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Telecom expands throughout territory

SSi Micro announced a \$75 million infrastructure investment specifically for Nunavut

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Northern News Services
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NUNAVUT

Nunavut broadband Internet services from one telecommunications company are poised to become faster and more comprehensive in the wake of a recent investment announcement but some worry it won't be enough.

On Sept. 23, SSi Micro - a Northern telecom company based in Yellowknife announced a \$75 million investment in its Nunavut broadband infrastructure over the next three years with improved services aimed to be online early next year.

"The bottom line for consumers is that by March 31, 2016, every single community in Nunavut - so all 25 communities in Nunavut - will have massive increases in

speed to the consumer broadband service," said Dean Proctor, chief development officer at SSi Micro, adding that usage caps for customers will also increase but without any price change for the same basic monthly package currently offered.

"It's been a long time coming," he said.

Of the announced funds, SSi Micro will be investing \$40 million of its funds while the remaining \$35 million is coming from the federal government. If that second number sounds familiar, it's because those funds were actually revealed in July and are part of the Connecting Canadians Program, a \$305 million initiative with



Dean Proctor, chief development officer at SSi Micro, announces a \$75-million investment in Nunavut broadband Internet services, at the Frobisher Inn in Iqaluit Sept. 23. - Casey Lessard/NNSL photo

the goal of bringing high-speed Internet services to some of the country's most remote communities.

"We didn't make any announcements (then) because we wanted to prepare for the larger announcement, this one here," Proctor said. "So what was announced in July was the signing of that contract but we wanted to complete the story."

Oana Spinu, executive director of the Nunavut Broadband Development Corporation, attended the event and was critical of some of the plan's details.

"While \$75 million is a significant investment, Nunavut users will only see an incremental improvement," she told News/North in an e-mail. "The Connecting Canadians Program only supports 3Mbps download and a 20 GB monthly cap in Nunavut (and Nunavik) under the program's Northern component. However, projects funded under the program in the rest of Canada must deliver at least 5 Mbps download speed and a 45 GB monthly cap."

SSi Micro currently provides Internet services to Nunavut via two Telus-owned satellites.

"This is us committing to purchasing significantly more capacity in those existing (satellites) - and that capacity is used immediately for the North," Proctor said. The investment will also install "state-of-the-art" mobile and 4G LTE wireless technologies in communities.

At the news conference, the company also touted a newly signed agreement committing to purchase capacity on a new satellite that will be launched soon by Telus, which Proctor described as a "high through-put satellite" that uses the latest generation technology.

However, Spinu said the development corporation is still concerned these steps will not be enough to "significantly meet the territory's growing telecommunication needs in the midterm, let alone the long term."

"Nunavut cannot wait until the next generation of satellites are capacity to begin planning for fibre (optic connectivity)," she said.

As part of the planned infrastructure upgrades, SSi Micro will begin rolling out facilities known as "PowerComm Hubs" in communities that will house all the electronics needed for communications technology. Half of each unit will be also dedicated to backup power generation.

Proctor said the greatest challenge facing the new services from SSi Micro will be ensuring the system can handle a sharp increase in usage. "It's a horrible thing to say, but typically the problems we're confronted with are demand. We have to make certain that we're ready when we do launch. This is why we can't overnight. We have to be certain we're ready to meet the demand," he said. "It's a good problem, but it is a problem."

