

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

TRAI releases Recommendations on “Improving Telecom Coverage and Backhaul Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Ladakh”

New Delhi, 24th April, 2023 - The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has today released recommendations on “Improving Telecom Coverage and Backhaul Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Ladakh”.

2. Recent media reports have highlighted the challenges faced by the people living near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in accessing high-speed internet, which is critical for pursuing online education and accessing digital banking. Furthermore, many remote areas in Ladakh lack mobile towers, resulting in network issues, particularly for those residing near the LAC and the Line of Control (LoC). As these areas are of strategic importance, mobile connectivity is crucial for ensuring the safety of the region by facilitating round-the-clock communication to the security forces deployed in these regions.

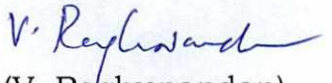
3. TRAI obtained the current status of mobile network coverage and backhaul infrastructure layout data in the UT of Ladakh from operating TSPs, as well as details of ongoing USOF sponsored telecom projects and Optical Ground Wire (OPGW) infrastructure availability from Power Distribution Companies (DISCOMs). Based on the gap analysis and evaluation of the Government sponsored USOF schemes, TRAI has come up with recommendations on "Improving Telecom Coverage and Backhaul Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Ladakh".

4. The salient points of these recommendations are as follows:-
- a) There are 3 villages in Ladakh which neither have any coverage nor were included in the ongoing schemes. During discussions with the Authority, BSNL has indicated that these villages will be included under 'Saturation of 4G mobile services' project. However, USOF must ensure inclusion of the 3 uncovered villages of Ladakh, under 'Saturation of 4G mobile services' project.
 - b) There are 19 villages in Ladakh which neither have 4G coverage nor are they included in the ongoing schemes for providing 4G coverage. The CAPEX and OPEX expenditure to be incurred for upgrading the existing non-4G based cellular mobile infrastructure at these 19 villages should be funded by Government through USOF. In 12 out of these 19 villages, the Authority recommends that the VSAT connectivity provided under BharatNet can also double as backhaul for 4G connectivity. In the remaining 7 uncovered villages, VSAT connectivity on shared basis should be considered till connectivity on OFC media is extended to these villages.
 - c) All operating TSPs in UT of Ladakh must provide fair and non-discriminatory access to their spare backhaul transmission media resource capacity via lease/ rent or on mutually agreeable terms and conditions, to other TSP/ ISP. A committee of TERM field unit of J&K and representative(s) of all TSPs should be formed at the earliest to help resource pooling across TSPs. A second level Committee at the DoT headquarters should be formed to periodically review and resolve any impediment being experienced by any affected entity.
 - d) The Authority recommends that charges paid by lessee (a TSP) to any lessor TSP for use of spare backhaul media transmission resource capacity should be reduced from the Gross Revenues of the lessor to arrive at Applicable Gross Revenue (ApGR).

- e) There is one Block Headquarter (Rupshu) which has no optical fibre connectivity. USOF should fund the backhaul connectivity on optical fiber from Rupshu Block Headquarters to Nyoma/ Chumathang.
- f) Licensed TSPs should maintain a waiting list of service demand. DoT should establish a mechanism to obtain, examine and analyze the data on waitlist from all TSPs.
- g) DoT may take up the case with concerned authorities for not levying RoW charges to TSPs/IP-Is for connecting administrative setup in remote and hilly areas in Ladakh. RoW rules should be aligned to ROW Rules 2016.
- h) DoT should plan for a VSAT based alternate communication overlay in all border areas of strategic importance in the country, including Ladakh, which should co-exist as backup communication medium in all such areas along with terrestrial connectivity. This will ensure continuity of crucial communication services during occurrence of natural calamity and/ or critical situations triggered due to border conflicts in such areas.
- i) TRAI has made recommendations to the Government on improving telecom connectivity/infrastructure in far-flung areas of Himachal Pradesh, many of which are valid for Ladakh also. Recommendations for providing electricity to telecom sites as a priority at Utility/Industrial tariff, waiving off last mile installation charges for extending electric connection to telecom sites etc should be mutatis mutandis made applicable to Ladakh also.
- j) DoT should take up with the MNRE and the Ladakh UT Administration for coming up with a scheme to fund installation of solar panels at important strategic telecom sites in remote hilly areas.

- k) DoT should take up with the Ladakh UT Administration, NHAI and BRO that all road construction, road widening, or other related works should be undertaken with prior coordination involving TSPs, and the liability of Contractor for making the damages good to the TSPs should be included ab-initio in the contracts. DoT should also explore the possibility of constructing utility ducts in all future road widening and new road construction projects, and any ban on giving RoW permissions to utility service providers during Defect Liability Period.
- l) DoT should do a site-wise analysis of all such sites that are being run by BSNL or any other TSP on VSAT in remote and hilly areas in Ladakh. For all such sites that are being run to serve strategic or service delivery needs of the Government, the entire operational costs of running these sites should be borne by the Government.

5. The recommendations have been placed on TRAI's website www.trai.gov.in. For clarification/ information, if any, Shri Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Advisor (Broadband and Policy Analysis/ Network Spectrum & Licensing-I), TRAI may be contacted at Telephone Number +91-11-23236119 or email at advbbpa@traigov.in.


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