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**AN BILLE UM BONNEAGAR LEATHANBHANDA 2008**  
**BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE BILL 2008**

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**EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM**

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Modern economies are knowledge driven. Those that prosper are those that are most efficient in transforming raw data into valuable knowledge and profitably using this knowledge. Broadband is a key enabler of this knowledge economy.

Broadband has the potential to transform our economy and society. It can produce efficiency gains in existing sectors, and spur the growth of complementary new sectors. It has the potential to attract inward investment and generate significant economic growth in rural areas. Efficiency gains can also be realised in the public sector, streamlining administration. Moreover, broadband has the potential to improve quality of life. It can advance healthcare and education services, and connect every household in the Republic of Ireland to the world economy.

Ireland is at the bottom of numerous league tables of broadband quality, penetration and price. This represents a key threat to the economy's long term viability. Countries such as Korea and Denmark are already constructing "Next Generation Networks". Meanwhile Ireland still does not have the necessary infrastructure installed to catch up to where these world leaders in Information Communication Technology are now.

This Bill aims to redress this. It provides targets for bringing about high quality broadband coverage nationwide. The Bill also provides targets for broadband uptake which will ensure that broadband becomes more affordable. The Bill establishes a National Broadband Network which will join up and extend existing broadband infrastructure. Use of this network will be kept open for competition between service providers. This network will be expanded and improved in preparation for "Next Generation Networks", and the Bill contains regulatory reforms to prepare the country for these networks.

In addition, a Broadband Commission will be set up to facilitate the objectives of the Bill. The Minister will be held accountable before the Joint Committee if the targets laid out in the Bill are not met.

The Bill also provides a new way for the Board of the Network to be chosen. They will be chosen by the Minister according to their expertise in this field. Their names will go before the Joint Commit-

tee on Communications, Energy and Natural Resources for ratification. A two thirds majority of the Joint Committee will be required to ratify each member.

*Seanadóirí Shane Ross, Feargal Ó Coinn, David Norris, Seosamh Ó Tuathail, Rónán Ó Maoláin, Ivana Bacik, Feabhra, 2008.*