

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India

TRAI releases Recommendations on “Improving Telecom Connectivity/ Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Himachal Pradesh”

New Delhi, 12th December, 2022 - The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has today released recommendations on Improving Telecom Connectivity/ Infrastructure in remote and far-flung districts of Himachal Pradesh.

2. Considering the poor telecom connectivity situation in some parts of hilly state of Himachal Pradesh and the need for addressing the digital divide in the state, the Authority had *suo-motu* initiated consultation with relevant stakeholders viz Department of Information Technology (DIT) of the Govt. of HP, Local State Government Officials, Telecom Service Providers, Bharat Broadband Network Limited (BBNL) and local consumer representatives.

3. To assess the present status of telecom infrastructure gap and to also bridge the extant digital divide in the state, TRAI identified four worst affected revenue districts in the state namely Lahaul & Spiti, Chamba, Kullu and Mandi respectively. TRAI went on to obtain the current status of available telecom network infrastructure in these four worst affected districts of Himachal Pradesh from operating TSPs, BBNL, USOF, Power generation/ transmission companies operating the state, for gap analysis. Based on the gap analysis, the Authority made its recommendations suggesting improvement in telecom connectivity in above mentioned districts of Himachal Pradesh.

4. The salient points of these recommendations are as follows:

- a. Capital Expenditure (CAPEX) and Operating Expenditure (OPEX) required for providing telecom infrastructure and connectivity to the 25 uncovered villages (falling under the three revenue districts of Lahaul & Spiti, Kullu and Chamba) of Himachal Pradesh (HP) should be funded by Government through USOF.

- b. As the extant provisions in USOF sponsored “Saturation Of 4G Mobile Services in Uncovered Villages Across the Country” allows for inclusion of additional 20% communities under its present scope, it has been recommended that USOF should immediately include these 25 uncovered villages under its 20% additional scope for providing 4G after carrying out on ground survey of the uncovered villages (falling under the three revenue districts of Lahaul & Spiti, Kullu and Chamba) The requisite overall additional expenditure has also been suggested for providing 4G coverage in these 25 left out villages.
- c. Cellular mobile infrastructure at 38 villages having non-4G based coverage, has also been recommended to be upgraded to 4G based telecom service under the 20% additional scope that exists in USOF sponsored “Saturation Of 4G Mobile Services in Uncovered Villages Across the Country.
- d. It has been recommended that for 4G saturation scheme, USOF should initially plan VSAT based backhaul connectivity for all such villages where OFC or other backhaul media is not currently available. The VSAT equipment can be taken on monthly rental model or other prevailing models including shared bandwidth model. The VSAT connectivity can be surrendered as soon as the OFC backhaul is made available.
- e. DoT should take it up with Ministry of Defence (MoD), for allocation of one/ two pair of OFC on NFS network for extending telecom coverage (including broadband services) to the villages located in far-flung or border areas in the state under BharatNet project. In case the same is not feasible, MoD may be approached to allocate suitable bandwidth on its existing functional OFC to extend the telecom coverage to such villages.
- f. For revenue districts of Himachal Pradesh viz. Chamba, Kullu, Lahaul & Spiti and Mandi, the villages that are yet to be connected under Bharat Net Project should be immediately connected on VSAT media. The VSAT connectivity can be surrendered as soon as the OFC backhaul is made available.
- g. For the identified districts of Himachal Pradesh, apart from providing mobile coverage to uncovered villages, a core transmission backhaul network in a

ring structure covering all tehsils/talukas should also be funded through USOF. TRAI will work on a detailed investment plan for the same and will recommend it separately.


- h. DoT may take up the case with State Government of HP for not levying any RoW charges to TSPs/IP-Is for connecting remote and hilly areas in the State including all locations in four districts of Lahaul & Spiti, Mandi, Kullu and Chamba. The RoW rules of the State should also immediately be aligned to the latest amendments carried out by DoT in ROW Rules 2016.
- i. DOT should take up with the State Government to consider providing electricity to telecom sites on priority (within 15 days of connections request) at Utility/Industrial tariff. DoT should also take up with the State Government of HP to consider waiving off last mile installation charges for extending electric connection to telecom sites in remote and hilly areas (including all locations in districts of Lahaul & Spiti, Mandi, Kullu and Chamba) as this will facilitate early roll out of telecom services in these areas and will help bridging the digital divide.
- j. DOT should pursue it with State Government, NHAI and BRO, that in all road construction, road widening or other related works prior coordination with TSPs should be done (through prior notice) and liability of Contractor for making payments for damages to telecom networks should be in-built in the contracts. DoT should also take up with the state government of HP to explore the possibility of constructing utility ducts in all future road widening and new road construction projects. This will help in quick rollout of all utility infrastructure, including telecom, in the state.
- k. The Authority recommends that DoT should take it up with the MNRE and Himachal Pradesh Government for coming up with a scheme to fund installation of solar panels at important strategic telecom sites in remote hilly areas
- l. DoT should do a site wise analysis of all such sites that are being run by BSNL on VSAT in remote and hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh. 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.

m. TRAI had earlier written a DO Letter No M-5/9/(4)/2021-QoS dated 07.10.2022 to DoT whereby action on behalf of DoT was requested on several points for improving digital connectivity and infrastructure in Sikkim. DoT should immediately initiate action on all points related to Sikkim. Some of the action points of the letter like –

- Operating a separate escrow account for managing BharatNet/USOF funded project by BSNL,
- Creation of state-wise special project division under LSA field units with personnel having technical expertise and experience for project implementation and maintenance of BharatNet and other USOF funded projects,
- Putting in a mechanism for instant information about lit GPUs to States,
- Enforcing license condition on TSPs to maintain waiting list of each every wired-line service demand raised to them etc. are equally relevant for the State of Himachal Pradesh as well. The Authority has recommended that points mentioned in the aforementioned DO letter, to the extent relevant for Himachal Pradesh, should also be implemented at the earliest.

6. 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@trai.gov.in”.


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