



NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

August 10, 2021

Auditor general releases report on Connecting British Columbia

VICTORIA – – The Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia has released a new information report: [*Update on the Connecting British Columbia Program*](#).

This report provides an update on Connecting British Columbia, a multi-year program that funds internet infrastructure in rural and remote areas of B.C. While almost all urban areas in the province have high-speed internet, 60% of rural and remote communities and 62% of rural Indigenous communities still lack adequate—50/10 megabits per second (Mbps)—internet.

With a focus on phases 3 and 4, the report includes details on the program’s funding and connectivity progress, how it responded to COVID-19 and information on the challenges it faces.

“This is timely information that legislators and the public can use to get a broad understanding of the digital divide our province still faces, and how the government is working to bridge that gap,” said Michael Pickup, auditor general. “It’s important to note, however, that the information in the report was not audited by my office.”

The program—which was created in 2015—is funded by the Ministry of Citizens’ Services and administered by the Northern Development Initiative Trust.

Phase 3 launched in 2019 with \$50 million:

- \$48 million has been committed so far for 85 projects expected to connect over 29,000 households. This funding included more than \$1 million for projects in response to COVID-19.

The end date for phase 3 was extended from March 31, 2022 to March 31, 2025, which the ministry indicated was to accommodate project completion dates and to enable co-funding with the federal government.

Phase 4 launched in 2020 with \$90 million (in response to COVID-19 as part of the StrongerBC Economic Recovery Plan):

- Around \$85 million has been committed so far for 55 projects, which are expected to connect more than 32,000 households in 224 communities and provide around 430 kilometres of new cellular coverage along highways.

The end date for phase 4 remains October 31, 2021, but some projects were extended to October 31, 2022.



Challenges

Some of the challenges government indicated the program is facing include:

- The current high-speed internet target of 50/10 Mbps requires building complex infrastructure, which can prolong the building process.
- The program is designed to align with federal funding programs (some of which have longer timelines), which can cause delays.
- The program requires participation from internet service providers, which tend to focus investments in urban areas that provide the greatest returns on investment.

The information in the report—which was compiled from the Ministry of Citizens’ Services and the Northern Development Initiative Trust —provides a snapshot of known financial information as of May 31, 2021.

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