

COAI welcomes TRAI's path-breaking recommendations on RoW & Spectrum

New Delhi, September 06, 2021: COAI, the representative body of the Indian telecommunications industry, welcomes the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) on resolution of various issues – the proposed national RoW portal; exemption of RoW charges for five years for expeditious laying of common ducts; streamlining RoW permission process with more participation of utility departments and central agencies; uniform restoration charges; auction of mid-band spectrum and assignment of backhaul spectrum. These recommendations by TRAI will make the 4G services and infrastructure more robust and accelerate implementation of 5G technology in India.

TRAI's thrust on resolution of RoW issues is much needed. The Recommendation for exemption of RoW charges for the next five years – from FY 2022-23 to FY 2027-28 – will significantly reduce the overall cost of roll-out for TSPs. Another recommendation on National RoW portal is a big step for the Indian Telecommunication Industry. It will usher transparency in decision making and also boost the roll-out of services.–

With regard to restoration charge, TRAI has recommended that the Central Government work out a uniform restoration charge for open trench and pit with State Governments and UTs. We believe that this will ensure clarity on charges applied and also reduce the cost burden for TSPs.

Another recommendation of TRAI is to implement dig once policy and to inform before dig. In this regard, TRAI has recommended that to avoid frequent interruptions in services due to accidental damages of underground infrastructure, each utility provider should communicate its digging plans in an area to other utility providers operating in that area before submitting application for RoW permission to the appropriate authority. This recommendation will help in addressing the issue of frequent fibre cuts and help the Industry to save the cost of redeployment of fibre.

Commenting on TRAI's recommendations **Lt. Gen. Dr. SP Kochhar, DG, COAI** said, *"We welcome the recommendations by TRAI on a National RoW portal, exemption of RoW charges for next five years, auction of mid-band spectrum, allocation of mmWave range, and assigning of backhaul spectrum to TSPs. These steps will go a long way in boosting the India's 4G services and infrastructure, and in paving the way for the smooth roll out of 5G services in India in the near future. We are confident that the suggestions provided by TRAI will be duly considered and implemented by the Central Government."*

To pave the way for India 5G ready at the earliest, TRAI's suggestion to expedite auction of available mid-band spectrum i.e. 3300 MHz to 3600 MHz, and allocation of spectrum in mm-wave range for IMT-2020 purpose, will enhance the availability of spectrum for diversification of broadband services. In addition to this, the suggestion for assignment of the backhaul spectrum on demand and in a time-bound manner to TSPs will help overcome the capacity constraints in the backhaul connectivity of cellular networks, thus enabling broadband reach and capacity.

It is critical to ensure that the telecom industry remains financially strong. The financial health of the sector has to be safeguarded and these recommendations from TRAI will boost the financial viability of the industry to meet the investment expectations. 5G has the potential to become the future communication platform of choice for every industry like Manufacturing, Education, Health, Entertainment, Real estate, etc. 5G, through its inherent strengths, will also enable the growth of new-age technologies like IoT, M2M, AI, AR, VR, and blockchains besides fixed wireless high-speed broadband networks. Therefore, we are thankful to TRAI for the recommendation and look forward to working with TRAI in scaling up the Digital Transformation in the country.