



Vodafone Counter to TRAI Consultation Paper on Proliferation of Broadband through Public Wi-Fi Networks dated 13 July, 2016

1. We reiterate that the concept of WIFI is for short range wireless access to the internet and that the concept of ubiquitous city wide Wi-Fi networks is technically and practically not feasible. WiFi coverage cannot be considered as ubiquitous city-wide coverage as 2G/3G/4G due to the very nature of the technology being a hotspot centric technology with very low power (less than 1 W) transmission on an unlicensed spectrum.
2. Right of way and adequacy of backhaul have been rightly identified by several stakeholders as a challenge in the proliferation of WIFI. We urge that the Authority make suitable recommendation so as to address this underlying constraint and thereby help create an enabling environment for the proliferation of WIFI.
3. Any suggestion that there be a separate category of WiFi service providers cannot be considered as these services are already permissible under UL (AS) and ISP licenses. It is reiterated that TSPs/ISPs are best placed to set up WiFi hotspots – offering their customers a seamless user experience, carrier grade services and a secure user experience.
4. We do not agree with the suggestion of some stakeholders that roaming should be mandated; roaming, by its very nature is bilateral and subject to mutual commercial agreement. Further roaming, which connotes a seamless mobile experience is different from inter-operability, which entails authentication across multiple hotspots. It is submitted that such interoperability should be permitted, but left to be agreed between operators based on mutual commercial agreements.
5. In respect of the suggestions by some stakeholders for delicensing TV White spaces, it is reiterated that the DoT has confirmed and clarified that the 470-698 MHz band will not be de-licensed. As regards the de-licensing of E-Band and/or V Band as has also been suggested by some stakeholders, it is submitted that the Authority has already submitted its recommendations regarding the same to DoT, which are pending consideration of DoT for final decision.
6. In respect of the suggestions by some stakeholders that technologies are available to unify and simplify Wi-Fi roaming and access by permitting online sign-up, immediate account provisioning, secure registration, adding multiple devices, and the enforcement of operator-specific policies; it is submitted that options available may be examined by the Authority for their robustness in meeting the national security considerations. Needless to say, any such options would need to be cleared by the MHA and further that these should be available to TSPs /ISPs as a choice and not a mandate. Further, such authentication options may also be extended to TSPs/ISPs for their KYC requirements for their access/internet services.



Notwithstanding the above, we believe that the introduction of the E-KYC norms would go a long way in easing and simplifying the authentication process.

It is emphasized that security considerations, privacy requirements, authentication procedures, KYC norms, etc., are important considerations from a security point of view and cannot be recommended to be discarded as opined by some stakeholders.

7. We reiterate that while a Unified payment interface may be considered by the Authority, it is once again emphasized that such payment cannot be linked to the prepaid/postpaid balances, vouchers, E-Top ups etc., which are being sold /distributed by TSPs for their own services.

Further rather than suggestions of a single/unified payment platform, we believe that an approach offering multiplicity of payment choices /methods would be more desirable.

8. We reiterate that the Hub based concept is not desirable. Stakeholders have highlighted that a Hub based approach can raise innovation barriers and increase the cost of compliance. Further, even if such hub were to be established, interconnection to the same cannot be mandated – it has to be left to market forces and the business case.
9. Suggestions that end users be allowed to boost their signals and offer commercial services, or subscribers with unused bandwidth be allowed to put data for sale, is completely unacceptable as it fails to appreciate that any telecom activity [even if it uses de-licensed spectrum] requires a license under the Telegraph Act.

Innovative and entrepreneurial initiatives may be encouraged but within the provision of the Telegraph act and licensing framework and should not permit backdoor entry in the garb of innovation and entrepreneurship

10. As regards suggestions of stakeholders that reselling should be permitted – it may be noted that DoT has permitted Virtual network operators, which can, as per prescribed framework, carry on re-selling activities.

The suggestion by some stakeholders that there should be no legal obligations on the entities and individuals setting up and providing WiFi services, and that the ISPs should be responsible for meeting the licensing requirement, it is submitted that the VNO guidelines lay down a clear framework under which reselling can be done, including, inter alia, define the role and responsibilities of the VNO.

Similarly suggestions that WiFi operators can be associates of licensed TSP/ISP – it is suggested that the same may also be as per the VNO framework/guidelines notified by DoT.



11. We do not agree with the suggestion that the policy should mandate neutral host WiFi deployments in public spaces and all TSPs/ISPs should be mandated to connect to such a neutral host. It is submitted that this suggestion is anti-competitive. We believe that free play of market forces should be encouraged; the TSP/ISP license are available on a non-exclusive basis for prescribed geographies and such non-exclusivity facilitates competition. Further, even in case of infrastructure sharing, the same is permitted and not mandated under license.
12. Any suggestions of providing subsidy through USO Fund for WiFi services, it is submitted that even this is to be considered/recommended, this must be through a proper tendering process as followed by USO – to ensure transparency, equal opportunity, etc.
13. We note that a counter calculation by a stakeholder has placed the cost of WIFI at ~8p/MB as compared to 2p/MB estimated by the Authority.
14. We agree with the views of some stakeholders that the SUC should not be payable on WiFi services. The TRAI, has noted in its AGR recommendations date 6.1.2015 that in the era of UL, a licensee will be providing a bouquet of services and that SUC should be levied only on revenue from respective services (for which spectrum has been assigned) and not on revenue accruing from other services. Accordingly, the Authority has recommended that Spectrum Usage Charges should be levied on AGR of respective telecom services which use access spectrum in operations or providing services. It may be noted that access spectrum has been defined by DoT as spectrum in 700/800/900/1800/2100/2300/2500MHz bands.
15. Similarly, clarity that all types of pass through revenues being excluded from AGR, would incentivise greater deployment of WIFI by the TSP/ISPs.
16. The suggestion by some stakeholders that Voice over WiFi should be encouraged – may be considered against the position taken by the authority that such voice is not telecommunications but is 'Content' Content has been defined all content, applications, services and any other data, including its end-point information, that can be accessed or transmitted over the internet. Further, in respect of a suggestion by one stakeholder that Wifi calling will help enhance users experience of VOLTE experience in areas where coverage is poor or capacity is limited, it is submitted that we have already expressed our concerns on such a proposition in our submissions to the TRAI Consultation of Internet Telephony, as we believe that such proposal is illegal on many levels. Our above submissions on Internet Telephony may kindly be read as a counter to the suggestion of Voice over WIFI.

New Delhi
7 September 2016