



BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY

2021-2025

Economic Growth, Tourism & Culture

The *Broadband Connectivity Strategy: 2021-2025* outlines the steps for the Government of Prince Edward Island to ensure high-speed Internet is accessible across the province.

Many facets of life rely on high-speed Internet including access to quality education, job opportunities, and essential public services. This is a challenge for many Islanders in rural areas of the province where Internet access is slower and less reliable compared to urban areas. Businesses across Prince Edward Island also face challenges. They depend on high-speed to reach their markets, suppliers and customers. In rural areas, businesses have identified stable, high-speed connections as critical for their sustainability and growth.

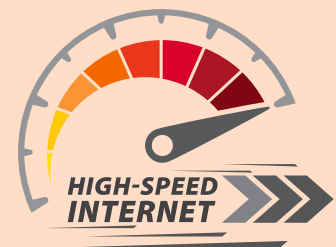
As a large step to support businesses and residents, the Government of Prince Edward Island holds jointly funded federal-provincial agreements with Bell Canada and Xplornet Communications Inc. Through these projects high-speed will be available to approximately 30,000 civic addresses through a combination of fixed wireless and fibre-to-the-home. These projects began in 2020 and will continue to connect Islanders until 2023. More information on these federal-provincial agreements can be found in Appendix 1. There are also various projects awarded through the Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund that will support the enhancement and expansion of Internet services across the Island. More information on these projects can be found in Appendix 2. Upon the completion of these ongoing projects in 2023, it is estimated that approximately 3,000 civic addresses will be unable to access high-speed Internet and are considered underserved.

What is considered high-speed?

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) defines high-speed Internet as download speeds of at least 50 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speeds of at least 10 megabits per second (Mbps).

How many PEI addresses are underserved?

- In 2021, approximately 19,000 or 25% of civic addresses did not have access to high-speed Internet that meets CRTC standards.
- Current, multi-year projects will hook up 30,000 civic addresses by 2023 leaving approximately 3,000 civic addresses to be targeted by future investments.



WHAT WE'VE HEARD

In August 2021, the Government of Prince Edward Island released a discussion paper that outlined proposed actions to ensure the accessibility of high-speed Internet. Members of the public, Internet service providers, communities, federal government departments, and organizations representing Indigenous communities were invited to provide feedback. Most respondents provided both general feedback on their service availability as well as feedback on the proposed actions. Over 120 responses were received throughout the consultation process.

Key Findings

- Any projects funded through the Government of Prince Edward Island should meet high-speed thresholds.
- The Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund, administered through Innovation PEI, should maintain or enhance the level of funding available through the various streams.
 - Approximately 60 per cent of respondents felt that subsidy levels for Internet service providers and businesses should remain the same.
 - Approximately 60 per cent of respondents felt that subsidy levels for community solutions should be increased.
 - Over 80 per cent of respondents indicated that eligible projects under the stream for residents should be expanded.
 - Most respondents felt that subsidy levels for residential solutions should be offered at 100 per cent.
- Project updates and funding displayed on the Government of Prince Edward Island webpage should be clearer. Further, it should be easier to locate the current and future services available to each community.
- Competitive processes should be used for awarding contracts to provide high-speed service to the underserved areas of the island.

COMMITMENT TO CONNECTING THE UNDERSERVED

The Government of Prince Edward Island is committed to ensuring high-speed Internet is accessible to 95 per cent of civic addresses by June 2023 and 100 per cent of civic addresses by 2025. Out of the 76,000 civic addresses on Prince Edward Island, service will be available through ongoing projects to approximately 73,000 civic addresses by 2023. The underserved civic addresses will be the focus for provincial investment moving forward.

The Government of Prince Edward Island recognizes that rural areas are often the most challenging and expensive to reach. This is due to the greater distance between civic addresses in rural areas, in addition to the various terrain challenges such as tree coverage and hills. Across the island, over 99 per cent of civic addresses identified as underserved are in rural areas.

Objectives

- Funding is prioritized to reach underserved civic addresses in the most timely and cost-effective way possible
- Programs are client-focused and meeting targets of reaching underserved civic addresses
- Funding opportunities from various sources are utilized
- Financial resources are not a barrier to access high-speed Internet

Key Actions

1 Enhance funding supports for Internet service providers to reach underserved areas:

- Underserved civic addresses are clearly identified to support Internet service provider's planning.
- Offer an enhanced subsidy level for projects that will service underserved civic addresses, recognizing these civic addresses are more expensive to reach.
- Utilize a competitive selection process to award contracts receiving higher subsidy levels.

#2 Enhance funding available to residents

- In 2021, government introduced an enhanced program for residents through the Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund based on the 2020 pilot fund. This included expanding the types of projects eligible for the fund.

#3 Ensure program guidelines meet needs of clients

- Ensure infrastructure projects awarded through competitive processes meet high-speed requirements.
- Incorporate an evaluation framework for project proposals that prioritize reaching underserved civic addresses.
- Perform an annual review of the Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund.

4 Identify and leverage external funding opportunities

- Work with municipal, provincial, and federal partners to identify funding opportunities to enhance and expand networks across Prince Edward Island.
- Continue to engage with partners and monitor national data to identify infrastructure upgrades or expansions to reduce infrastructure overbuild.

Existing Initiatives

- Through consulting national data and engaging Internet service providers, the availability of high-speed service across Prince Edward Island has been determined. This has allowed the Government of Prince Edward Island to identify and map the civic addresses that will remain underserved.
- Potential cost-effective solutions have been identified to reach underserved civic addresses through analyzing existing and future infrastructure across the island. Utilizing a variety of technologies will be required to reach underserved civic addresses in order to address the various terrain challenges across the island. This includes wired, fixed wireless, and satellite technologies.
- The Government of Prince Edward Island has committed \$2 million a year until 2025 to help expand and enhance broadband connectivity through the Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund. The fund provides financial assistance for projects that enhance access and service levels. While some funding streams were available for a limited time as pilots, the permanent streams accept continuous intake of applications.

PERMANENT FUNDING STREAMS	PILOT FUNDING STREAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fund for Communities• Fund for Businesses• Fund for Internet Service Providers• Fund for Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accelerated Internet Service Provider Pilot (2020)• Residential Pilot (2020)

COMMITMENT TO REGULARLY SHARE PROGRESS UPDATES AND SERVICE AVAILABILITY

Broadband projects require large infrastructure builds that are highly technical and often take time to complete. Civic addresses across Prince Edward Island will be served by these builds at different times and with different technologies. Islanders often inquire about how each of these projects will impact their access to high-speed service and which service providers are available in their area. Ensuring availability and clarity of information about the timing and scope of projects will help Islanders identify the service available to them.

Objectives

- Project scope and impact are easily understood
- It is clear to Islanders whether progress is being made and targets are being met

QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK?

We welcome your feedback and comments about Internet availability to your home or business, progress and investments to your area.

Email: myinternet@gov.pe.ca

Phone: **902-368-5540**



Key Actions

#1 Provide clear and accurate project updates on the Government of Prince Edward Island website

- Ensure that the website is updated monthly to indicate progress of existing projects
- Indicate the scope and timelines of new projects on the website

#2 Complete and share annual strategy reports

- Measure the success of all projects in reaching their outcomes
- Outline the locations that have been served as well as the total dollar value invested
- Ensure targets are up to date and meeting national standards

#3 Enhance visibility of service availability

- Develop clear communication tools that identify service provider availability across Prince Edward Island
- Ensure that the website clearly reflects the civic addresses connected through each project

Existing Initiatives

- Projects awarded through the Prince Edward Island Broadband Fund, including approved project dollar value and scope, are posted online.
- The Internet Plan webpage offers information on project updates, Internet service providers, regulatory organizations, speed requirements, and more.
- The frequently asked questions (FAQs) on the Internet Plan webpage are updated frequently to reflect the needs of residents.
- In summer 2021, a consultation process was launched with a discussion paper to formalize feedback from members of the public. General inquiries can always be submitted via email or phone.

MEASURING SUCCESS

The actions in the *Broadband Connectivity Strategy: 2021-2025* are expected to help reach the targets of ensuring high-speed Internet across Prince Edward Island. Specifically, the targets include:

- High-speed Internet is accessible to 95 per cent of civic addresses by June 2023
- High-speed Internet is accessible to 100 per cent of civic addresses by 2025

Each year, the Government of Prince Edward Island will prepare an annual public progress report. This report will provide a clear picture on what targets have been met and what targets remain ongoing. A review will also be completed each year including a review of the key actions and an adjustment to any standards that have been set nationally.

Annual updates will be provided as a status report and made available on the Internet Plan webpage at PrinceEdwardIsland.ca/InternetPlan.

Appendix 1

BELL CANADA		
Technology to be deployed	Number of Civic Addresses	Communities
Fibre-to-the-home	Approximately 10,000 civic addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charlottetown • Covehead • Crapaud • Hunter River • Montague • Mount Stewart • Murray River • New Haven • Rustico • Souris • Tignish • Tyne Valley • Wellington
XPLORNET		
Fixed wireless (8 new towers)	Approximately 17,000 civic addresses to access fixed wireless	Areas surrounding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borden-Carleton • Cornwall • Georgetown • Urbainville • Summerside • Ellerslie • Irishtown • Belfast
Fibre-to-the-home	Approximately 3,000 civic addresses to access fibre-to-the-home	Various

For more information, please visit

PrinceEdwardIsland.ca/InternetPlan

Appendix 2

Between September 2019 and September 2021, the following streams have supported projects:

PERMANENT			
Stream	Description	Contribution	Total Project Cost/ # of Projects
Internet Service Provider	To improve Internet access to a community, increase service levels and/or improve consumer choice	\$112,083	\$224,166
Business	To support costs incurred for new or upgraded connection at for-profit or not-for-profit business premises	\$68,735	\$134,191
Communities	To increase service levels or improve access to communities	\$87,325	\$174,650
PILOT			
Accelerated ISP	To improve access or service levels through rapid response projects	\$754,675	\$1,115,317
Residential	To support costs that help capture signal for a permanent resident	\$1,498,656	564 Projects

* Note: The PEI Broadband Fund for Residents opened in October 2021.



BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY STRATEGY 2021-2025

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