

Richard Lochhead MSP
Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism and Trade
The Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

24 January 2023

Dear Richard

Shared Rural Network

At a recent meeting of the Council, there was a discussion over the Shared Rural Network (SRN) which is a UK Government digital connectivity programme. It aims to achieve 95% mobile phone coverage across Britain focusing on geographical coverage rather than population coverage.

This makes little sense in the Highland's uninhabited mountain and upland landscapes. There has also been very little, or no, consultation with communities in Highland to understand their connectivity needs and to identify appropriate locations for SRN masts so that connectivity is improved for rural communities.

In support of the coalition of community groups and conservation and outdoor recreation organisations in Scotland, it was agreed that by the Council that I write to both the Scottish Government and UK Government to ask that Ministers work together, to pause and review the SRN programme and improve it by:

- Consulting with rural communities across Highland to establish their digital connectivity needs first;
- Avoiding construction of new access tracks unless no other method is possible;
- Adequately resourcing Local Planning Authorities;
- Avoiding the Highland's designated and other environmentally sensitive wild areas; and

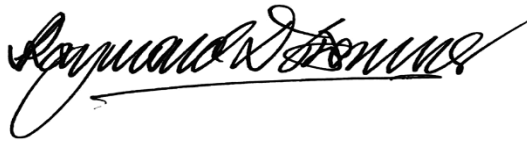
- Insisting that mobile operators share mast infrastructure, rather than building adjacent masts.

I have written in similar terms to Julia Lopez MP, Minister of State for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries in the UK Government.

I would be most grateful if you could give consideration to the terms of this Council motion.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Raymond Bremner
Leader of The Highland Council

An Comhairliche Raymond Bremner
Ceannard Chomhairle na Gàidhealtachd