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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
2021CITZ0031-000814  
May 3, 2021

Ministry of Citizens' Services

### **More cellular service for B.C. highways**

VICTORIA – Improved cellular service is coming to B.C. highways 95 and 97 as record investments from the Connecting British Columbia program continue to benefit people throughout the province.

“While miles apart, these two highways have many things in common. They can have difficult winter driving conditions, they’re prone to sudden road closures and they have large gaps without cellular service,” said Lisa Beare, Minister of Citizens’ Services. “We can’t change the weather, but we can make strategic investments to help expand highway cellular service in B.C. With these latest projects, we are on track to more than triple our target to increase highway cellular coverage, making our highways safer than ever before.”

Rogers will receive up to \$5.47 million from the Connecting British Columbia program toward the estimated \$6.4-million cost of filling in cellular gaps along 68 kilometres of Highway 97 between Chetwynd and the Highway 39 junction. The route includes Pine Pass, a sparsely populated area prone to avalanche conditions. Cellular service will also be made available at the West Pine rest area and Powder King Mountain Resort.

“Our world is becoming more and more connected, and we want to be sure that people using our rural transportation networks can fully capitalize on that connectivity. Investments like these, combined with the improved safety and access to services that cellular and Wi-Fi provides, will help our regional economies recover and thrive in the post-pandemic world,” said Roly Russell, Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development. “Working together, we can ensure the incredible benefits of technology can be enjoyed by everyone in B.C.”

Jayde Duranleau, youth councillor with the McLeod Lake Indian Band, said: “This new cellular coverage will benefit northern communities and will provide much-needed safety and cell service to a long stretch of highway. The coverage is essential and will bring peace of mind to our commuters and community members who regularly use the highway.”

Rogers will also receive \$774,000 from the Connecting British Columbia program to upgrade cellular service along Highway 95 between Golden and Spillimacheen. This work will include improved coverage at the Braisher Creek rest area and in the communities of Nicholson, Parson and Harrogate.

The Connecting British Columbia program was expanded in September 2020 as part of StrongerBC: BC’s Economic Recovery Plan. For the first time in the program’s history, a mandate was included to improve access to cellular for people in rural and Indigenous communities.

“Rogers is proud to continue investing in British Columbia on these highway connectivity

projects to build critically needed 5G networks to bridge the digital divide in partnership with the B.C. government,” said Dean Prevost, president, Connected Home and Rogers for Business. “Connecting Canadians, including rural, remote and Indigenous communities, is a top priority for Rogers. Through this partnership, we are providing improved safety and reliable connectivity for those who depend on highways 95 and 97, while creating new jobs and supporting B.C.’s economy.”

Funding from the expanded program has successfully encouraged the expansion of cellular service along 429 kilometres of highways throughout the province, increasing safety and convenience for people travelling along routes like Highway 14 on Vancouver Island and Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George.

The Connecting British Columbia program provides grants that help service providers with the cost of expanding connectivity and making it more reliable in rural and Indigenous communities. The program is delivered by Northern Development Initiative Trust.

“Investing in infrastructure that improves lives for people in rural communities is imperative as B.C. begins its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Joel McKay, CEO, Northern Development Initiative Trust. “Assets like cell towers make our highways safer and more productive while making it easier for people to access services, from health care to emergency response. Northern Development is pleased to support this work that assists rural and Indigenous communities now and into the future.”

The highways 95 and 97 cellular projects are expected to be completed by October 2021.

#### **Quick Facts:**

StrongerBC included a one-time \$90-million grant to the Connecting British Columbia program in support of expanding high-speed internet access and cellular in rural and Indigenous communities.

#### **Learn More:**

StrongerBC: BC’s Economic Recovery Plan: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>

Connecting British Columbia program: <https://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/fundingprograms/partner-programs/connecting-british-columbia>

Connectivity in B.C.: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/connectivity-in-bc>

A backgrounder follows.

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## BACKGROUND

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### **What people are saying about highways 95 and 97 cellular**

#### **Karen Cathcart, Area A director, Columbia Shuswap Regional District –**

“As the regional director here, I’m absolutely over the moon that this is finally happening. It couldn’t come at a more important time. Bringing cellular service to Highway 95 between Golden and Spillimacheen is absolutely essential for health care and the safety and security of our residents, business owners and educators. I want to thank everybody involved for moving this project forward so quickly.”

#### **Allen Courtoreille, mayor, Chetwynd –**

“I’m very pleased to see cellular service is coming to Highway 97, particularly through Pine Pass. This road is regularly used by people, families and professionals in the transportation industry who live in my community. When conditions are bad, such as during a storm, it can be a dangerous road to navigate. Bringing cell service to Highway 97 and Pine Pass will immediately make the route safer by enabling people to call for help during an emergency and for first responders to locate and support them.”

#### **Gerry Wilkie, Area G director, Regional District of East Kootenay –**

“I want to extend my appreciation to the Province of B.C. for investing in this vital infrastructure. Not only will it significantly improve safety and connectivity for residents and travellers, it will provide this service at a time when it is critically needed due to increased traffic during the Kicking Horse Canyon project.”

#### **Ron Oszust, mayor, Golden –**

“We are very pleased to see upgrades to cellular service coming for this stretch of highway. These upgrades are essential to support the residents along Highway 95, as well as for emergency services and the travelling public. A big ‘thank you’ to everyone who advocated for this project and worked to make it possible. Increased access to connectivity in rural communities will help people stay better connected, provide improved access to public safety and be a catalyst for economic development.”

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