









Securing a Sustainable Future for TV Distribution

A statement from Channel 4 in response to the Government's Media Green Paper



Channel 4 is the UK's only publicly owned and entirely commercially funded broadcaster. We have a broad statutory remit to commission distinctive, innovative and challenging TV content that reflects the whole of the UK. This short paper summarises key elements of our response to the Government's Green Paper: Watch this space: a new strategic direction for UK media.

Summary

- Channel 4 is united with the other UK public service media (PSM) providers[1] in calling for a managed switchover from digital terrestrial television (DTT) to internet protocol television (IPTV)-only distribution in 2034, supported by a clear transition plan that preserves universality and ensures TV and PSM remain free and easy to access.
- Moving to IPTV offers significant benefits for audiences, including greater content choice, improved accessibility and more flexible viewing. But the benefits of digital inclusion go far beyond TV: an IPTV transition with appropriate social support would also tackle digital exclusion, widening access to essential services and supporting Government's wider ambitions for growth, productivity and public service delivery.
- If the transition is delayed until 2044, those audiences who remain reliant on DTT will be left with a dwindling range of channels and content as the costs of remaining on the network rise for TV service providers. Burdened by increasing distribution costs, PSM providers' content investment will suffer – diminishing the crucial social and economic value that PSM delivers for all audiences across the whole of the UK.
- A 2034 transition is achievable: the most recent 3Reasons forecasts suggest a very small proportion of households will be without access to IPTV in 2034 (0.67m / c.2%)[2], but targeted support for vulnerable and unconnected households will be needed to close this gap. We believe this can be achieved at reasonable cost and funded through the millions that a full transition would unlock, including proceeds from a future auction of DTT spectrum.

[1] *The UK's PSM providers are the BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, STV and S4C.*

[2] *Robert Kenny / Communication Chambers, August 2026. Critique of the 'Watch this space' CBA, p.8*

The Government recognises a "compelling case" for a DTT transition in 2034

Television viewing is increasingly moving online, while reliance on DTT continues to decline. The Media Green Paper recognises that television distribution will ultimately transition towards internet-based services and that DTT will become economically unsustainable. It is consulting on two possible transition dates: 2034, when the current DTT licences expire, or 2044 following a ten-year extension. The Government identifies a "compelling case" for a 2034 transition.

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Delaying the transition until 2044 would undermine investment in the TV content and services available for UK audiences

The economics of DTT become increasingly challenging as audiences migrate online. The costs of maintaining the network are largely fixed, meaning that as viewing declines and commercial broadcasters leave the platform, a greater share of those costs falls on the remaining PSM providers who retain obligations to maintain universal availability via DTT. Channel 4 estimates that its cost of delivering DTT on a per-household basis will increase fourfold between 2024 and 2034, diverting funding away from British content, digital services and innovation.

Crucially, the choice is not between a managed transition in 2034 and maintaining today's DTT service unchanged until 2044. As audiences and revenues decline, commercial services are likely to leave the platform, reducing the breadth of content available to those who remain reliant on DTT. Current proposals would require a substantial rebuild of the DTT network at an estimated cost to broadcasters of £1.5 billion, in order to extend the platform's life by a further ten years. Delaying a decision therefore risks a disorderly, market-led, and costly transition rather than preserving a stable DTT service for another decade.[3]

An inclusive IPTV transition would deliver benefits far beyond television

IPTV can provide audiences with a broader range of live and on-demand content, improved accessibility features and more flexible ways to watch television. A managed transition also presents a wider opportunity to tackle digital exclusion. Access to broadband is increasingly essential for accessing public services, managing money, finding work and participating in education and community life, while those who remain offline pay c.25% more each year for goods and services as a result of digital exclusion.[4] At a national level, a fully digital society could generate up to £31 billion a year in additional GVA, demonstrating that the benefits of an inclusive transition extend well beyond television.[5]

A transition to IPTV nevertheless presents challenges, particularly for households facing barriers around connectivity, affordability or digital skills. However, the latest forecasts suggest that just 0.67 million / c.2% of households will remain without IPTV by 2034, suggesting that the remaining challenge can be addressed through targeted support for those most at risk of exclusion.[6]

[3] Future TV Taskforce, Written Evidence to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee: BBC Royal Charter Review inquiry, June 2026.

[4] Centre for Social Justice - Left Out (2023): How to tackle digital exclusion and reduce the poverty premium

[5] PwC report commissioned by the BBC, 2025. Socioeconomic Impact of Digital Transition

[6] 3 Reasons estimates, spring 2026.

Channel 4 urges the Government to commit to a managed transition to IPTV in 2034

Channel 4 supports the Government's conclusion that television distribution will need to transition to an IP-based future and is united with the other UK PSM providers in supporting a managed switchover in 2034. Confirming a 2034 switchover would provide the certainty needed to deliver an orderly and inclusive transition, while protecting the long-term sustainability of PSM. Done well, it could also support wider digital inclusion, productivity and access to essential services – making the benefits of transition extend far beyond television.

Government should now move from recognising the case for transition to setting out the clear timetable and coordinated framework needed to deliver it successfully in 2034. Central to this must be preserving the principle of universality. Any replacement for DTT must deliver comparable standards of reliability and resilience, alongside affordable and easy access to PSM services. The UK's broadband infrastructure is continuing to improve, with the Government's Project Gigabit programme predicting gigabit-capable broadband will reach 99% of premises by 2032[7], while fixed wireless and satellite can provide alternative solutions in harder-to-reach areas. Vigilance will of course be needed to protect broadband networks against security threats. However, with its reliance on a small number of major infrastructure sites, DTT has greater vulnerability to certain forms of security threat (such as physical sabotage) than broadband services operating via a distributed network.

PSM providers can use our reach and trusted relationships with audiences to communicate the transition and direct viewers towards support, while services such as Freely are already helping audiences access IPTV through a familiar free-to-air experience. However, ensuring that currently unconnected households can get online will require coordinated action from Government and the wider industries that stand to benefit from increased connectivity.

Alongside protecting universal access, the transition must support the long-term sustainability of PSM. Universal access to trusted news, information and shared cultural experiences remains an important part of a healthy democracy and resilient civil society. As viewing moves online, PSM providers are increasingly reliant on global technology platforms that act as gatekeepers between PSM services and audiences, with significant influence over how content is discovered, accessed and monetised. PSM services must therefore remain prominent and widely available, with fair commercial terms that enable continued investment in distinctive British content and services.



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[7] *UK Government, published April 2022 and updated November 2025. Project Gigabit.*