

Digital Connectivity Project Update #3

Site Selection and Preparations

Field Solutions Group, the appointed network operator for the Balonne Digital Connectivity Project, has now completed all geo technical studies and soil sampling for the new tower sites.

Updates on the final locations of towers will be made available by Field Solutions Group by 31 October 2020.



Towers have landed in Australia

The towers are manufactured offshore and have now arrived in Australia. The first stage of construction is the foundation work. It is expected that foundation work will commence the week beginning 19 October 2020.



Retail Plans and Next Steps

When the construction phase is complete, the infrastructure will be owned and operated by Field Solutions Group. The network will provide wholesale broadband to retailers i.e. internet service provider (ISP) who offer the internet plans to end-users (customers).

Field Solutions Group will run update in-community information sessions in the Balonne Shire approximately November 2020.

For full details on retail plans and FSG's latest updates visit <https://fieldsolutions-group.com/2020/10/18/balonne/>

Note: There may already be fixed wireless solutions available to end-users (customers), or, other internet solutions available, end-users will need to make their own decision on which plans and ISPs they want to utilise for their homes or businesses. Council has no commercial relationship with any ISP. Before relying on any information or offers made by an ISP, end-users must undertake the necessary due diligence.

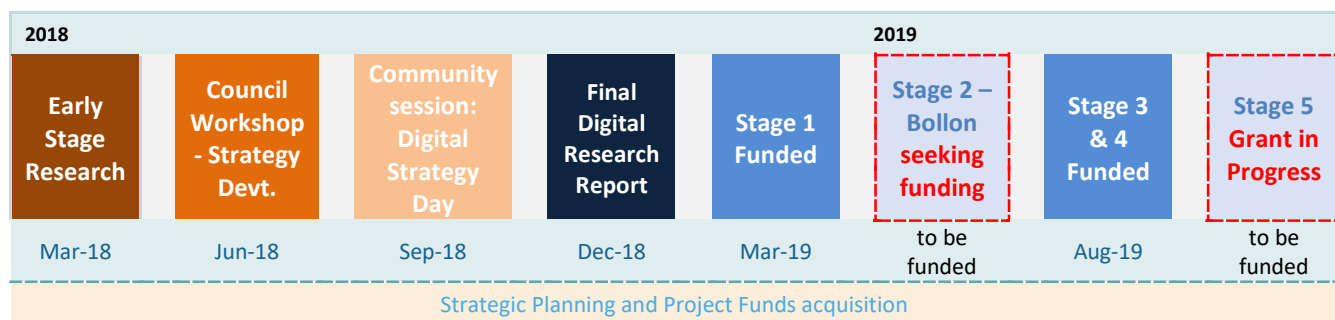
Background

The Balonne Shire Council Digital Connectivity Project is a strategic and staged approach that focuses on the area of internet connectivity. An added benefit of the project could be the possibility to investigate the use of the towers for further connectivity upgrades and IOT (Internet of Things) gateways.

This update #2 focuses on the funded stages of the project which are stages 1, and stages 3 and 4. Stage 1 is proudly funded by the Queensland Government's Building Our Regions program. Stages 3 and 4 have been made possible with funding by the Australian Government under the Murray–Darling Basin Economic Development Program.

Solving digital connectivity is strategic priority, however it requires ongoing lobbying and funding to become a reality. The table below shows a timeline of the progress for the first five stages of the project. Council has submitted two separate grants for Stage 2 Bollon and awaits news on the Cross-Border Commissioner Infrastructure fund for Stage 5 (Mungindi-Thallon link and Mungindi-Hebel). Stage 5 is an important part of the model as it is proposed to provide redundancy and backhaul for the entire Balonne and Moree network.

Figure 1 - Digital Connectivity Planning Timeline



What is the project about?	<p>A strategic approach to solve digital connectivity issues in the Shire, involving the construction of backbone infrastructure and technology to deliver internet connectivity into the Shire, that is, up to 45m towers and asset re-use such as water towers and grain silos.</p> <p>Council facilitated the delivery of this project by sourcing funding and Council will provide overall project management and oversight. Once each stage is complete, the infrastructure will be owned and operated by the appointed network operator, Field Solutions Group (FSG). The network will provide wholesale broadband to internet service provider (ISP) retailer(s) who provide retail internet plans.</p> <p>Fixed wireless is the type of internet solution. Symmetrical bandwidth will be available, with guaranteed speeds and unlimited usage.</p>
Where can I find out information on retail plans?	<p>Information on retail plans will be made available by Field Solutions Group regarding the approved ISP retailer(s) for their network. There may already be fixed wireless solutions available to end-users (customers), or, other internet solutions available and therefore end-users will need to make their own decision on which plans and ISPs they want to utilise for their homes or businesses and undertake the necessary due diligence when selecting any retail plans. Council has no commercial relationship with any ISP.</p> <p>Go to the following FSG website for more information, including indicative retail plan information https://fieldsolutions-group.com/2020/10/18/balonne/</p>
What are the confirmed stages?	<p>Stage 1 – St George, Dirranbandi, Hebel and Thallon¹</p> <p>Stage 3 – MDBEDP² defined areas (St George surrounds)</p> <p>Stage 4 – MDBEDP defined areas (Dirranbandi surrounds)</p> <p>¹ Final Stage 1 design (including tower-POP locations) depends on land access negotiations</p> <p>² MDBEDP – Murray–Darling Economic Development Program (Australian Government).</p>
What about the other stages?	<p>Grants are being actively sought for additional stages. An announcement on Stage 5 – Mungindi-Thallon is expected by 30 October 2020.</p>
What is the project value?	<p>\$2 million grant for three (3) stages + Field Solutions Group contribution.</p>
Where will the towers be located?	<p>Exact tower locations will be confirmed by the end of October 2020. Towers/POPs will be both 'in' townships and 'out of town' on rural lands (as negotiated). There will be twelve (12) points of presence in stage 1, 3 and 4.</p>
How long does it take to build the towers?	<p>The towers are expected to be built by 31 December 2020, with a contingency of 28 February 2021 due to Covid-19.</p>

How will I know if I can get fixed wireless coverage from the network towers?	Line of sight and the distance from the proposed tower are the key factors in determining end-user coverage. That is, the signal must be transmitted, without obstacles interrupting the signal, from the backbone tower to your location (out of town this may require 'getting up above the tree line' in some cases). Consultation and detailed coverage modelling on coverage options will be the next step.
What about IOT and LoRaWAN® ?	The LoRaWAN® is not a 'connectivity solution'. Business needs now, and, into the future, may require a good, strong reliable connection, in addition to, LoRaWAN®. The LoRaWAN® specification is a Low Power, Wide Area (LPWA) networking protocol designed to wirelessly connect battery operated 'things' to the internet. FSG have advised they will encourage partnerships, with third party technology partners, to access the new infrastructure to provide further services to the community.
What if I am out of the "line of sight" of the tower / POP?	There may still be options for those locations that are out of the footprint covered by the towers / infrastructure. Additionally, Council continues to seek funding for parts of the Shire that are not covered in the currently funded stages.

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