in place, EORN staff must now work with our federal and provincial partners to sign contribution agreements. This determines the details of what expenses are covered and how the funding will flow to the project.
- We are hoping to have the contribution agreements signed by the end of this year, or early in 2020.
- EORN will then be able to go through the procurement process.
- We expect it to take 12 to 18 months for these steps, and our goal is to have shovels in the ground in 2020 if possible. It will then take about four years to build.
- New coverage will come online throughout the process, but it is far too early in the process to say when certain areas would get improvements.

Q&A

Why are we providing funding to mobile carriers?

- The infrastructure to serve a large, sparsely populated region is costly. Mobile carriers need to have a strong business case to make the investment.
- By partnering and providing some funding, we can improve the business case and help our communities get the mobile broadband coverage they need to thrive.
- We saw with EORN's earlier broadband project that private sector partners contributed more than expected and then went on to invest on their own to expand services – to the tune of about \$100 million.

Will there be more cell towers?

- The only way to deliver better cell service is through more towers. We'll likely need some new towers and some smaller "radio sites," which serve a shorter range and can be less intrusive. There is still a lot of planning before we'll know how many towers will be needed and what type.
- Through the Request for Proposal process, EORN will encourage tower sharing and the use of existing infrastructure to reduce the number of new towers needed.

Who determines where towers go? Are they safe?

- Tower locations are regulated by the federal government and all companies must comply with local zoning by-laws and follow local siting protocols. Council must provide agreement with a tower before it can be built.
- Both Health Canada and the World Health Organization say that the exposure to radio frequency from cell towers is well below any health risk. They are lower than TV and radio towers, which have been around for 50 years or more.