

£1 billion deal to end poor rural mobile coverage agreed

Today [09/03/2020] Ministers and bosses from mobile network operators will meet to sign a £1 billion deal to make poor and patchy rural phone coverage a thing of the past.

The world-first deal will be a huge boost for people across the country in rural areas and will deliver strong 4G coverage irrespective of what network provider people use.

The ambition is to make sure everyone can benefit from fast services on the go – from those running small businesses to people shopping or booking travel online to speaking to friends and family. It will spur economic growth and close the digital divide across the country through better connectivity.

The Shared Rural Network (SRN) is a deal with EE, O2, Three and Vodafone investing in a network of new and existing phone masts, overseen by a jointly owned company called Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited, they would all share.

It will provide guaranteed coverage to 280,000 premises and 16,000km of roads. We can also expect some further indirect improvements over time, including a boost to 'in car' coverage on around 45,000 km of road and better indoor coverage in around 1.2m business premises and homes.

The deal will lead to increases in coverage in some areas by more than a third, with the biggest coverage improvements in rural parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Coverage in Scotland, where there are unique geographical and landscape challenges and sparsely populated areas, will rise from 80% to 91% from at least one operator and from 42% to 74% from all four operators.

It means all four mobile network operators will deliver 95% combined coverage across the whole of the UK by the end of 2025 and consumers can rely on their own provider's network wherever they are.

It follows moves by the government to improve digital infrastructure by making it easier and cheaper for the private sector to deploy faster broadband to the most commercial areas of the country, new legislation to make it easier for telecoms firms to connect blocks of flats, and plans to mandate gigabit-capable connectivity in new build premises.

The government has also pledged £5 billion to subsidise the roll out of gigabit capable broadband in the harder-to-reach areas of the country.

Scotland Secretary Alister Jack said:

This joint UK Government and industry investment of £1 billion is

great news especially for those living in rural areas of Scotland who will be able to get the fast and reliable 4G mobile coverage they need and deserve.

Better mobile connectivity is vital for our daily lives – making flexible working, booking travel, shopping online and communicating with friends and family easier.

We are closing the digital divide, uniting and levelling up our country with superb infrastructure in every corner of the United Kingdom, boosting economic growth.