

Martin announces phone-fund project

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The Government has established a €2.45 million research fund for the development of television, music and other services for Irish mobile phones.

The mobile phone research funding was announced yesterday by Minister for Enterprise Micheál Martin,

Supported by Enterprise Ireland, it will bring together 23 telecoms companies and researchers from third-level institutions.

"This work has a timeframe of 30 months," the Minister said. "It will assess what future services are required . . . as well as examining the development and delivery of such services."

Separately, Irish university researchers have received €400,000 in backing from Enterprise Ireland to progress a project which it is hoped will make it easier and cheaper for mobile phone users to avail of low-cost calls over the internet.

In relation to making cheaper calls from mobiles over the internet, new software will use widely-available wifi hotspots to route the telephone calls over the

web. Tech-savvy users can currently do this using voice over internet protocol software from providers, including Skype and Vonage.

Calls using this software are low cost or even free, but savings are negated by the costs which have to be paid to access the hotspot - €20 or more for a monthly subscription or often up to €10 for ad-hoc access.

The Metakall software being developed at the Centre for Telecommunications Value Chain Research (CTVR) in Trinity College Dublin provides the ability to make so-called micropayments to hotspot providers.

The CTVR team is talking to service providers about commercial models, according to CTVR director Prof Donal O'Mahony.

"Metakall uses technology to pay hotspot operators small amounts of cash in real time," Dr O'Mahony explained: "Our software will sit in your laptop or wifi phone automatically logging you on to the nearest hotspot . . . a real-time meter will show how much your call is costing as you talk. On average, we are looking at about 5 cent a minute."