

The €8 million investment into broadband networks in the north-east, which was announced by the government last week, will build new broadband lines in five towns, even though broadband is already available there.

As reported by *The Sunday Business Post* last week, the government has already invested €120 million in the broadband networks, but does not know how many customers are using them.

Last Tuesday, the Minister for Communications, Noel Dempsey, announced that the government was investing a further €8 million in the broadband networks – known as metropolitan area networks – in Castleblayney, Clones, Cootehill, Bailieborough and Ardee.

The state-backed networks are alternative broadband networks which allow Eircom's rivals to offer broadband, without using the former state company's network.

The EU Commission and the government are funding about 90 per cent of the investment. At a Dáil telecommunications committee meeting earlier this month, Dempsey said EU approval for such investment was given on the condition that it did not duplicate similar broadband lines.

However, broadband has been available from Eircom in Ardee since July 2004, and in Castleblayney, Cootehill and Bailieborough since October 2004. In March 2005, Eircom built broadband lines in Clones. About three years ago, the Dáil telecommunications committee recommended that the government's broadband investment did not duplicate broadband lines that had been



Noel Dempsey

already built. "It seems to me that nobody did that," said Green Party TD Eamon Ryan at the committee meeting earlier this month.

This weekend, a spokesman for the department said it was "satisfied there is no infrastructure comparable to the metropolitan area networks" in the towns targeted. The spokesman said that, unlike Eircom's broadband lines, any operator could use the government-funded networks.

"While detailed plans for the new networks have been available for a year or more, no operator has notified us of comparable infrastructure in any of the locations approved for investment," said the spokesman.

The chairman of the Dáil telecommunications committee, Noel O'Flynn, said he would be writing to Smart Telecom to confirm how many of its customers cannot receive the company's broadband service.

According to Smart, 6,500 of its customers cannot avail of its broadband service because Eircom customers must change their home phone number to use the service.

"It is not acceptable that delays of this magnitude can be tolerated in the rollout of broadband," said O'Flynn.



Scott Barron, director of Famous Memorabilia with a replica United ball signed by members of the 2006 squad

By Denise O'Donovan

The first Irish memorabilia shop, Famous Memorabilia, opened in Dublin last week.

Among the items for sale in the shop on Drury Street is astronaut Buzz Aldrin's medal from the Apollo 11 space mission, which costs €150,000.

The artefact, commemorating the first landing on the moon with Neil Armstrong, was presented to the astronaut by the Mayor of New York in

1969 and is the most expensive item in the store. Owners John Barron and Michael McMichael gave the item by its Brian Hamilton Bland and have agreed to return it if it is not sold.

The store is affiliated with company Sportizus, the largest of vintage, contemporary and celebrity memorabilia in Ireland.

"The next highest-priced item in the store is a Beatles display case. The last public concert in 1996, signatures of John, Paul, George and Ringo presented individual

Text message company

By Caitríona Mc Bride

A British company that answers queries from customers by sending them a text message, plans to recruit 200 people in Ireland over the next two years. AQA (Any Question Answered), which was launched in Ireland last week, answers 10,000 customer questions a day on topics that range from rail timetables to advice on fashion.

"We are aiming to answer 1,000 questions a day in the Republic, bringing employment to 200 home-based researchers throughout Ireland," said Paul Cockerton, marketing director of AQA.

Cockerton said the company chose to expand into Ireland because of the popularity of text messaging in Ireland.

"Ireland has a very high text usage and although the market is smaller than the UK, the feverish texting has not gone unnoticed," he said. Using the

Top five most asked questions

Q1: What's a good chat up line?

AQA: The world's best chat up line is: "Excuse me, can I have your phone number? I seem to have lost mine."

Q2: What's the meaning of life?

AQA: In 'The Meaning of Life' written by Bradley Greive, the answer is summarised as: "Figure out what you love and do it."

Q3: Why is the sky blue?

AQA: The sky appears blue because blue light gets spread much more than the

AQA service, mobile phone users text 57275 to get any question answered, within minutes, 24 hours a day. Each text costs €2. Since its launch

New broadband product

Technology firm Azotel will launch a new broadband product on Tuesday, which it claims will increase competition in Ireland's broadband market, writes Laura Noonan.

Azotel said the new product, which provides broadband operators with software to bill and track their customers, would make broadband commercially viable in rural areas. It said the product would look after the network's security, settings and how its bandwidth was distributed.

"We offer everything that an operator needs to set up a wireless network," said John O'Hare, Azotel's chief executive. "The problem is that, at the moment, each wireless operator that sets up is reinventing the wheel. With our product, all an operator will need is a single box which replaces the need for a rack of traditional equipment."



Labour Court to rule

The Labour Court is expected to issue a recommendation shortly on a pensions dispute between the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Re-

RNAI's defined-benefit pension scheme for journalists, which would give employees a guaranteed regular payment when they retire.