

Background

Jamaica privatised its telecommunications sector in the late 1980s and embarked on a process of phased liberalisation in 2000 with the opening up of the mobile market to competition. Subsequent to this, all other aspects of the sector have been opened up to competition with the final frontier, international telecommunications to and from Jamaica, opened as at March 2003.

This has resulted in the issuance of over four hundred carrier and service provider licenses. These licences provide for, as applicable: the construction, ownership or operation of a diverse range of telecommunications facilities and provisions of telecommunication services. These licences have included three (3) new licences to build, own and operate submarine fibre optic cable carrier facilities. The first two of these licences were granted in 2004 pursuant to a Ministerial Directive of the same year and the last was recently granted following a December 2008 Directive. These are in addition to the licence granted to the incumbent operator prior to liberalisation and whose facilities included a sub-sea fibre optic cable.

To date, only one of the three new licensees has commenced operation. Nevertheless, ongoing enquires and expressions of interest indicate that there is still significant scope and opportunity to expand Jamaica's international fibre capacity. It is also the expressed policy of the Government of Jamaica to convert Jamaica into an international communication and information hub and in this regard diversification of access to international networks is a critical imperative.

The Government of Jamaica is therefore keen to continue to promote a policy of liberalization of access to international gateways and circuits and securing increased bandwidth capacity. It is anticipated that this will have the beneficial effects of reducing the costs of providing information technology related services to both operators and end-users and improving the country's competitive advantage.

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