

New World Bank project will expand internet access for Marshall Islands

The US\$30m Digital RMI Project will increase access to the digital economy, promote investment

WASHINGTON DC, August 31, 2021 – The World Bank’s Board of Executive Directors has approved a US\$30 million project in Marshall Islands, where access to high-speed internet remains extremely limited and costly, that will secure faster, more reliable, and more affordable internet access across the country.

In addition to expanding online access, the Digital RMI project aims to promote private sector investment in climate-resilient digital infrastructure and establish the foundations for digital government services and the digital economy. The project will be implemented over seven years and is being led by the Government of the Marshall Islands through its Ministry of Finance, Banking & Postal Services and the Ministry for Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

“COVID-19 has only served to underscore the importance of being digitally connected. We are proud to be standing with Marshall Islands to improve internet access for all Marshallese, and to invest in the development of digital government services and the digital economy,” said **Stephen Ndegwa, World Bank Country Director for Papua New Guinea and the Pacific Islands**. *“The links between extreme poverty and a lack of access to basic public services are clear and research has shown direct ties between an increase in high speed internet access and economic growth. Improved access to the internet and digital government services – including for health and education – will be critical for the Marshallese people now and into the future.”*

Limited online access has constrained the country’s ability to participate in the digital economy, further isolating the atoll nation and its people and reducing economic and social opportunities.

“I sincerely thank the World Bank for its support of the Digital RMI project,” said the **Marshall Islands Government Chief Secretary Kino Kabua**. *“This project will secure a more prosperous future and greater opportunities for every citizen of Marshall Islands through faster, more reliable and more affordable digital connectivity. This represents a critical opportunity that will benefit generations to come.”*

The project addresses connectivity issues in four areas while laying the foundations for the development of digital government services and the digital economy. One component of the project will drive new investment in energy-efficient, disaster- and climate-resilient digital infrastructure across all 24 inhabited atolls and islands, including Majuro and Ebeye.

Another aspect of the initiative focuses on investments in digital government platforms, cybersecurity, and digital skills, with work to prioritize key services such as e-health and e-education. Digital job creation, skill development and initiatives to close gender gaps in the access and use of digital infrastructure and services will also be prioritized to support the Marshall Islands’ transition to the digital economy.

The project will also support the Ministry for Transport, Communications and Information Technology, including with the strengthening of the policy, legal and regulatory environment around digital economy and digital government services. These reforms – particularly around data protection and privacy, cybersecurity and combatting cybercrime – will be essential to help build trust around the delivery and use of digital services.

The total project cost will be US\$37.5 million, with a US\$30 million grant from the International Development Association (IDA) - the World Bank’s fund for the world’s most in-need countries – and US\$7.5 million of private capital, which will be mobilized under component one of the project.

The World Bank works in partnership with 12 countries across the Pacific supporting 86 projects totaling US\$2.06 billion in commitments in sectors like agriculture, health, education and employment, climate resilience and adaptation, energy, fisheries, rural development, economic policy, macroeconomic management, aviation and transport, telecommunications, and tourism.

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