MTN's investment in submarine cables reaches new frontiers as WACS prepares for

2011-05-23 12:00:00 by Rons_ROV_Links

MTN Group's $90 million investment in the West Africa Cable System (WACS) will reach an important milestone this month when the 14,000 kilometre-long submarine cable lands at Yzerfontein in the Western Cape.

MTN's investment in WACS forms part of a myriad of submarine cables that Africa's leading telecommunications provider has invested in in an attempt to bring much-needed broadband capacity to the continent, bolster Africa's efforts to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals to bridge the digital divide and provide millions of its subscribers in its footprint in Africa and the Middle East the capacity and ability to use smart solutions.

As the single biggest investor in WACS, MTN will receive an initial capacity of 11% when the cable becomes commercially available in the second quarter of this year.

Says Karel Pienaar, MTN South Africa Managing Director: "WACS will provide millions of MTN subscribers across Africa the much-needed bandwidth and will go a long way towards catapulting Africa into the digital age. Lack of bandwidth on the continent has arrested the development of Africa and has constrained the continent from achieving its full potential. MTN's investment in WACS and a myriad of other submarine cables bears testimony to the company's commitment towards the development of the continent and reaffirms our long-held confidence in the future of the continent."

The WACS submarine cable is an ultra high capacity fiber optic submarine cable system which links Southern Africa and Europe, spanning the west coast of Africa and terminating in London, United Kingdom. This $650 million cable

system is the biggest to ever land on the Africa continent. It has 15 terminal stations which anchor along the western coast of Africa, including countries where MTN has operations such as Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast.

Pienaar adds that as a multinational corporation with a strong presence in 16 African countries, MTN's multi-million rand investments in undersea cables is also underpinned by the critical role that telephony has played in contributing meaningfully to gross domestic product (GDP) and alleviating poverty.

Quoting figures released by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Pienaar says mobile penetration in Africa is the lowest worldwide at 41%, and that Africa still lags behind when it comes to fixed (wired) broadband.

"Although subscriptions are increasing, a penetration rate of less than 1% illustrates the challenges that persist in increasing access to high-speed, high capacity internet access in the region. We believe that these investments MTN has made in submarine cables will vault Africa into the digital age and afford our subscribers in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond the capacity and ability to be part of this growing global village," says Pienaar.

In addition to the $90 million investment that MTN ploughed in WACS, MTN has made a cash injection of $50 million in Europe India Gateway (EIG) - the submarine cable that connects Europe and India, $40,3 million in the Eastern Africa Submarine Cable System (EASSy) - an undersea fibre optic cable system connecting countries of eastern Africa to the rest of the world, and $10 million in SAT-3/SAFE linking Portugal and Spain to South Africa, with connections to several West African countries along the route.

In EASSy, MTN has already been allocated an initial capacity of 30GB in line with its investment in the cable, while the company enjoys 317GG of capacity on the EIG cable.

WACS configuration

- WACS - a minimum 4-fibre pair cable system linking South Africa (SA) to Portugal, with landings in several intermediate countries and an extension Segment to the United Kingdom (UK) and London Point of Presence
- System Design - 5.12 Terabits per second measured at 10Gbps wavelength technology
- Initial Equipage - more than 500Gbps
- Certain segments will deploy 40Gbps wavelengths technology from first day of operation
- Express fibre pair - interconnect SA, Portugal, and UK through to London
- Semi-express 1 fibre pair - interconnect SA, Nigeria, and UK through to London
- Semi-express 2 fibre pair - interconnect SA, Angola, Democratic Repubblic of Congo, Ivory Coast and UK through to London
- Omnibus Fibre pair - interconnect SA, Namibia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, Canary Islands, Portugal, UK through to London
- The landing Parties are: Telkom(South Africa), Telecom Namibia(Namibia), Angola cables(Angola), OCPT(Democratic Republic of Congo), Congo Telecom(Congo),

MTN(Cameroon), MTN(Nigeria), Togo Telecom (Togo), MTN(Ghana), MTN(Ivory Coast), PTC(Cape Verde), Vodacom Group(Canary Islands), Tata Communications(Portugal), Tata Communications(UK), Cable and Wireless(London PoP)

- Segments are capable of carrying between 128 and 160 x 10Gbps wavelengths per fiber pair.

The WACS Consortium members are: MTN Group, Angola Cables, Broadband Infraco, Cable & Wireless, Congo Telecom, Office Congolais des Postes et Telecommunications (OCPT), PT COMUNICAÇÕES, Togo Telecom, Tata Communications, Telecom Namibia, Telkom SA Ltd and Vodacom Group Ltd.