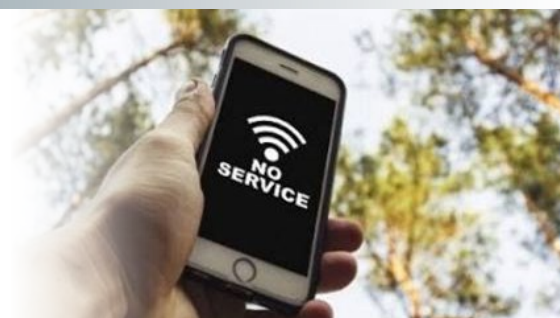


RURAL CELLULAR COVERAGE FOR EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS



BACKGROUND INFO

Cellular coverage is a longstanding concern for rural municipalities as economic opportunities and quality of life can be diminished by poor coverage. A study commissioned by Develop Nova Scotia (which has now been renamed Build Nova Scotia) was completed by FarrPoint to identify the large swaths of provincial highways and civic addresses that exist in areas of poor cellular coverage. The report was submitted in July 2022 and demonstrated that in some rural areas up to 35% of civic addresses have no cellular coverage.

NSFM received letters from 6 municipalities across the province calling for the provincial government to address poor cellular coverage in rural areas. This issue was reviewed by the Public Safety Advisory Committee and was approved as an Advocacy Priority by the Board of Directors on September 6, 2024.

Based on the findings of the FarrPoint study, the provincial government initially invested \$47.3 million for Build Nova Scotia to work with telecommunications providers, existing infrastructure, and untraditional infrastructure to fill gaps in cellular service across the province.

Following Hurricane Fiona, the Minister of Municipal Affairs made amendments to the *Emergency Management Act* that designation of telecommunications providers as critical service providers with certain emergency preparation responsibilities with Bill 198 on November 9, 2023. Despite the unanimous support, these amendments have not been proclaimed.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUE

The Minister of Emergency Management, Hon. Kim Masland, has stated publicly that cellular service is no longer a luxury but a matter of public safety. Municipalities want to ensure that all residents are able to receive emergency alerts and are able to call 911 during emergencies. Without better cellular coverage, emergency response efforts will not be effective for all.

Poor cellular coverage is an even greater concern in the context of emergencies and power outages. Municipal councils want to ensure that emergency alerts are received, and people are able to contact 911, especially when these services are needed most.

NSFM ADVOCACY & RESEARCH

NSFM has corresponded with the Minister of Emergency Management to call for the proclamation of amendments in Bill 198. The Minister responded that ministerial regulatory powers under the Emergency



Preparedness and Nova Scotia Guard Act will be used instead of the amendments to the Emergency Management Act. On April 27, 2026, NSFM wrote a letter expressing support for this approach.

The NSFM Public Safety Committee has received two presentations from the Build NS on the Cellular for Nova Scotia Program and regular updates have been posted on the Build Nova Scotia website (<https://internet.buildns.ca/cell/>). The Province has continued to fund sequential stages of this project.

NEXT STEPS

Municipalities are not able to govern telecommunications providers despite the importance of cellular service to their residents. Therefore, NSFM is set on engaging the orders of government that do govern these importance services. The federal government oversees consumer protections through the Canada Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), and the provincial government oversees emergency management responsibilities in the interest of public safety through the Department of Emergency Management. The provincial Department of Public Works also plays a role in filling cellular coverage gaps by overseeing the work of Build Nova Scotia and the Cellular for Nova Scotia program.

Given the apparent consensus among all orders of government on ensuring the cellular service is available to residents when they need it most, NSFM is confident that a regulatory framework can be put in place that will help keep telecommunications providers accountable and all members of the public connected.

To advance toward this much-needed framework, NSFM will continue to:

- Call for provincial regulations that designate telecommunications providers as critical service providers with specific emergency preparedness responsibilities as spelled out in s.7 of the Emergency Preparedness and Nova Scotia Guard Act.
- Engage in federal advocacy by engaging ministers overseeing the CRTC and Innovative, Science, and Economic Development office of Canada.
- Monitor the Cellular for Nova Scotia program through the Public Safety Advisory Committee and call for municipal involvement in the roll out of this program.

By working collaboratively, all orders of government will be able to increase the standard of safety and connectivity for all Nova Scotians.