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Nextgen Networks to fill in broadband backhaul blackspots

by Stuart Corner

Friday, 04 December 2009

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Leighton Contractors' subsidiary Nextgen Networks has won the Federal Government's tender to provide the optical fibre links for its \$250m Regional Backbone Blackspots Programme, and has already signed Nextep as the first ISP to make user of the network.



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In addition to the major centres required to be served by the tender the new 6,000km network will serve many smaller centres along its routes. Nextgen will roll out from Toowoomba to Darwin, Perth to Geraldton, Shepparton through Mildura to Adelaide, Mildura to Broken Hill, Sale to Wonthaggi and Adelaide to Victor Harbour and on to Mount Barker.

Nextgen says the new network has the capacity to serve approximately 395,000 people in over 60 regional towns through the provision of ADSL2+ services by ISPs using the new backhaul services. The new network will interconnect with the existing Nextgen Network and will almost double its 8500km length.

Nextgen CEO, Phil Sykes, told iWire " Our approach [to the tender] was what was try and serve the maximum number of possible users we could reach with that budgetary figure. " In the contract we have defined approximately 100 service access points were ISPs can get into and out of our network."

In addition to these the network will be preconfigured with many more potential access points. "We will build it with pits very 10kms or so and we have tried to align those with road intersections and mobile towers so we have made it easy for service providers to get access to that network," Sykes said. "It is not just an express network. We have made sure it can be opened up to support growth in those areas."

The network will have an initial capacity of 10Gbps and will be upgradeable in 10Gbps increments (by activating another wavelength on the fibre). Sykes said: "As we are building it we can continue to equip for greater capacity if the demand is there. This network will be built with a 50 year [demand] outlook."

Sykes said that NEC subsidiary Nextep was planning to install DSLAMs at 60 locations on the network and offer wholesale ADSL services. "This will make it very easy for regional and national ISPs to turn on ports in new locations...This supports the government's overall objective of getting ISPs to go into regional areas and offer services." (At this time iWire is waiting on confirmation from NEC of its involvement in the project)

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Sykes added that other ISPs were expected to sign up before the rollout was completed. "I am sure others will want to deploy DSLAMs in the same time frame...we have been talking to all ISPs but Nextep were the ones who wanted to move quickly."

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NextGen is primarily the operator of a long haul network, not a network builder, and Sykes said that, while it is the prime contractor, much of the construction work would be carried out other Leighton divisions.

Peter McGrath, executive general manager of Leighton's Telecommunications Division, said: "We are in an advanced stage of project readiness having walked the routes, undertaken design work and notified our suppliers. We are well positioned to commence construction activities shortly."

Nextgen says it will complete the construction of the new backhaul links within 18 months and will progressively be activating each link as they are completed; the first, shorter links will be completed within 12 months.

During construction Nextgen says it will provide progress reports and invite the participation of regional services providers and community groups via its portal, "Australia, have your say", at www.regionalbackboneblackspots.com.au .



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