

Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

Submission Cover Sheet

Submission Information

This cover sheet should be attached to submissions made to the Department of Communications in relation to the Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper.

Contact Details

Name of respondent:	Sally Block
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Confidentiality and privacy

All submissions and comments, or parts thereof, will be treated as non-confidential information unless specifically requested, and acceptable reasons should accompany each request. Email disclaimers will not be considered sufficient confidentiality requests.

Respondents lodging a submission should be aware that submissions (excluding any information agreed to be treated as confidential information) will be made publicly available, including on the Department of Communications' website. Submissions and comments will be subject to freedom of information provisions. Despite a submission being identified as confidential or sensitive, submissions may be disclosed where authorised or required by law, or for the purpose of parliamentary processes.

Do you want all or parts of the submission to be treated as confidential? Yes No

If yes, identify below which parts of the submission are to be treated as confidential (and provide a reason):

If the submission contains personal information of any third party individual, indicate on this Submission Cover Sheet if that third party individual has not consented to the publication of his or her personal information:

Submission Instructions

Submissions are to be made by **5:00pm (AEST) Friday 28 February 2014**.

Where possible, submissions should be lodged electronically, preferably in Microsoft Word or other text-based formats via the email address mobilecoverage@communications.gov.au

Alternatively, submissions can be sent to the postal address below (to arrive by the due date):

The Manager
Mobile Coverage Programme
Department of Communications
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2615

All submissions lodged will be acknowledged by the Department of Communications by email (or by letter if no email is provided). Respondents lodging a submission who do not receive acknowledgement of their submission should contact the Department. Submissions which are not acknowledged by the Department as being received may not be considered. Respondents should be aware that emails greater than 10Mb may not be successfully delivered.

Gidgegannup Progress Association (Inc.)

Working with the Community – For the Community



23rd February, 2014

The Manager,
Mobile Coverage Programme,
Department of Communications
GPA Box 2154,
Canberra,
ACT 2615

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re.: Mobile Coverage Programme Discussion Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this Discussion Paper. Gidgegannup is an Outer Metropolitan area in the City of Swan. It is situated some 40 kms from Perth and covers an area of 333.5kms square. It has a population of about 2300 and mainly consists of farming properties, rural subdivisions, National Park and a small townsite. About 1000 of our population is concentrated in the rural residential subdivisions and townsite, the rest of the population is scattered throughout the 333.5 kms square.

Main Transport Routes: It has two main transport routes traversing it:

-The Toodyay Road – 64kms long from Midland to Toodyay and servicing all communities en route and the wheatbelt towns beyond Toodyay.

-The railway connecting Perth to the Eastern States.

The area is heavily vegetated, in places very hilly with deep valley systems and in parts remote, most of it has been formally declared a Bushfire Prone Area with an EXTREME rating. Landlines are in many places overhead and generally quite aged and becoming increasingly unreliable. Repairs to landlines can take weeks instead of days. The area is subject to power outages.

The existing telecommunications infrastructure consists of ADSL connection to some of the subdivisions surrounding the townsite; satellite connection that, although reliable, is now no longer available as all slots have been used up on the Satellite; and one Telstra telecommunications tower situated just to the west of the townsite. This tower has limited range and those on the fringe of it are subjected to constant dropouts and slow service. Speed tests show that the coverage is fragmented and unreliable. It appears that the tower has, on many occasions, reached the limit of

its bandwidth. It only has Telstra equipment on it, which means that there is only one expensive provider.

The service from this tower has deteriorated significantly in the last year. Prior to that areas on the fringe could get an adequate service by using external antenna and repeaters. Many people have purchased this equipment and had it installed at quite an expense, only to find, now, that it is mostly useless.

The community has complained to Telstra on many occasions over the last few months and eventually Telstra did check the tower to find it was faulty. Having "mended" it, the coverage has not improved significantly

Business: Gidgegannup is home to many small studs and farming properties. Telecommunications are important to them for business purposes and for safety reasons. There are also many home businesses in this area who need telecommunications to run and grow their businesses. There is no public transport in Gidgegannup so people either have to commute or run their businesses from home, sometimes a combination.

Tradesmen visiting the area are disadvantaged by the poor mobile coverage.

Education in Gidgegannup is confined to a primary school. Students need to travel to High School and University, many of them needing to study at home. This is difficult and, at times, impossible because of the poor telecommunications. This is affecting their education.

High Fire Risk: Almost all of Gidgegannup has been formally declared Bush Fire Prone in accordance with WA Government guidelines, and in response to the recommendations of the Keelty enquiry into the Perth Hills Bush Fires 2011. By far the majority has been rated as EXTREME fire risk as part of this process.

Limited and patchy mobile phone coverage means that fires may not be reported quickly, leading to delayed emergency response. In particular local Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades rely heavily on mobile phone/SMS to turn out crews. Poor phone services mean it will be much harder to warn and check on the welfare of neighbours, particularly in the more isolated areas where time and distance means physically travelling and checking may not be practicable at the time. These issues are life and death and a reliable and consistent coverage is essential for safety reasons.

Emergency Alert: (ref www.emergencyalert.gov.au) This is one of the primary means by which Emergency Services may warn residents in a defined area who are under imminent threat, particularly from bush fire, and for providing advice on immediate actions they should take to ensure their survival. This relies on landline and mobile phone services to deliver voice and SMS emergency information. Landline is becoming increasingly unreliable, and is very frequently severely affected during a bush fire, particularly in the immediate area where the warnings are most needed. Patchy mobile coverage also severely inhibits effective distribution of Emergency Alerts.

Accident: Gidgegannup has long winding roads, hilly terrain and extensive tracts of bush with very little mobile coverage. These roads are popular with tourists, car clubs on rallies, motorbikes and cyclists, and inevitably accidents occur and it is usually a resident who finds the accident and has to sort it out. The same is true of accidents on farming properties and in the Walyunga National Park.

This is quite challenging when there is no mobile coverage as it means leaving the “victim” to get help. It also means that help can be quite a long time coming.

Communications for the elderly: Many of our residents are elderly and are ineligible for a Seniors’ fuel card as they are in an Outer Metropolitan area. There is no public transport, so they rely on telecommunications to keep in touch with their families and friends, and for families and friends to check on them. This is difficult with our poor mobile coverage. Gidgegannup is an area where your nearest neighbour can be a kilometre away so reliable communications are essential for the community to function adequately.

Transport Routes: Both the Toodyay Road and the Railway line have intermittent coverage and at times non-existent. This is dangerous in the case of accident. There have been cases of motorists running off the road and not being found until the next day. There has also been a case that the driver of a train was unable to be contacted for several minutes when his train was distributing sparks along the railway line, causing fires that then spread and burnt out a large area of the National Park as well as causing fires that threatened properties. This is totally unacceptable.

Our local roads are not very well mapped and visitors can get lost quite easily and then find that they have no mobile coverage to get help.

Programme Funding: We note that the Mobile Network Expansion Project aims to improve mobile coverage along major transport routes, in small communities and in areas that are prone to experiencing natural disasters. Gidgegannup qualifies in all these three categories:

- Poor coverage on major transport routes – Toodyay Road and Railway, dangers of fire, breakdown and accident. Road carrying a large amount of truck traffic mixed with commuters.
- Our community is small and relatively isolated with most people reliant upon mobile phone coverage for reliable and consistent internet and phone coverage.
- High Fire risk area with all the dangers that are inherent and the need for fast and reliable coverage in order to mitigate the risk and be made aware of it.

As a community, we would request that consideration be given for Gidgegannup to be included in the Mobile Network Expansion Project so that we can live more safely, develop and run our businesses, our children and young people can receive the educational benefits available from the internet and we can interact more easily in our community and with the outside world.

Yours faithfully,

Sally Block
Chairperson
Gidgegannup Progress Association Inc.