

Moving Freeview to make more airwaves available for mobile – the ‘700 MHz clearance’

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Consumers’ demand for mobile data has never been higher, and is expected to continue to grow significantly over the next decade.

To cope with this increasing demand, an additional section of the airwaves – known as ‘the 700 MHz band’ – is being made available for future mobile data use.

Opening up the 700 MHz band will allow mobile networks to provide better services at lower cost, and help meet the rapidly growing demand for mobile data. The process will deliver an estimated £900m-£1.3bn worth of benefits to the UK.¹

The 700 MHz band is currently used to broadcast digital terrestrial TV, commonly known as Freeview.² It is also used for wireless communication for programme-making and special events. In order to make the band available for mobile broadband in the coming years, these services are being moved to other frequencies. This programme is known as ‘**700 MHz clearance**’.

Freeview and other digital terrestrial viewers will simply need to retune their TVs or set-top boxes when these changes happen in their area. A very small minority – estimated to be up to 1% of households – may need to replace their rooftop aerial. A key objective of the programme is to avoid undue disruption to viewers as a result of 700 MHz clearance.

Each area of the UK will undergo the change at a different time, with the process starting in parts of Scotland this year.

The map below shows when the different areas of the UK will see the change happen. The programme is currently scheduled to finish in April 2020, subject to review in 2017.

Scottish Highlands and Islands

As part of the 700 MHz clearance, there will be a change to transmitters in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. This will happen during July 2017 – October 2017, and will involve moving channels that are currently being broadcast in the 700 MHz band to their new frequencies.

Digital terrestrial viewers tuned to the Bressay, Knockmore, Rumster Forest, Rosemarkie, Eitshal, Skriag and Torosay transmitters, or their relay transmitters, may need to retune their TVs or set-top boxes to continue receiving their Freeview services.

A local information campaign will prepare people for the changes as they take place in each area. Information will be available on the Freeview website at freeview.co.uk/tvchanges and advice as well as support can be accessed from the Freeview Advice Line on Freephone 0808 100 0288. These will be operational from 12 July.

¹ See Ofcom’s 2014 statement ‘Decision to make the 700 MHz band available for mobile data’ https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0024/46923/700-mhz-statement.pdf

² The digital terrestrial platform also includes Youview, TalkTalk TV, and BT TV services

Figure 1. current proposed 700 MHz clearance timetable

