



COVERSHEET

Minister	Hon Paul Goldsmith	Portfolio	Media and Communications
Title of Cabinet paper	Lifting the Resilience of Cellular Telecommunications Networks	Date to be published	1 August 2025

List of documents that have been proactively released

Date	Title	Author
June 2025	Lifting the Resilience of Cellular Telecommunications Networks	Office of the Minister for Media and Communications
24 June 2025	Lifting the Resilience of Cellular Telecommunications Networks EXP-25-MIN-0056 Minute	Cabinet Office

Information redacted

YES / NO

Any information redacted in this document is redacted in accordance with MBIE's policy on Proactive Release and is labelled with the reason for redaction. This may include information that would be redacted if this information was requested under Official Information Act 1982. Where this is the case, the reasons for withholding information are listed below. Where information has been withheld, no public interest has been identified that would outweigh the reasons for withholding it.

Office of the Minister for Media and Communications

Office of the Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery

Cabinet Economic Policy Committee

Lifting the Resilience of Cellular Telecommunications Networks

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks approval to reprioritise \$6.4 million of connectivity funding associated with radio spectrum re-planning to fund much needed improvements to the resilience of approximately 200 to 250 cellular telecommunications sites.

Relation to government priorities

- 2 Severe weather events in the last few years have highlighted the importance of lifting the resilience of critical infrastructure, such as cellular telecommunications networks. These networks are essential to the everyday lives of New Zealanders and assume even greater importance in emergency events by allowing timely communications within and between emergency services and communities. Improving telecommunications resilience also supports the Government's priority to strengthen the emergency management system given the extensive use of cellular networks for emergency services coordination and civil defence emergency texts.

Background

- 3 Budget 2021 provided \$10.0 million of funding to enhance connectivity through re-planning the 600 MHz radio spectrum band to enable it to be used for cellular mobile telecommunications. While significant progress has been made in the technical and negotiating aspects of re-planning the 600 MHz band, officials have ultimately been unable to secure agreement to relocate all existing spectrum rights holders. Without this agreement, it is not possible to utilise the band for cellular services and therefore the Minister for Media and Communications has directed officials to cease work so they can progress other radio spectrum allocation priorities.
- 4 Ceasing work on re-planning the 600 MHz band means there is \$6.4 million of funding available for reprioritisation. This funding will be returned to the centre on 30 June 2025 in the absence of further decisions from Cabinet.

Analysis

- 5 The Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events highlighted the importance of telecommunications services and recommended that telecommunications services be restored early given their importance to both communities and emergency services (recommendation 11). The report also identified power cuts as the major cause of telecommunications outages.
- 6 Most cellular telecommunications sites have between four and eight hours of battery backup. These batteries are primarily designed to deal with outages associated with

technical and maintenance updates rather than the longer duration loss of electricity that occurs in severe weather or other emergency events.

- 7 Severe weather events over the last few years have demonstrated that between four and eight hours of battery backup provides an inadequate level of resilience. At the same time, investing in increased battery backup is generally not an attractive commercial proposition for network operators given their flat revenue per user and the high levels of investment necessary to roll out next generation 5G networks.
- 8 We therefore propose that the \$6.4 million of reprioritised funding be used to increase the battery life of an additional approximately 200 to 250 cellular telecommunications sites around New Zealand to a minimum of 24 hours. Sites will be chosen based on population coverage, community vulnerability and the availability of alternative telecommunications services.
- 9 Previous small scale Crown investments in larger batteries for cellular sites have demonstrated that relatively small amounts of co-funding provide significant lifts in resilience. For example, some Northland cellular sites were able to operate for three days without mains power in the aftermath of ex-tropical cyclone Tam. There are approximately 4570 cellular sites across the country, of which around 108 rural towers are in the process of being upgraded to have at least 24 hours battery backup to date.

Implementation

- 10 Procurement of resilience improvements will be managed by National Infrastructure Funding and Financing (formerly Crown Infrastructure Partners). Competitive tendering and industry co-investment of at least 50% will be sought to ensure that any Crown funding delivers value for money and does not crowd out private sector investment.

Cost-of-living Implications

- 11 There are no cost-of-living implications arising from the proposals in this paper.

Financial Implications

- 12 The proposals in this paper are fiscally neutral as they involve the reprioritisation of \$6.4 million of existing connectivity funding associated with re-planning the 600 MHz radio spectrum band that is not proceeding. Funding the resilience improvements outlined in this paper does not commit the government to any future resilience expenditure.

Legislative Implications

- 13 There are no legislative implications arising from the proposals in this paper.

Impact Analysis

Regulatory Impact Statement

- 14 The proposals in this paper do not have any regulatory impacts and therefore impact analysis requirements do not apply.

Climate Implications of Policy Assessment

- 15 There are no climate implications from the proposals in this paper.

Population Implications

- 16 No population implications have been identified for the proposals in this paper.

Human Rights

- 17 No human rights issues arise from the proposals in this paper.

Use of external Resources

- 18 No external resources were used in the development of this paper.

Consultation

- 19 The Treasury, the National Emergency Management Agency, the Ministry of Primary Industries, NZ Police (including Next Generation Critical Communications), the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (National Risk Directorate), and National Infrastructure Funding and Financing were consulted on this paper. The Policy Advisory Group in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet was informed.

Communications

- 20 The Minister for Media and Communications will announce Cabinet's decisions as soon as practicable through a press release.

Proactive Release

- 21 We intend to proactively release this paper on the MBIE website within 30 business days after Cabinet has made a decision, subject to appropriate redactions.

Recommendations

The Ministers for Media and Communications and Emergency Management and Recovery recommend that the Committee:

- 1 **note** that electricity outages are the single biggest cause of telecommunications outages in emergency events and that extending the duration of battery backup at cellular sites has proven itself an effective and cost-efficient method of lifting telecommunications resilience;

IN CONFIDENCE

- 2 **note** that \$6.400 million of 2024/25 funding for connectivity investment associated with the re-planning of the 600 MHz radio spectrum band is available to be reprioritised;
- 3 **agree** to reprioritise the funding referred to in recommendation 2 to lift the resilience of approximately 200 to 250 cellular telecommunications sites by increasing the length of time that cellular sites can operate off batteries to a minimum of 24 hours;
- 4 **agree** to establish the following new appropriation:

Vote	Appropriation Minister	Appropriation Administrator	Title	Type	Scope
Business, Science and Innovation	Minister for Media and Communications	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment	Lifting Cellular Telecommunications Resilience	Non-Departmental Output Expense	This appropriation is limited to expenses incurred to lift the resilience of cellular telecommunications networks.

- 5 **approve** the following changes to appropriations to give effect to the policy decision in recommendation 3, with a corresponding impact on the operating balance and net core Crown debt:

Vote Business, Science and Innovation Minister for Media and Communications	\$m – increase/(decrease)				
	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29 & Outyears
Non-Departmental Output Expense: Lifting Cellular Telecommunications Resilience	-	2.400	4.000	-	-

- 6 **agree** that the appropriation changes in recommendation 5 are offset by the return of \$6.400 million of funding in the 2024/25 year as outlined in recommendation 2;
- 7 **agree** that the proposed change to appropriations for 2025/26 above be included in the 2025/26 Supplementary Estimates and that, in the interim, the increase be met from Imprest Supply;
- 8 **authorise** the Minister for Media and Communications to further develop policy matters consistent with the policy intent of this paper.

Authorised for lodgement.

Hon Paul Goldsmith
Minister for Media and Communications

Hon Mark Mitchell
Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery