

Input for
TRAI consultations for NTP2018

Telecom is one sector which has outperformed Government's targets often. It has been possible due to TRAI exercising the 'forbearance' mantra and letting competition play out in most situations. The lesson from this for NTP 2018 is that Government to provide the infrastructure and fill up the gaps.

Wireline broad band is a club good, with excludability but non-rivalry characteristics till its capacity, and shares common carrier features. Net Neutrality principle would require mandating compulsory open access along with regulator determined tariffs for its access and use. Private sector may not be forthcoming to extend fiber optic lines throughout the length and breadth of this country, because it may not see financial viability. So, either Government should do it itself/through BSNL or MTNL or it should give a remunerative tariff which will attract private sector to this task.

TRAI/DoT should offer a citizen's charter of deadlines for award of licences and also publicize it through web site and through consumer education and newspaper announcements. The default option in any telecom related business enterprise should be 'no licence'; areas/endeavours requiring licence should be clearly spelt out, along with the maximum time taken for the award of licence, from the time of application.

TRAI and DoT should also seriously examine if these two institutions are both necessary, or one would do. Specifically, we should rethink if a much-slimmed version of the Ministry would do. In US, there is only FCC; in UK, there is only OFCOM. Why a poor country like India needs more bureaucracy?

Don'ts:

1. Don't set up a Special Technology Zone for innovation. Innovation happens everywhere. Instead, provide IT infrastructure for 80-90% of colleges and 50% of schools. Alternatively give concessional rates for usage through direct benefit transfer.
2. Don't set up Telecom R&D Centre. Instead, remove obstacles for anyone setting up such a centre, like partial subsidy or tax break.

V Ranganathan
Former member (part time) TRAI
ranga@iimb.ac.in