



Media Release
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Council seeks improved internet and mobile phone coverage

Selwyn District Council has lodged an application with the government to improve broadband and mobile phone services in Selwyn.

The Council has lodged three separate requests as part of a registration of interest for the government's ultra-fast fibre broadband fund, its rural broadband initiative and mobile black spot fund.

The Council's application supports using rural broadband initiative funding to improve internet services in the area to be covered by the Central Plains Water irrigation scheme. The scheme will cover a 60,000 hectare area once fully developed, and will irrigate most of the Canterbury plains area north of State Highway One between the Rakaia and Waimakariri River. It is expected to have a wider economic impact of between \$1 billion and \$1.4 billion and create 1,130 jobs.

The Council undertook a survey during May of Selwyn households and businesses. Of the 634 responses to the survey, 54% came from rural or lifestyle areas. People in these areas experienced the slowest internet speeds, with 40% of people experiencing speeds of 3mpbs or less and households and businesses reporting they found it difficult to work from home, use business or farm software, download files, watch videos or using Skype.

Selwyn District Council Chief Executive David Ward says that as the Central Plains Water scheme is rolled out there will be a need for farms to have access to sophisticated software to monitor and input data needed for water and farm management. "The scheme is projected to boost Selwyn's economy significantly and create many new jobs. Improved broadband services will be necessary for farms and local businesses to be able to operate efficiently once the scheme starts operating."

The Council's application seeks to prioritise broadband improvements so that they occur alongside the staged development of the scheme.

The ultra-fast broadband application requests that the government expands and improves service to Darfield/Kirwee and Leeston/Southbridge, and also requests that the existing Lincoln ultra-fast broadband service be extended to include Tai Tapu. Currently Rolleston and Lincoln are the only areas of Selwyn to have access to ultra-fast fibre broadband. The application to extend ultra-fast broadband to Tai Tapu also seeks to extend the service to cover new subdivisions at the eastern end of Lincoln. Lincoln and Tai Tapu's population is expected to grow from around 6,500 now to nearly 10,000 by 2025. Lincoln is also identified as a hub for education, industry and research and the expansion of research and industry will create demand for new housing in Lincoln and nearby Tai Tapu.

Darfield and Kirwee are expected to grow from around 4,100 now to reach over 5,000 by 2025. The development of Central Plains Water is expected to increase the number of new businesses and workers locating in these areas. Leeston and Southbridge's population is

expected to grow from around 3,200 now to 3,800 by 2025 and the towns act as service centres for agriculture and an expanding local population.

The survey results found that 34% of people from Selwyn townships outside of Rolleston and Lincoln had internet speeds of 3mpbs or less and experienced issues using the internet for some business or leisure activities.

The Council has also applied to the government's mobile black spot fund to improve mobile phone coverage along State Highway 73 between Springfield and Otira.

"This route is a busy tourist highway, and during the winter it is used by thousands of skiers to visit the six ski fields located in Selwyn. From the perspective of civil defence and emergency services it is critical that mobile coverage be provided along this route due to the risk of traffic accidents and ski accidents. There is also the risk of an earthquake occurring along the alpine fault line. Should this occur it is also critical that mobile coverage be provided so that contact can be made with communities living in this area and contractors working to reopen the road," says Mr Ward.

Upgrades are already planned by Chorus as part of the rural broadband initiative during the second half of 2015 at Windwhistle, Greendale, Bankside and Southbridge and at Springfield in May 2016. An upgrade to the Kirwee internet exchange was completed by Chorus in June 2015.

As part of its application the Council will also prepare a Digital Enablement Plan, to identify how the Council can assist in digital engagement and increase the uptake of fast broadband.

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