

# REGIONAL BROADBAND EXTENSION INITIATIVE

20 December 2002

PROJECT PROBE UPDATE

ISSUE 2

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/probe>



Project PROBE is a government initiative to provide broadband technology to all New Zealand schools and provincial communities, giving schoolchildren in Wairoa the same access to online opportunities enjoyed in Wellington or New York.

Developed and funded jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Economic Development, Project PROBE's key objective is to roll out broadband to all schools and communities that do not yet have access. A second objective is to encourage competition in broadband telecommunications outside the metropolitan centres.

Project PROBE is an enabler – not a solution in itself. It will provide the infrastructure to enable potential users to make the most of the opportunities that high speed Internet access can provide.

## RFI nets significant response

A very encouraging response was received to the Request for Information (RFI) with all major telco's and a number of minor players interested, including some satellite operators. Thirty responses were received to the RFI, which went out to potential suppliers in late July, with a third of respondents covering more than one region. A number of responses fell into the category of "additional services" outside the immediate scope of the project, but still relevant for later consideration.

Ministers said that as the response had exceeded expectations, the project team would be given more time to assess the RFIs and to consult with regions and other interests in preparation for the release of the Request For Proposals (RFP). They said the Government was exploring opportunities to enhance the broadband benefits the project might deliver.

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Education Minister Trevor Mallard said: "There's a lot of excitement developing around broadband and the opportunities it offers to improve the delivery of government services to people outside the main centres. As the potential benefits are so great, it's important that we take time to ensure that we can accommodate the proposals that are coming forward. We will still be on track to meet our target of having broadband access to schools and communities in place by the end of 2004."

## **RFP tender companies announced**

After careful evaluation of all the RFI responses received, 18 companies were invited to participate in the Request for Proposal (RFP).

The companies are:

- Apertura
- Counties Power
- E-Comm Pacific
- IHUG / BCL
- Intelsat
- Network Tasman
- NZ Sprint / BCL
- Rural Networks
- South Waikato Networks
- Tangent / BCL / Powerco
- Telecom / BCL
- TelstraClear
- The Lines Company
- The Pacific.net
- UCC Technologies
- United Networks Communications
- ViaSat / PacAmTel
- Vodafone / Walker Wireless

PROBE Project Director Tony van Horik said tenderers participating in the RFP needed to produce proposals to provide services over an entire region. "This means that more localised suppliers may need to form consortiums if they are not able to cover an entire region on their own."

The RFP was issued in late December with a closing date of late February 2003.

This *Project PROBE Update* is the second in an occasional series of newsletters.

Please visit the PROBE website for the latest information about the project:  
[www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/probe](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/goto/probe)

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## Additional region announced

"Broadband is the infrastructure for the knowledge economy, delivering the high-speed internet access critical to improving our educational and economic outcomes. It's as important to the modern world as roads and railways were in opening up opportunities for previous generations."

**Trevor Mallard,  
Minister of  
Education**

An extra region has been added to the Project PROBE tender process – a national satellite tender to cover the most remote areas of the country. Region 15 has been added to ensure economical delivery of high-speed services to remote areas. The tender will call for proposals from satellite providers for 150 – 300 schools and communities across the country.

Satellite providers are expected to link in with the regional tenderers as some satellite companies may not wish to offer a retail service. Along with the 18 companies already chosen to participate in the tender, an additional three or four satellite companies will be invited to participate.

## Southland project supported as pilot

The government has agreed in principle to support the Southland broadband project as a pilot for Project PROBE around the country. That support is subject to further evaluation of the proposal and Southland's own ongoing discussions with its preferred supplier, a Vodafone / Walker Wireless consortium.

Regional Development Minister Jim Anderton has welcomed the leadership demonstrated by the Southland proposal, which he said could provide a good model for government / regional partnerships in other regions. He said the government was keen to work with private sector groups who had also indicated that they would benefit from wide broadband access.

"Ultimately, each region will have to find the model that meets its specific requirements," Jim Anderton said. "Southland is one of several regions that has put a lot of effort into this issue in the last year or so. The government-funded pilot programmes there and elsewhere have helped shape PROBE so far and the experience gained there will continue to ensure we meet our goals and reap the economic, education and social benefits of comprehensive broadband coverage."

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## **Demand requirements**

All regions have now provided information about their demand requirements. The information will need to be reviewed at the roll out phase when specific project priorities will need to be established with a higher level of confidence of demand uptake. In the RFP, individual customer details will be suppressed and only Area Unit demand will be provided. This will avoid any confidentiality issues and retain market information.

## **Representative regional group established**

A Regional Broadband Group, including one representative from all 14 regions, has been established to liaise with the Project Team over regional requirements. The Group asked that its chair, Steve Canney from Venture Southland, be nominated to join the PROBE working party to discuss the criteria for selection of service providers from the RFP process.

## **Letter to school principals**

Carol Moffatt, Manager of the Ministry of Education's ICT Strategy for Schools, has written to all school principals about the opportunities presented by Project PROBE. The letter outlined issues schools needed to be considering in preparing for broadband access, including security and ISP costs.

Project Probe is now featured on the [www.tki.org.nz](http://www.tki.org.nz) website, a popular education resource for teachers, principals and school administrators.

## **TUANZ broadband applications forum**

TUANZ (Telecommunications Association of New Zealand) and Industry New Zealand held a successful broadband applications forum in Nelson in November, aimed at exciting interest in the range of possibilities enabled by broadband access. The forum's discussions were divided into ten sectors, including retail, education, agriculture and tourism. The outcomes will be published in a report due out in January in book form.