

Supplementary Written Evidence Submitted by Telecom Infra Project (UKT0027)

Subject: 24 June appearance at the Science and Technology Committee

I am writing to thank you for the opportunity to appear at your committee to give evidence on OpenRAN and disaggregation in telecommunications networks. I would also like to thank Danielle Nash and Ellen Watson for their help coordinating the session.

I was encouraged by the committee's interest in the need to introduce systemic change to the UK telecommunications market and in the potential of disaggregation to make this happen. The organisation I lead is convinced that today's environment, where mobile network operators are constrained in buying monolithic networks from a handful of suppliers, must be better.

The current situation contributes to a landscape where upgrade cycles are lengthier than they need to be, meaning consumers are left waiting years for world-leading connectivity. This is particularly true for rural customers, who in previous generations of communications technology have been left behind. Current technological trends mean we can do it differently – in my evidence we referred to separation of hardware and software components as just two of those trends. The imperative for better connectivity here and worldwide means we must.

With policymaker support, the UK can take a lead in creating an ecosystem of disaggregated networks: by supporting initiatives such as OpenRAN, we can create a plethora of interoperable components, each representing its own market and each able to be swapped out to respond to technological progress or address security concerns.

As I mentioned in my evidence to your committee, I believe these trends are inevitable. There is, however, the potential to foster a new generation of specialised British vendors in 5G and future generations if the UK moves early to leverage its substantial research and technology base. We are encouraged by the British government's first steps and believe there are opportunities to go further.

The 5G Testbeds and Trials programme has generated some promising results, and our members would welcome the opportunity to partner with government to make this programme go further. Similarly, the government's idea of a 'UK ARPA', subject of another inquiry of your Committee, could be a further route to extend UK leadership. As an organisation with a membership from across the world, we are also excited to see the government looking to take a leading role in this issue in the proposed "D-10" initiative.

During the session, I committed to following up with Carol Monaghan MP to answer her question on how governments are supporting telecommunications innovation around the world. I wanted to inform you that we will follow up with her office, the clerks and you within the next week.

In closing, I would like to repeat our offer to provide any further information about disaggregation, OpenRAN or the Telecom Infra Project that may be of use to your inquiry as it progresses. You kindly offered the option of a short meeting ahead of the session and, while we were unable to align our schedules on this occasion, we would appreciate the chance to discuss our work in some more detail with your office. I will be happy to make those arrangements with your office, as you see fit.

Thank you again for a stimulating session.

Yours sincerely,

Attilio Zani, Executive Director, Telecom Infra Project

(30 June 2020)

