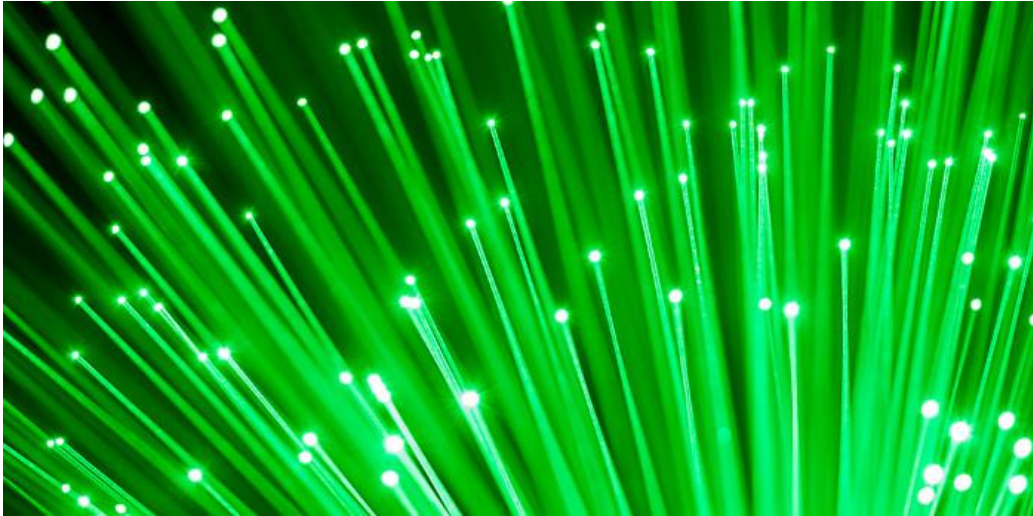


News Release

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May 18, 2021, 4:32 pm

Improved Internet for People in Fraser Canyon Communities

Ministry of Citizens' Services

FRASER CANYON - People in 10 Indigenous and rural communities in the Fraser Canyon will soon be able to access a reliable high-speed internet connection, thanks to a project supported by the Connecting British Columbia program.

“For people in many Indigenous communities in B.C., connecting to the internet has meant driving to the nearest town for Wi-Fi or going to the band office to connect to its network,” said Lisa Beare, Minister of Citizens’ Services. “But now, record investments in connectivity are helping to close the digital divide between urban and rural communities and improve access to services, education and economic opportunities.”

The Connecting British Columbia program will provide Telus up to \$2.9 million toward the cost of improving the performance and reliability of internet access in Dogwood Valley, Squeah, Yale and parts of Skawahlook, Chawathil and Yale First Nations.

“We have four separate communities and currently none have a reliable internet connection. This project will enable our people to pursue education and employment opportunities that aren’t possible with poor internet connections,” said Elsie Kipp, government administrator, Yale First Nation. “Our businesses will be able to work more efficiently and provide better service to customers. Also importantly, our families will have access to

information and entertainment options that most other communities have had for years.”

Bridging the digital divide is a critical component of B.C.’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the Province’s commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The completion of this project means people in Fraser Canyon homes and businesses will be able to access services in new ways, interact with co-workers and clients around the world and help to grow the region’s economy as B.C. emerges from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Reliable internet access is critical for communities, making it possible to access services online, do business and learn and work remotely. Addressing the digital divide faced by many remote Indigenous communities is critical as we move forward to build a better B.C.” said Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. “Improving connectivity in the Fraser Canyon will make life better for everyone in the community, bringing lasting improvements and serving as a powerful economic driver.”

The Province expanded the Connecting British Columbia program in September 2020 with a \$90-million grant to encourage investment in broadband and cellular infrastructure to benefit people in rural and Indigenous communities throughout B.C.

“This partnership with government will deliver upon our collective commitment to bridge digital divides and ensure more Indigenous and rural communities in British Columbia have the technology they need to fully participate in the digital economy,” said Tony Geheran, executive vice-president and chief customer officer, Telus. “Our PureFibre network has supported millions of British Columbians as we adapted to new ways of living through the pandemic, enabling people to work with large files at home while other family members could simultaneously be doing virtual school, virtually connecting with health-care practitioners or staying socially connected.”

Northern Development Initiative Trust has been the fund administrator for the Connecting British Columbia program since its inception in 2015. Northern Development is a regionally operated economic development funding corporation for central and northern British Columbia and operates independently from government.

“Improving internet services in the Fraser Canyon will make a real difference in people’s lives. At Northern Development, we are proud to do our part to facilitate investments that help bring new opportunities,” said Joel McKay, CEO, Northern Development Initiative Trust. “All across B.C., we are seeing the incredible impacts connectivity investments are having in rural and Indigenous communities. With today’s announcement, we are thrilled to add another 10 communities to the list.”

Record investments in connectivity are part of StrongerBC: BC’s Economic Recovery Plan. The Province continues to welcome internet service providers’ applications to the Connecting British Columbia program’s Economic Recovery Intake. Funds from the program will benefit people in hundreds of rural and Indigenous communities throughout B.C. this year.

Quick Facts:

- The Connecting British Columbia program is funding nearly 75% of the estimated \$3.9-million cost of upgrading internet services for homes and businesses in the Fraser Canyon.
- Telus is expected to complete these broadband upgrades in the Fraser Canyon by Oct. 31, 2021.

Learn More:

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

StrongerBC: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/>

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

Northern Development Initiative Trust: <https://www.northerndevelopment.bc.ca/>

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