

SUBMISSION ON COPPER WITHDRAWAL CODE

This is a general submission raising points that I feel should be considered for the Copper Withdrawal Code.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENT TO MOVE TO FIBRE

1. **COSTS & OPTIONS** - A mandatory (forced) move to fibre commits consumers to unknown expenditure, and expenditure that they may not be able to afford. This is especially pertinent post COVID-19, with many consumers losing their jobs.

Fibre has been offered to our home but, after making further enquiries, we cannot obtain accurate costs for installation nor for what equipment upgrades will cost. Although we are being told by Chorus' contractor UCG that installation will cost us nothing, our ISP says we may be charged for installation, as this is established on a case by case basis. And in order to establish if costs will be incurred, we need to proceed with consent and commissioning of the works to find this out. In my opinion this appears to be the "horse before the cart" and can set the wheels in motion without the consumer understanding how much cost will be incurred. Many consumers, particularly those on fixed incomes, such as pensioners, have limited funds, which may put them under financial strain. And you cannot budget if you do not know what these costs will amount to. A copper service should remain available to those who wish to continue using it, without it being cost prohibitive.

2. **SERVICE RELIABILITY** - As fibre requires electricity to work, a mandatory requirement to move to fibre imposes an unfair situation on consumers, particularly during electricity outages i.e. fibre service will not be available in a power outage, which removes the ability to utilise telephones (other than mobile) and internet services.

An example of a situation that has been imposed on consumers is the move from TV aerials to satellite dishes to access free to air TV, via a Freeview box. Virtually every time it rains, and sometimes in just fog, we lose our connection, with the statement appearing on our TV – "rain fade". This change in system has meant we lose access to TV almost every time it rains, whereas under the previous system, we did not. Technology does not always mean a better service and there needs to be a provision for continuity in the form of an alternative service in these situations.

3. **PROCESS & COST** – Most people will be unaware of the entire process and costs to connect to fibre. To simply receive a letter from Chorus stating that fibre is available in your area, and then advised that it may be able to be connected at no cost, does not paint the full picture for those considering connection.

From my research, the connection process and associated costs appear to be:

- **Step 1** - Give consent for Chorus (or their contractor) to install fibre cabling from the access point on the road to the consumer's telephone plinth at their property. A letter advising there will be 'no cost' is, in my opinion, misleading. I was advised by my ISP that confirmation of costs won't be confirmed until the job is booked i.e. after consent has been given. Then you will find out if there is any cost involved in this initial step. And with our property being located up a driveway at least 350m from the access point on the road, this is likely to be substantial. I have heard

examples of consumers being advised that installation of fibre to their property 500m from the access point on the road, will cost around \$8,800.
COST: unknown

- Step 2 – If consent for fibre cabling is given, the next step after running fibre to the plinth, is to run cabling and install an ETP & ONT to connect it into your home. Again, after a visit from a sub-contractor to UCG, the Chorus contractor, an indicative cost was unable to be given. However, we were informed that a quote could be given after installation of the fibre cabling to the plinth had been undertaken. This would require a consumer to commit before fully understanding all the costs.
COST: unknown
- Step 3 – My research indicates that in order for fibre to work, an upgrade will likely be required to our router. This can cost between \$200-\$350 for a new router.
COST: up to \$350
- Step 4 – A new fibre plan from our ISP varies in price, depending on what level of speed you wish for. What lay person would understand a comparison between the speed they currently receive over copper versus fibre? From conversations I have had with consumers who have already switched to fibre, they have noticed the increase in speed has been negligible.
- Step 5 – As fibre appears to be reliant on power, my research indicates a battery backup system is required in the event of a power cut, in order for fibre to function.
COST: \$200 approx.
- Step 6 – It also appears that equipment upgrades are required for anything that currently works over copper but won't work with fibre. In our case, we would require a new alarm system to be installed, as our current alarm system is incompatible with fibre.
COST: min \$200 for retrofit plus ongoing copper line charge to retain, or min \$400 equipment plus installation labour costs for new system

So costs will likely exceed \$1,000 and could be up to \$5,000 but who really knows beforehand what the entire cost will be. If you are a consumer with limited income, this will more than likely be unaffordable. Especially for pensioners who may not be able to afford this cost, let alone even require fibre.

So in summary, I would submit that:

- The copper service be retained if people wish to continue under the status quo.
- Full installation and equipment upgrade indicative costs are published as a guide to consumers before they commit to fibre.
- Better communication is provided to the public on what the full process is, as some consumers may not have the ability to determine what is required to fully connect to fibre. The pamphlet in the mail doesn't paint the full picture.



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