# WRITTEN STATEMENT

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# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Mobile Action Plan for Wales** |
| **DATE**  | **5 October 2017** |
| **BY**  | **Julie James AM, Minister for Skills and Science** |

Mobile phone connectivity is becoming increasingly important both for residents and businesses whether that is to carry out everyday tasks such as banking, to simply keep in touch on the move or to allow machines to connect with each other.

Over 90 per cent of adults in Wales now own a mobile phone and increasingly mobile phones are being used to go online with 57 per cent of users in Wales reporting that they use their mobile phones to access the internet.

Wales has particular characteristics in terms of topography and population density which pose challenges for mobile operators when deploying mobile infrastructure. As a result significantly more infrastructure is needed to provide coverage than other areas of the UK.

In January I held a round table meeting with representatives of the mobile industry, Ofcom, local planning officers and Welsh Government officials to explore how Government, the regulator and industry could work together to tackle the challenges and improve phone services across Wales.

Following that meeting I announced that I would publish a mobile action plan that would reflect the challenges of deploying mobile phone infrastructure in Wales

Over the intervening period officials have been working with those bodies represented at the round table meeting and others such as the farming unions, landowners and business organisations to develop the plan.

Today I am pleased to be able to publish a mobile action plan for Wales.

Telecommunications policy is not devolved to Wales so the plan focuses on nine key areas where the Welsh Government can use the levers at its disposal to create the right environment to further improve connectivity in Wales.

In some areas such as planning and non-domestic rates we need to work with the industry to gather the evidence to underpin changes to legislation or to act to incentivise investment in infrastructure.

In other areas, such as the use of public assets or providing coverage at major events, the Welsh Government can play a central role in facilitating relationships between the industry and other bodies.

Even with the investment being made by the mobile industry towards meeting their regulatory targets it is likely that there will still be areas without a usable and reliable mobile signal. The plan highlights the work we are already undertaking with the Home Office on future proofing their masts under the emergency services mobile communications programme and also plans to scope any other potential public sector interventions in Wales to cover these gaps.

We also need a regulatory regime that is fit for Wales so the plan outlines how we will engage with Ofcom to understand the opportunities and challenges in establishing geographically differentiated regulation.

Technologies that are devised and tested in Wales will be fit for Wales so we want Wales to be regarded as a testbed for new technology. The plan reinforces our support for emerging technologies initiatives in Wales.

Connectivity on the move along road and rail corridors has advantages for business, for safety and to access a range of apps and online services. The plan outlines a number of opportunities for improving connectivity on transport networks including working with Network Rail.

The plan purposely does not set out in detail the eventual solutions but instead provides a roadmap for improving mobile phone coverage in Wales. It is a working document and it will be reviewed regularly and updated. I intend that the first review will be carried out in the spring next year.