

**Minutes of the 1st meeting of the State Broadband Committee, Kerala
held on 24.09.2020 through video conference**

List of Participants:

Shri.Satyajeet Rajan IAS, Addl Chief Secretary (ACS)(Co-ordination)
Shri. Bishwanath Sinha IAS, Pr.Secretary (LSGD-Urban)
Dr.Usha Titus IAS, Pr.Secretary (Environment)
Shri.Anand Singh IAS, Secretary (PWD)
Shri.Mohammad Y Safirulla IAS, Secretary (Electronics&IT)
Dr. Chithra.S IAS, Director, KSITM
Dr. Jayasankar Prasad, MD, KFON
Shri. Vinod. G, Additional Secretary, E & ITD
Dr.P.T.Mathew ITS, Sr.DDG, DoT, Kerala LSA
Smt.C.Sunitha ITS, DDG(Service Compliance&Rural), DoT, Kerala LSA
Shri.Seetharaman T.A. ITS, ADET(Rural), DoT, Kerala LSA
Shri C.V.Vinod ITS, CGM, BSNL
Shri.N.K.Sukumaran ITS, GM(NWP-CFA), BSNL
Shri.P.G.Nirmal ITS, GM(NWO-CFA), BSNL
Shri Roy.M.Jacob ITS, CGM,Kerala, BBNL
Shri T.R.Dua, DG, TAIPA (Tower and Infrastructure Provider's Assn.)
Shri Ashish Garg, Sr.Manager, TAIPA
Shri P.Ramakrishna, Pr.Advisor,COAI (Cellular Operator's Assn of India)
Cmde(retd) Dr.J.Jena Dy.Dir.General,COAI
Shri.Deepak Gupta, Dy.Manager,COAI

The 1st meeting of the State Broadband Committee, Kerala was held through video conference under the Chairmanship of ACS(Co-ordination) on 24.09.2020 at 11:00 am. It was convened by Senior Dy.Director General, DoT, Kerala LSA.

Sr.DDG Kerala LSA in his welcome address stressed upon the importance of broadband penetration in line with the objectives set by the National Broadband Mission. He also emphasized the importance of broadband in view of the increased use of ICT applications due to the prevailing pandemic situation. He welcomed all the participants to the meeting.

The Chairman enquired about the rationale behind the plan to increase the tower density to 1 tower per thousand population and the current tower density. Director, KSITM replied that the current tower density in Kerala is 0.52 per thousand population against a national average of 0.42 per thousand population.

Sr.DDG, Kerala LSA requested Tower and Infrastructure Provider's Assn (TAIPA) to present the industry view on the rationale behind the requirement to increase tower density. DG, TAIPA informed that there is a

requirement to double the number of towers to cater to the rapidly increasing data consumption. He also stated that the data consumption has reached an average of 11GB per user per month and is increasing every year. He also put forth the views of TAIPA on the concerns of the industry regarding telecom infrastructure. He also requested for the overall support required by the industry from the part of Government.

As regards, expediting Right of Way (RoW) permissions, the representative of TAIPA pointed out the need for a Nodal Officer in the State for co-ordinating RoW permission related activities in the State. The Chairman suggested Director KSITM as the Nodal Officer for RoW related matters. Director KSITM informed that an online portal for RoW permissions will be active soon. The Chairman suggested that all pending RoW cases be shared with Secretary, IT.

Principal Secretary, LSGD-Urban, informed the Committee that a policy regarding laying of gas pipelines in line with NHAI guidelines is already in vogue in the State. As regards deemed clearance within 30 days of submission of application complete in all respects, it was informed that deemed clearance cannot be activated now, as there found many substantial issues, which will be referred to a committee constituted at the State level.

Secretary (PWD), suggested that pending RoW cases from PWD can be displayed in a dashboard. Principal Secretary LSGD (Urban) informed that cases pending from LSGD end cannot be displayed in the LSGD dashboard. It has to be included in the portal developed by KSITM.

TAIPA rep pointed out the decrease in frequency of District Telecom Committee meetings which play a vital role in addressing public grievances. The Chairman stated that resistance from the public to the erection of towers has to be dealt with by Service providers by creating awareness programmes among public about the misconceptions related to electromagnetic radiation from towers. Sr.DDG Kerala LSA informed the Chairman that DoT Kerala LSA is doing its part by arranging EMR awareness programmes in different parts of the State and also through various electronic media. Director, KSITM informed that the frequency of DTC has reduced because of additional responsibilities on the District Collectors due to the pandemic and mobility restrictions. The Chairman suggested Secretary (IT) to direct the District Collectors to hold DTC meeting over Video conference.

The discussion then moved on to the agenda point reg. availability of Govt land and buildings for tower erection. The Chairman requested Secretary IT to give his views. Secretary IT, informed that the draft policy for utilising Govt.land and buildings for towers and the policy on sharing of towers are under consideration and will be circulated among departments concerned and shall be finalised shortly.

Principal Advisor, Cellular Operator's Assn of India (COAI) requested Government to reconsider the One Time Contribution (OTC) of Rs.75000/Km levied by the State Government, which was fixed during 2015 when no guidelines was issued by Govt of India. Now TSPs are finding it difficult to pay such an amount and requested Govt to reconsider it in line with GOI's ROW Policy, 2016. The Additional Chief Secretary informed that the above amount was fixed through mutual discussions with all the TSPs and a consensus in this regard has been got from the Service Providers. Later, it was approved by Cabinet. He also stated that at present, the entire amount of One time Contribution now flows into CMDRF and hence cannot be reconsidered at this stage.

In view of increased requirement of OFC, Pr.Advisor, COAI enquired about the policy for aerial OFC. It was replied by Secretary(PWD) that already as a policy, KSEB is leasing out the electricity poles to cable TV operators for laying OFC and the same can be followed by service providers.

DDG(C&R),Kerala LSA, gave a power point presentation regarding constitution of the State Broadband Committee and its functions, year wise targets under National Broadband Mission and current status of parameters regarding broadband penetration in Kerala. She also appreciated the state for submitting the details of BRI to ICRIER for compilation of BRI index and requested Government of Kerala to share the details of latitude and longitudes of all government establishments available across the state. This can facilitate planning of further connectivity in the rural areas which are lagging due to non-availability of suitable infrastructure.

CGM, BBNL, informed the Committee that BBNL has given optical fiber connectivity to 1129 ONTs at Block Panchayats/Gram Panchayats in Kerala as a part of the Bharat Net Phase-I project. Secretary IT had raised concern about operational issues of Broadband connectivity at Gram Panchayats and regarding this, CGM BBNL informed that on an average, around 96-97% of the Optical Network Terminals (ONTs) are up and running. Old equipment installed 3-4 years back are being replaced by new equipment. The maintenance of BBNL network was earlier entrusted to BSNL and as of now it is carried out by CSC E-Gov India Ltd. In addition, BBNL has deployed Field technical/Network engineers for first line maintenance. Further, under BharatNet Phase-III project, OFC cable in ring fashion is being planned for all GPs and Villages. This will further reduce the downtime due to OFC cuts. Overhead optical fiber connectivity is also planned from GP to village under this scheme. He also clarified that BBNL is planning to lay 8000Km of OFC to replace the BSNL fibre utilised for connectivity from Block HQ to GPs in the initial phases and not going to be duplication of works carried out by KFON.

The Chairman stated that connectivity issues were being reported from

some rural areas of the State, especially in the past few months, where more students and other professionals are depending on digital mode for classes/ trainings etc. and directed the COAI to inform the plans of TSPs to improve the Rural networks in the state. He acknowledged that performance of BSNL Kerala is the best in the country. The Chairman directed all other private players to erect sufficient towers in the rural areas, where there exist connectivity issues and the actions taken in this regard may be appraised before the Committee in the next meeting.

CGM, BSNL informed that BSNL has installed 1066 USO funded WiFi hotspots in rural areas of the State. He also suggested a policy for providing utility ducts as and when road expansions are carried out and also offered expertise available with BSNL for constructions. The chairman also wanted to explore the option of GoI funding for rural optical fiber connectivity being executed by the State Govt through KFON project. CGM nominated GM (Network Planning-CFA), BSNL Kerala Circle, for helping GoK to prepare the plan.

The Chairman directed to schedule the next quarterly meeting in the 3rd week of December, 2020.

The meeting ended at 12 Noon.