



**DCC response to  
consultation on  
CSPC&S WAN  
solution  
T3 antennae and alternative  
options**

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# 1. Background

The Communication Service Provider (CSP) Central and Southern (C&S) is tasked with providing Wide Area Network (WAN) coverage to allow the communication between Smart Metering Systems and the DCC.

The CSP C&S utilises a mixture of technology to provide WAN coverage, including cellular mast deployment, inter Communications Hub Mesh communications and the utilisation and installation of T1, T2 and T3 antennae. The T3 solution was developed by the CSP as part of their design solution and it has a contractual right to recommend the installation of up to 100,000 T3 antennae as part of that solution. In these circumstances the T3 antennae are required in order to connect to the WAN. It is projected that the installation of at least ~30,000 T3 antennae will be required to provide WAN connection.

The T3 solution requires the installation of an antenna at a consumer's premises. Installing organisations are informed of the requirement for a T3 antenna when using the DCC WAN Coverage Checker and can book the installation of the antenna through the T3 Service Request Portal. Operational guidance for installing organisations covering the T3 process is in development and is targeted to be available by the end of June 2021.

Energy suppliers have informed DCC that the installation of T3 antennae presents a more complicated installation and that end consumers are reluctant to agree to their installation. There has been one T3 antenna installation to date. Whilst energy suppliers have raised a series of concerns about the practicalities of the T3 solution, given the limited installation activity, there is little evidence of the actual problems encountered at install to date. It is also not known how many consumers have been offered a T3 installation by their energy supplier. While the T3 antenna is available and nominated for installation, the reluctance to install them results in some consumers being unable to realise the benefits of smart meters.

DCC consulted on the T3 solution and alternative options to better understand industry concerns in continuing with the T3 antenna solution and their opinion on alternative options.

## 2. DCC Responses to Comments Received

DCC consulted on three options and sought industry views on each. The options presented were:

- Option one – do nothing. This would not see any amendment to the WAN solution and would continue to allow the nomination and installation of the T3 antennae to continue.
- Option two – remove T3 antennae from the WAN solution and allow for planned cellular mast deployment over time.
- Option three – remove T3 antenna from the WAN solution and accelerate mast deployment.

DCC Received six responses to the consultation. Five responses were from Large Energy Suppliers and one response from an industry body representing energy suppliers.

DCC posed three questions which are set out below, along with comments received and DCC's responses to those comments.

## Question 1

Do you support Option One as the preferred solution? Please provide a rationale for your response, highlighting any additional benefits or drawbacks.

This question related to the option to continue with the current WAN solution and the nomination and installation of T3 antennae.

There were five respondents who addressed this question, all of which reiterated previously described perceived issues with T3 installations and were against continuing with the solution.

The complexity of T3 installations was highlighted as a concern, including the difficulty in managing consumer expectations; managing the co-ordination of two technicians from separate organisations on site; the requirement to obtain planning permission in some circumstances; obtaining permission in rented accommodation; and complicated fault diagnosis. In addition, the low uptake by consumers is seen as a major issue with the success of installation, and the negative consumer experience in which such an installation may result.

One respondent recognised that some consumers may support the installation of a T3 antenna.

To date the CSP has been asked twice to attend an installation to provide the T3 antenna and so experience in the process of installation and fault diagnostics is absent across the majority of installing organisations. One respondent highlighted that their installers were not trained in T3 installations which suggests some installing organisations are not aware of the correct process, which if improved could result in greater numbers of installations.

DCC recognises the concerns of respondents in terms of complexity and the low uptake of installation by energy consumers. However, very little evidence of issues has been provided, including how many times consumers have been offered a T3 installation and their responses to that offer. DCC would like to understand these concerns in more detail and consider how issues could be overcome in order to increase installation rates. For example, this might include considering what information DCC could provide to better manage consumer expectations or providing additional support to the installing organisation to coordinate the installation and fault diagnoses.

## Question 2

Do you support Option Two as the preferred solution? Please provide a rationale for your response, highlighting any additional benefits or drawbacks.

This question related to the option to remove the T3 antennae from the WAN solution and allow for the CSPs planned cellular mast deployment to improve WAN coverage over time.

This option received the most support from respondents, though this was not without caveats. This option presents an unknown in terms of timing since this mast deployment would be driven by CSP priorities other than Smart Metering.

Four respondents suggested that the benefits of DCC's Network Evolution project should be considered as part of this solution. One of these respondents considered that Network Evolution could make option 2 redundant.

One respondent would support this option if the installation of T3 antennae remained an option and where Network Evolution was also considered.

The benefits of this option were considered by the respondents to be that it presents no significant additional cost and that the removal of the T3 antennae requirements would eliminate issues respondents noted in with the current solution.

DCC discounted Network Evolution from the options considered due to the uncertainties that it presents in both the ability of advanced technology and the timeline in which that might become available. It is therefore difficult to provide certainty that Network Evolution could improve WAN coverage to the required areas and by when. DCC issued a consultation on its proposals for Communications Hubs and Network changes moving forward, and this consultation is set to conclude in June 2021.

### Question 3

Do you support Option Three as the preferred solution? Please provide a rationale to your response, highlighting any additional benefits or drawbacks.

This question related to the option to remove the T3 antennae from the WAN solution and to accelerate the CSPs planned cellular mast deployment to improve WAN coverage over time.

Of the six responses to this question no organisation agreed with proceeding with this option. The high cost of this solution for a perceived small number of consumers was considered prohibitive.

Three respondents also questioned whether Network Evolution should be factored into this solution.

One respondent highlighted that a small number of consumers may be supportive of the T3 antennae removed under this proposal.

DCC understands respondents concerns over the cost associated with this option and the considered low number of consumers the solution would benefit, resulting in this solution not being considered viable.

## 3. Next Steps

The alternative options presented are not considered viable at present due to the unknown timeline associated with option two and the additional cost associated with option three.

DCC will continue to engage with industry on the current T3 solution and will look to engage with installing organisations to better understand the issues associated with it and consider how those

issues might be overcome, including what support or actions DCC can take to minimise those issues.

At the February 2021 SMDG forum BEIS asked Energy Suppliers present to work collaboratively with support from BEIS to develop a T3 specific customer journey to ensure consumers are provided with sufficiently clear and helpful information on why a T3 aerial is needed and installation steps required to achieve this. BEIS will also facilitate a T3 workshop(s) to discuss the consumer and operational journey to support successful T3 installations.

New Operational guidance covering the T3 process is in development and is targeted to be available for installing organisations by the end of June 2021.

DCC encourages installing organisations to utilise the T3 solution and to contact DCC where issues arise.