

I am particularly concerned that the plans for BT's 21CN network will not go far in addressing any universal broadband obligation or indeed the speed in the rural areas of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, let alone any plan for FTTH or FTTC.

Recently there have been widespread deployment of a next generation network by Cable and Wireless as part of the Pathfinder North (www.pathfindernorth.co.uk) project for local authorities in this area, and would be interested to know whether government would allow use of this network to deliver high speed services to homes and businesses in this area, or whether government can engage with Cable and Wireless to deliver services using the infrastructure to offer higher-speeds.

BT's 21CN doesn't address the speed or coverage element in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, and any proposals to extend this coverage and speed availability would be welcome.

The dangers is that yet again a two-tier geographic approach to broadband will once again affect rural areas, where services such as broadband is even more important than urban areas already benefiting from LLU and BT's plans.

We've only just got to a point in the larger towns in the Highlands and Islands that are on a par with the 8Mbps services on offer elsewhere in the UK (although there are still many exchanges on Exchange Activate limited to 512Kbps).

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