



31 October 2022

His Worship Mayor Wayne Brown  
Mayor of Auckland  
Auckland Council  
24 Wellesley Street West  
Auckland  
New Zealand

Dear Mayor,

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding connectivity in Auckland, and the offer for Council to assist mobile network operators to deploy digital infrastructure more easily.

As New Zealand's largest telecommunications and digital services provider, we naturally have a large presence in Auckland, including our national head office, 18 retail stores, four business hubs (servicing small-medium business customers), three data centres, 12 telephone exchanges, and a purpose-built Satellite Earth Station in Warkworth. We are a significant local employer, with over 2,300 people employed across these operations.

Spark's mobile networks now reach 97.5% of New Zealanders nationwide. Within the Auckland region our coverage is just over 98%. We operate 3G, 4G and 5G mobile networks, as well as Internet of Things (IoT) networks across the region. You can see our coverage here: [Spark NZ network coverage](#).

As the country's biggest city, Auckland is a critical component of New Zealand's economy, and in the last 18 months we have made significant capital investments into the region.

We have added 12 new mobile sites across Auckland, many of which have helped to bolster areas of lower coverage. Auckland has also been a focus of our accelerated 5G rollout, with services now available in over 60 Auckland suburbs. As we have been visiting our sites to add 5G, we have also taken the opportunity to boost 4G capacity by 16%, delivering greater speeds and less congestion for our mobile and wireless broadband customers.

When expanding our coverage and capacity, we are focused on ensuring that the places people live and work are well provided for, and that we prioritise investment in areas of our network that have the greatest capacity needs. As an example, when we started our 5G rollout in Auckland we prioritized South Auckland deployments first, where we had high demand for our not-for-profit broadband product Skinny Jump.

Skinny Jump aims to bridge the digital divide by making internet access more affordable for those who find cost is a barrier to getting connected. The communities most impacted by the digital divide include Māori and Pasifika, refugees, new migrants for whom English isn't a first language, the elderly, job seekers, people living in social housing, and people recently released from prison. We have over 23,000 homes connected across the country, including a large number in South Auckland, who have been supported by our recent upgrades.

We also work in partnership with Government and our industry peers on improving rural connectivity and state highway coverage.

As you are probably aware, we are part of a joint venture with Vodafone and 2degrees called the Rural Connectivity Group (RCG). RCG works alongside Crown Infrastructure Partners to expand mobile coverage further into rural New Zealand and to address mobile black spots on

state highways. These are areas that are uneconomic for industry to invest in alone, and where joint public and private sector investment is the most effective approach. Since 2019, RCG has built 383 new towers and this includes 17 in the Auckland region (which all provide coverage to heavily trafficked rural roads), and an additional 10kms of coverage on State Highway 16 and a total 869kms of highways nationwide.

We recently welcomed the New Zealand Government's announcement of the next steps in the allocation of C-band spectrum, which is a critical enabler of the ongoing rollout of 5G across Aotearoa. This agreement gives Spark confidence to continue with the nationwide rollout of our 5G network, including within Auckland.

In return for the allocated spectrum rights, Spark will commit an additional \$24 million in funding to RCG between 2023 and 2025, enabling the continued expansion of mobile coverage further into rural New Zealand and the ability to address more mobile black spots on state highways. Spark has also agreed to deploy more extensive 5G services in provincial towns in the same time period.

With businesses experiencing rapid digitisation in the wake of Covid-19, we are also making significant capital investments into our data centre footprint in Auckland, including upgrading our Mayoral Drive Exchange to host significantly more wholesale and cloud data centre services and an expansion of our Takarua Data Centre campus, which is on track for delivery next year.

Looking forward, we have a nationwide 10-year mobile network densification plan across both 4G and 5G services, which will see a significant number of new sites built.

In terms of how Council can support our mobile network investments, we have asked our industry body, the Telecommunications Forum (TCF), to provide a full summary of the assistance that would be of use. In brief, helping us to reduce the time it takes to acquire sites and obtain planning permission and ensuring that essential telecommunications infrastructure is considered and integrated into major infrastructure investments and housing developments at the outset would be of great benefit. We would welcome support from the Mayor on these matters.

Spark has successfully worked in partnership with Auckland Council on a number of innovative digital solutions over the years, including the roll-out of the [smart city precinct](#) in Wynard Quarter, and our [5G Race Zone](#) – a free experience in Auckland's Viaduct Harbour during the 36th America's Cup, aimed at attracting visitors back into the city post our initial Covid lockdowns. We were also one of the first corporates to sign up to Auckland Council's Future Fit sustainability challenge, which over 1,500 of our people participated in last year.

We hope to continue this positive relationship and identify new ways we can work alongside Council to ensure Auckland is able to realise the full potential that technology can bring.

Ngā mihi,



Jolie Hodson

Spark CEO