

Nations around the world make access to free high-speed broadband “a legal right”

by [John Kennedy](#)



Communications Minister Denis Naughten TD said that as soon as the National Broadband Plan begins in 2017, the next step will be a new USO

Unlike the UK, which has stalled at 10Mbps, new Communications Minister Denis Naughten TD has said that when Ireland’s National Broadband Plan rolls out in 2017, the next step will be a revised USO to make access to a minimum of 30Mbps broadband an “enforceable right.”

The minister said that there are plans in place to revise the current 40-year-old universal service obligation (USO) for telephony services across Ireland from basic copper telephony to a minimum of 30Mbps broadband speeds once the [National Broadband Plan](#) begins to be rolled out.

[The €275m plan](#) – supported by EU state aid – will fund operators to compete to deliver a guaranteed minimum of 30Mbps download speeds and 6Mbps upload speeds with 99.95pc uptime. The plan

covers 750,000 postal addresses and some 1.8m citizens, including 1,522 primary schools, 96,000 farms, 64,440 non-farm businesses and ultimately 38pc of the working population.

‘We want to ensure people have access to broadband as a right. I want it as an enforceable right’

– MINISTER DENIS NAUGHTEN

In a meeting with journalists at Leinster House yesterday (1 June), the new Minister for Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources, Denis Naughten TD, said that in the coming month the shortlist of five consortia competing for the rollout of the National Broadband Plan will be decided.

Each will then receive a book of (Eircode) addresses five-and-a-half inches thick to enable them to provide detailed plans for how they will deliver the minimum of 30Mbps to every home in the broadband intervention area.

The [original plan](#) had been to begin procurement by the middle of 2016 and bring broadband to 85pc of premises by 2018 and 100pc by 2020. However, it emerged that [procurement will not now begin until 2017](#) and it could be three-to-five years (2022 at the outset) before the plan is fully delivered.

Minister Naughten said that the process to decide the winners will be thorough but by June next year contracts will be rewarded and at least 60pc of homes in broadband-deprived areas will receive a connection by 2019.

He said that while 2022 could be the final date for the final premises to be connected, officials will be weighing up all the plans and it could be possible some operators may be able to complete the project sooner. But they will have to guarantee this in the contract or face stiff financial penalties if they fail to deliver on time.

Overall, 32 companies have bid for the contract(s) to roll out the plan, including Eir, SIRO (Vodafone/ESB), Enet, Imagine and Gigabit.

Broadband as a right



Denis Naughten TD, Minister for Communications, Climate Change and Natural Resources

One unexpected but logical development to emerge from the meeting with the minister is that the USO currently on the shoulders of the incumbent operator Eir is likely to be revised as the plan gets underway to reflect a digitally-connected 21st-century Ireland.

In effect, the USO that guaranteed a minimum copper telephony connection for every home that has served the country of Ireland for the last 40 years will be adjusted to a USO that guarantees a minimum of 30Mbps for every premise in the country.

Naughten said he and his department are watching closely developments in the EU, including a new draft directive on infrastructure that will ensure that all buildings in Europe will have fibre ducting.

“Our number one priority is to get these contracts signed next June. We need to put the infrastructure in place first. But a legal right to high-speed broadband is the outcry and it needs to be done. The difficulty is defining a USO will only apply to what everybody else has at the moment, and that average is low, and we need to set this at a level to ensure we meet existing and future requirements.

“We want to ensure people have access to broadband as a right. Having a USO is critical, just like electricity, broadband should be a right and I want it as an enforceable right.

“There needs to be a change at EU level to facilitate putting in place a USO that is meaningful.

“People are sick and tired of hollow promises,” said Naughten, who comes from Roscommon, where 60pc of the county is in the intervention area of the National Broadband Plan. The next worst-affected county is Galway, where 50pc of the county is in the plan’s remit.

“We need to bring in new legislation and the focus is to get these contracts signed in June and get the support of the local authorities. Once the contract is signed then we will look at putting that legislation in place.

“We will still need to revise the USO even if there is a network deficit. We will need to roll out the infrastructure as quickly as possible and then set out a legal obligation.”

Naughten said that, unlike the UK, which has stopped at 10Mbps as a minimum standard, the USO will need to serve home and business owners in Ireland for the next 30 or 40 years and that 30Mbps is the baseline.

“We want to ensure people have access to broadband as a right,” Naughten said. “I want it as an enforceable right.”

Data caps are a monopoly control lie - not a network necessity, Frontier CEO admits

Frontier has no plans for usage-based Internet billing, CEO tells investors.

by [Jon Brodtkin](#)

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Fun fact: This is what a data transfer looks like when you're inside an Internet tube.

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Frontier Communications, newly expanded after purchasing Verizon wireline networks in three states, says it has no plans to impose Comcast-style data overage charges.

"We have not really started or have any intent about initiatives around usage-based pricing," CEO Daniel McCarthy told investors Wednesday at the Bernstein Strategic Decisions Conference. "We want to make sure our product meets the needs of customers for what they want to do, and it doesn't inhibit them or force them to make different decisions about how they're going to use the product."

Further Reading



Verizon warns FiOS user over “excessive” use of unlimited data

7TB monthly on 500Mbps plan brings letter threatening service disconnection.

FierceTelecom has a [story](#) about McCarthy's comments, and [audio is available here](#).

McCarthy noted that networks are facing fewer capacity constraints as technology improves and data transport costs decline. Therefore, Frontier isn't necessarily making pricing decisions based upon its own costs per megabit. Instead, the company prices Internet service based on what's competitive in the market, generally charging less than cable companies, he said.

"There may be a time when usage-based pricing is absolutely the right solution for the market, but I don't see that as the path the market is taking at this point in time," he said.

With unlimited data, customers might be inclined to purchase standalone broadband service and "cut the cord with a cable company because we give them the right product to do that," McCarthy said.

Data caps have been a contentious issue with customers and regulators. Comcast has angered customers with its caps, but recently the company raised the limits from 300GB to 1TB per month and limited data overage fees to a [maximum of \\$200 a month](#). Charter, which just purchased Time Warner Cable to become the nation's second largest broadband provider after Comcast, is barred from imposing data caps and overage fees for seven years as a result of [conditions](#) imposed on the merger by federal regulators.

Verizon hasn't officially imposed caps on its fiber-based FiOS home Internet service. Although it isn't charging data overage fees, Verizon has threatened to disconnect customers over "[excessive usage](#)." Verizon's unofficial caps are 10TB a month on FiOS and 1.5TB on DSL, according to a [DSLReports story last year](#).

Frontier's recent purchase of Verizon networks in California, Florida, and Texas gave the company an additional 2.1 million Internet customers, nearly doubling its subscriber base. Frontier also gained 3.3 million phone customers and 1.2 million TV customers in the transition that happened April 1.

The transition did not go well, as [about 30,000 customers](#) may have lost service. Frontier [told lawmakers in California](#) that problems were caused by corruptions in data taken from Verizon. The missing data prevented Frontier's network from communicating properly with equipment at customers' homes, making it impossible to provision service to everyone.

McCarthy discussed the problems Wednesday, saying there were "22,000 potential gaps in the data" among 440 million lines of data extracted from Verizon. Frontier had to figure out what caused the problem, extract the entire data set again, and sync it properly with Frontier's systems, but McCarthy said the data problems are now resolved.

[Rainbow image](#) via Shutterstock

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