

NBI
Opening Statement for JOC
18th November 2020

Thank you Chair and a very good morning to the Committee. It is our pleasure to be welcomed here today.

My name is Peter Hendrick and I'm the Chief Executive Officer at National Broadband Ireland – or NBI, as you'll hear us referred to.

I would like to start by thanking the Committee for the invitation to speak with you all today, and I'm pleased to introduce my colleagues TJ Malone, who heads up the Deployment of the NBI network, and Tara Collins, our chief marketing officer overseeing all stakeholder and community relations.

Our Chairman, David McCourt, has asked me to extend his apologies as he was not able to attend today.

On 19th November last year, NBI signed contracts with the Government to deliver the new fibre network under the National Broadband Plan, which is widely recognised as one of the most ambitious projects of its kind globally. On the 9th January this year, the contract came into effect and we commenced with boots on the ground.

The vision of the NBP is clear. It is about making sure that every home, business and farm in Ireland has access to this vital service.

It will also ensure rural communities get the same access to opportunities offered by high-speed broadband as those in urban areas. This includes offering the same connection cost and benchmarking the same quality and speed of service for rural communities as urban areas would benefit from.

This is a project of tremendous size and scale:

- It will serve over 1.1 million people in Ireland with world-leading, future-proofed high-speed fibre broadband.
- There will be approximately 544,000 premises available to connect to high-speed broadband, including homes, schools, businesses and farms.

At NBI, we are incredibly proud to be delivering the fibre network under the National Broadband Plan, which holds such significant national importance.

Our passion for delivering Ireland's new high-speed broadband network is what brings everyone at NBI together. We believe that better broadband networks promote social progress, equality and sustainability. With equal access to local, national and global opportunity, every person, community and organisation in Ireland will be empowered to achieve more.

Having commenced activities in January, NBI has made significant progress in mobilising our team and sub-contractors in the deployment of the NBP network, all of which has taken place during the most difficult circumstances presented by Covid-19 restrictions over that period.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us, the way we live, work and educate has changed forever, and access to reliable, scalable, high-speed connectivity is vital today and for generations to come.

Over the course of the last few months, we have seen unprecedented adoption of new technologies and applications which rely on access to reliable connectivity. For so many of us, it will have been the first time we've ever worked from home. 'Zoom' was just a word, now nine months later, it's synonymous with communication. But it doesn't end there. The way our children have accessed schooling; the way vital healthcare services have been delivered; the way in which we purchase food and goods. This has all been fast-tracked to move online.

We strongly recognise that Covid-19 has accelerated demand for reliable, high-speed broadband. We want to assure the Committee that at NBI we take this very seriously and I will talk more about our efforts in a moment. Our commitment is to be part of Ireland's recovery.

The pandemic has created challenges for NBI in a number of areas:

- Key contractors have restricted operations and in one case, a specialist UK contractor was forced to postpone its Irish operations.
- The availability of accommodation for contractors to work across the country has not been there.
- Access to certain premises and locations including the islands has not been possible for long periods.
- Equipment and material supply chains have been impacted from overseas suppliers.
- And the recruitment and integration of personnel as we and our sub-contractors scale our operations has undoubtedly been more difficult.

I am pleased to be here today, reporting that as a result of the mitigation measures that NBI has put in place to minimise the impact of Covid-19 delays, we have been able to progress our rollout and hit significant milestones.

To put this into context as of today:

- Over 800 people are now employed to work on the National Broadband Plan project.
- We have boots on the ground in all 26 counties.
- We have 132,000 premises surveyed.
- Detailed designs have been conducted for 92,000 premises.
- We have commenced network build to the first 19,500 premises.
- Our first Fibre to the Home services will be delivered this year.
- 200 Broadband Connection Points across 26 counties have been connected, including 36 schools.
- We have signed up 33 Retail Service Providers who will provide services to consumers and businesses on the NBI network – creating competition and choice from day one.

Last month, we were delighted to launch the first 50 of 200 Broadband Connection Points, working with the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications. The BCPs represent a major milestone in the rollout of the NBP and will provide free public access to high-speed connectivity at community facilities in every county.

NBI's priority is to keep operations on track, despite the challenging environment caused by Covid-19. The progress made to-date and the recovery strategies we've put in place where necessary, give us confidence not only to meet future milestones, but also put the project in a strong position for acceleration.

I would like to assure the Committee that we are exploring every possible option to accelerate, and it remains a clear ambition for NBI to deliver the fibre network for the NBP in the shortest feasible time. We spend a lot of time engaging with local communities and we see first-hand how essential and urgent connectivity has become.

NBI has committed dedicated resources to independently evaluate the opportunities for acceleration and formulate our plan. We continue to work closely with the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications in this regard.

I would also like to take the opportunity to put this project into context with what's happening elsewhere in Europe, and also give some context to our commitment to future-proof the NBP network, which has been a critical objective of the project since its inception.

Broadband connectivity is of significant strategic importance for European growth and innovation in all sectors of the economy, as well as for social progress. Because of this, the EU Commission strongly supports initiatives which align with its Digital Agenda.

I would stress that because of Ireland's National Broadband Plan, Ireland stands to lead the way in Europe in the provision of high-speed broadband. Ireland is currently ranked in the top five fastest growing markets in Europe for delivering high-speed broadband networks.

Over the next 24 months, the NBP network will reach in excess of 200,000 premises. To put this into context, Ireland will have almost 90% of premises across the entire country with access to high-speed broadband.

In addition, the NBP network will launch with a minimum service of 500Mbps (download), exceeding the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) target, which has a goal set for 2025 to provide at least 100Mbps to all European households.

Meeting the needs of a digital economy has accelerated significantly over the last 12 months, and this network will place Ireland years ahead of other European countries in the provision of high-speed broadband and will empower a truly limitless Ireland.

I welcome the opportunity to take questions from the Committee.