

Telstra moves to please the country

In advance of the July 31 deadline set for the Australian Communications Authority report into the analogue AMPS service, Telstra has agreed to upgrade its analogue AMPS mobile network to a new generation mobile technology known as CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access).

According to Telstra, the decision means that areas of Australia which currently receive mobile phone coverage from the Telstra analogue AMPS network will continue to receive the same coverage when the network is upgraded, and follows the government's allocation of additional spectrum earlier this year. It also means that after 2000 when the AMPS system will be phased out, mobile phone users in rural areas will no longer have to choose

between having an AMPS mobile phone that gives coverage in the country, or a GSM mobile phone that gives coverage in urban areas.

Areas of regional Australia which now get AMPS coverage will be upgraded to receive CDMA coverage. Ultimately, the service is intended to also cover urban areas and all other areas which currently use the AMPS network. It is anticipated that third party resellers will get wholesale access to the new network.

More than \$400 million will be invested in CDMA which will use the 800 Mhz spectrum recently acquired by Telstra in the mass spectrum sell-off by the government.

CDMA is a digital technology like the GSM system already in operation in Australia but it has a similar range to the AMPS system, its coverage from each base station being roughly equivalent to that of

AMPS. According to Telstra, CDMA allows multiple phone calls to be carried on a single frequency by "encrypting" each conversation. The signal drops out at the end of its range. Like GSM, CDMA provides high security and can carry large quantities of data which allow users to access the Internet, data transfer, voicemail and other messaging systems and services.

AMPS users will need to buy a new "dual mode" handset, allowing users with a CDMA handset to access the old AMPS network for as long as it remains operational. The handset is expected to cost roughly the same as existing GSM handsets once the technology is in place.

The CDMA network should be in place in those areas where the AMPS network is scheduled to close at midnight on December 31, 1999.

Communications and Arts transfer to DoCA

The Communications and the Arts branch of the former Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics (BTCE) will transfer to the Department of Communications and the Arts (DoCA) this month.

The branch had remained in the BTCE as part of the then Department of Transport when the Department of Transport and Communications was split in late 1993. It continued research on a range of communications issues working closely with DoCA but the recent move by the department from Civic to Forrest in Canberra has made close contact between the two agencies more difficult.

All positions in the former BTCE branch will transfer to DoCA. The branch will be renamed the Communications Research Unit (CRU) and will reside in the Telecommunications Industry Division. The unit will continue to be led by David Luck who will report to Fay Holthuizen.

Secretary of the department, Mr Stevens, has indicated that the unit will continue to undertake independent research and retain its current level of budget funding. Its research will cover a wide range of communications issues of interest to all areas of the portfolio. One of the benefits of co-location will be the additional opportunities available to employ the recognised research skills of the unit on current policy issues.

The CRU will also be able to bid for some fee-for-service consultancy work such as that recently

undertaken for the Working Group on Putting Cables Underground.

The unit will be encouraged to continue publishing the results of its major research projects and will remain a focus for the communications research community. An important task will be to continue to organise the annual Communications Research Forum which will again be held in Canberra, from September 24-25, 1998 at Old Parliament House.

For the latest information and details on how to register for the forum, visit the CRF website at www.dca.gov.au/crf or contact Adrian Walker at the BTCE on ph: 02 6274 7242, fax: 02 6274 6816, or email Bseminar@email.dot.gov.au

**David Luck, research manager,
Communications Research Unit**