



NEWS

Citing CRTC delay, Northwestel pushes back unlimited plans

Ollie Williams - October 29, 2020

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There will be no unlimited internet plans for northerners on November 2, Northwestel said on Thursday. It's no longer clear when those plans will be introduced.



A sign on Highway 3 warns of overhead fibre-optic cabling. Ollie Williams/Cabin Radio

In a [tweet](#), Northwestel said telecoms regulator the CRTC needed more time to study its plans. The CRTC has to approve any change in Northwestel's plans because of the company's dominance in the northern market.

Northwestel is understood to have relied on the regulator speedily issuing what is known as an interim approval for a change in the packages it offers.

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An interim approval would have allowed the company to go ahead and begin offering unlimited plans on November 2 while the full regulatory process was still going on.

Northwestel's tweet appears to suggest no such interim approval has been granted, though that could not be immediately confirmed.

SSI Micro, a smaller rival to Northwestel, had filed an intervention with the CRTC this week urging the regulator not to grant Northwestel the go-ahead for unlimited plans.

SSI Micro relies on Northwestel's infrastructure to offer rival plans to northerners, purchasing space on Northwestel's fibre line then using that to sell packages of its own.

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The smaller company said Northwestel's plan to introduce unlimited plans was "anti-competitive" and could do "significant, irreparable harm" to Northwestel's competitors.

SSI Micro had in September asked the CRTC not to give Northwestel what it termed a head start by being the first to offer unlimited plans, before its rivals are able.

It's now not clear when Northwestel may begin to offer unlimited plans. If the CRTC does approve Northwestel's proposal, however, the delay is unlikely to be more than a month or two. (The CRTC may yet choose to reject the proposal.)

"The CRTC has informed us they need more time to consider our application for unlimited internet," Northwestel's Thursday tweet read.

“This means the new unlimited plans will not be available November 2. We continue to get ready, and we will keep you up to date as we know more.”

The CRTC told Cabin Radio it could not comment on an active file.

Northwestel had always been clear that its new, unlimited plans were reliant on CRTC approval, though the company’s emphasis squarely fell on marketing those plans to northerners – including a [recent announcement of its proposed prices](#).

If unlimited plans are rolled out in the near future, they are set to be offered first in Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Norman Wells, and Hay River, alongside several Yukon and BC communities.

Not all residents in and around those communities may benefit, though, depending on whether the infrastructure to all homes has been updated.

Several Hay River residents, for example, told Cabin Radio they had been advised by Northwestel that they would not be able to immediately access unlimited plans.

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