

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here on behalf of Openreach Limited.

Now I've only got five minutes, but that's probably a good thing as we're pretty busy getting on with the job of building full fibre across Britain – but let me come back to that in a second.

I'd like to make three simple points today:

- Firstly, that Openreach is very much in the full fibre business
- Secondly, that we have the most capable, highly-skilled, national fibre delivery machine in the UK
- And finally, that Openreach is a dependable partner for the whole industry as we seek to make full fibre the backbone of Britain's social and economic success for decades to come.

[Unrivalled commitment]

Let me start with our commitment.

Openreach is a fibre business.

Our commitment as Britain's national digital infrastructure provider is longstanding and it's long-term.

And we recently made another substantial pledge.

[Pause]

We've already built our full fibre network to well over half a million properties, mainly in rural areas. But our target – announced in February – is to reach three million front doors by the end of 2020.

We've called this programme 'Fibre First' because our attitude is just that.

Full fibre is our default choice.

We'll build it wherever we can. And we'll do that as fast as possible.

But we don't want to stop at three million.

With superfast broadband, we upgraded two thirds of the country on our own. And if we can get the right conditions to invest, we want to repeat that trick with full fibre.

We want to build a 10 million footprint by the mid-2020s, and ultimately to reach the majority of Britain.

It's an unrivalled national ambition.

And, having consulted with our customers, we all agree that Openreach should ramp up the build now to meet the demand of the future.

[Unrivalled capability]

To achieve that, we're building the ultimate delivery machine.

I'm really proud of Openreach's scale and capability already.

Our 30,000 people were critical to helping government reach its 95% target by the end of last year. And our engineers, based in every community, meet more than 25,000 customers every day.

But building a national full fibre network is another huge step up.

It requires more investment in networks, but also people – engineers and planners, and in processes, tools and training. So that's exactly what we're doing.

Last year, with financial support from BT, we invested more than £1.5 billion into our network, and this year we'll invest more than any prior year.

Last year we hired more than 1,800 new engineers, and this year we've launched the largest recruitment drive in our history - with 3,500 more joining to support our fibre plans from Penzance to the Orkney Islands.

We're supporting them with 12 new training schools and we'll double the amount of training we deliver to make Fibre First a reality.

At the same time, we keep innovating.

From commercial models that help communities, government and industry to make the fibre economics work – to clever techniques developed by our Chief Engineer team, led by Andy Whale.

Andy's using everything from drones to fishing rods to deliver connectivity. And he's brought in some brilliantly ruthless

trenching machines called 'ditch witches' that can bury up to a kilometre of fibre a day.

It's helped us deliver full fibre to families in the Scottish Highlands that can't even get mains water.

We've also introduced 'plug and play' connectors and flexible, armoured cabling – helping us cut our deployment costs in half.

[Pause]

We're also removing costs and barriers to increase the pace of the rollout. For example, by co-locating with our suppliers and local authorities, we're finding better ways of working on planning, road closures and permissions to access private land.

We're now committed to delivering FTTP in 40 towns, cities and boroughs and in just a few short weeks we've raised the delivery rate of full fibre to over a thousand homes per week in Bristol and in Cardiff.

By the end of May, we'll be building to 1000 homes each week in each of the eight cities we've announced in our first wave.

We will double our FTTP footprint this year.

And we don't yet know how fast we can go.

But be assured Openreach will go full throttle, at scale, across 40 cities.

[Pause]

That said, to create a national network, builders like Openreach also need help from Government and Ofcom.

I'm particularly encouraged by the approach of the DCMS barrier busting team, because everyone knows that network builders could go faster if there was less red-tape.

But it's also important for the whole industry that we find a solution to business rates. One that promotes investment and better reflects the long term nature of what we're all investing in.

Ofcom's WLA review gives us more pricing certainty, but regulation must promote FTTP investment and take-up, so investors need unequivocal support for the switchover from copper to fibre, and greater flexibility to withdraw legacy products when launching new ones.

In the longer term, we believe the model needs fundamental change to guarantee customers quality and choice. We can achieve that by:

- Incentivising fibre investments that allow a fair return
- Encouraging competition outside urban clusters
- And recognising that a three year regulatory review cycle is too short

We will continue to support and feed into the government's Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review.

[Unrivalled enabler]

Finally I want to emphasise our role as an enabler for others.

Openreach was established in 2006 to promote competition in the telecoms market.

Promoting competition is the reason we exist.

And in delivering Britain's full fibre future, we're not just building the biggest and best network for our customers - we're a partner for others that want to use our poles and holes to achieve their own ambitions.

Our passive network has been open since 2011. And by investing in automation, digital maps and self-service tools, we're making it as easy for others to use as it is for Openreach.

So far, more than 15 companies have earmarked around 1,000 kilometres of our network to deploy their own fibre, and we're very much open for more business.

[Conclusion]

So in the short time I've had, I hope I've been able to underline Openreach's commitment, our capabilities and our industry solidarity.

So often the headlines about full fibre focus on speed. And in that respect it's a truly amazing invention.

But FTTP's about more than just speed. It's about a consistent, dependable service – and I want to emphasise today that the same is true of Openreach.

We won't be just the fastest full fibre builder in the UK, but we'll be Britain's national, dependable full fibre delivery machine for years to come.