

24 April 2020

Broadband and the Road to 5G Inquiry
Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Ms Ayinla

ACS Submission: Broadband and the Road to 5G

ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry on broadband and the road to 5G. ACS represents over 33,500 convenience stores and forecourt shops across the UK including Co-op, McColls, BP and thousands of independent retailers, many of which trade under brands such as Spar, Nisa and Londis.

Convenience stores trade across all types of communities, in rural (37%), suburban (26%) and urban (37%) areas, providing a grocery offer alongside essential services such as access to cash through free-to-use ATMs (46%) and branches of the Post Office network (21%)¹. 38% of stores trade as an isolated business with no retail or service businesses close by but reliable broadband and data services are now business necessities for retailers in all locations².

Reliable digital access is needed by these businesses for online banking and wholesaler services and to facilitate the in-store provision of card payments, ATM transactions and Post Office services. HMRC's Making Tax Digital reforms have also underlined the importance of reliable internet connections for all businesses. During the coronavirus crisis, retailers are finding it essential to be able to communicate with their customers through social media on changes like opening hours, new delivery services and social distancing policies. Communicating with communities digitally is increasingly important for local shops. By greatly increasing mobile capacity, 5G has significant potential to help meet business' digital needs and facilitate productivity gains. We support the Government setting a target to achieve nationwide rollout of gigabit-capable broadband by 2025.

We recognise that the Government is acting to support digital connectivity, for example through the Broadband Universal Service Obligation, implementing the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review and establishing the Rural Connected Communities Project. However, it is important to acknowledge that accessing earlier forms of digital connectivity remains a problem for a significant minority of stores. One-in-three (31%) convenience retailers state that their existing digital connectivity either makes it difficult or causes delays to completing business tasks, while existing digital connectivity is preventing one-in-ten (8%) from offering a wider-range of internet-enabled services to customers³.

ACS is open to further engagement with the Committee on wider issues for convenience stores. For more information, please contact Steve Dowling, ACS Public Affairs Manager, via steve.dowling@acs.org.uk.

Yours sincerely



James Lowman
Chief Executive

¹ ACS Local Shop Report 2019

² ACS Local Shop Report 2019

³ ACS Voice of Local Shops Survey: February 2018