

Cable-laying operations for Digicel's Unlimited Fibre project may be causing headaches today, but the results will make it all worthwhile, say company reps.



Despite 'issues' and 'extra care', trenching work continues as Digicel prepares its Unlimited Fibre offering to businesses and homes

Fibre project progresses

By Dan McSarry

DIGICEL VANUATU CONFIRMED on Friday that not everything has gone to plan on their much-anticipated fibre-optic cable roll-out. But they committed themselves to returning every inch of affected roadway to its original condition.

Complaints have been widespread on social media concerning the condition of the roads following trenching works that, once completed, will stretch from Interchange's cable landing station in Mele, all the way to the airport, and right across town to Digicel HQ on the Ellouk plateau.

The company was quick to tout the benefits. Promising better performance and higher bandwidth for competitive prices, Digicel believes it has an eye-catching package that will appeal to businesses throughout the town.

Prices start at Vt15,000 per month for a 1 megabit unlimited connection, and rise to Vt150,000 for 20 megabits per second. Sales Director Andrew Middlebrook stated that these are so-called 'all-in-one' packages, in which a business picks up mobile and fixed voice services, call handling services and data all in one connectivity package.

Work on the project—which consists of cable-laying from Mele to the airport and up the Lini Highway all the way through the CBD and Nambatu—was originally stated to take 90 days. Mr

Middlebrook attributed a number of factors to the delays, not the least of which were un-mapped buried cables owned by TVI and the Government of Vanuatu.

To add to the difficulty, "extra care" was required when trenching near UNELCO's underground transmission cables. If they are struck during the digging process, it could prove harmful or even deadly to workers, and cause significant disturbance to the community.

Mr Middlebrook was quick to praise the power company for their cooperation. "UNELCO has a map for their cable, and they've been very helpful in sharing that to ensure that the contractor and any diggers are safe."

Digicel is rumoured to be seeking further collaboration with UNELCO, to use their power poles to string their cable overhead as an alternative to further digging. Disabled people in particular have been critical of the disruptions, stating that the roads, which are already difficult to navigate, have become impassable in some places.

"It's very difficult to dig and patch in the same moment," said Mr Middlebrook. While the actual trenching is being performed by contractors, he reiterated several times that Digicel assumes full responsibility for the work, and promises to ensure that roadsides and affected areas

will be returned to their original condition.

Benefits of the project extend beyond businesses. Free installation is being offered to those household users willing to sign up now, and the cable is already in close proximity to many residences in Nambatu and elsewhere.

Digicel confirmed that their first subscribers are already up and running. Fibre-to-the-premises internet is available now to those households and businesses on streets where the cable has already been installed.

Digicel has a number of internet packages aimed at residential users, starting at Vt3,000 per month for 3GB and reaching Vt88,000 for 250GB at a startling 12 megabits per second. People who use more than the allotted amount of data can still run at a slower speed for the rest of the month.

The service comes with a will device that allows phones, tablets, laptop and desktop computers to connect with ease. Home telephony services are available as well.

In addition to this, all of the major towers in the Port Vila municipal area will now be connected to the fibre optic cable. While this will only have a limited impact in the short term, it will make it easier for the company to offer 4G LTE data services, with speeds up to 20 megabits per second, throughout the town.



The cement walkway on the Lini highway leading up to Tektakor