

BIF Press Release

Powered Up Public WiFi for Common Person: BIF lauds DoT's recent amendments to PM WANI Framework and Guidelines for registration

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The Department of Telecommunications (**DoT**) on 16th September 2024 brought out notable amendments in the existing PM-WANI (Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) Framework and Guidelines for Registration, to be implemented with immediate effect. These amendments will benefit the 'common person' in getting much-needed PM-WANI-based Public Wi-Fi. Broadband India Forum welcomes these amendments wholeheartedly and would like to make the following comments:

Here below are the **notable and progressive amendments**:

- **The barrier of 'commercial agreement' at "exorbitant rates" which PDOs were forced to enter into with TSPs/ISPs for internet connectivity has been removed:**
 - The PM WANI framework required only internet connectivity to be taken by PDOs from TSP/ISP through a commercial agreement. There was no requirement for an 'Internet Leased Line' for this purpose. However, the framework was misinterpreted and misused by TSPs/ISPs to enforce PDOs to take only Internet Leased Lines at commercial tariffs in the name of 'commercial agreements'. This resulted in a connection that should have cost a few thousand rupees per annum to PDO for Public WiFi being given at INR.4- Rs. 8 lakhs per annum in the name of commercial agreement/commercial tariff.
 - However, the amendment now addresses this barrier by clarifying that PDOs to avail **regular Internet connectivity** without any need for commercial agreement with the TSP/ISPs. This would set right the ambiguity caused in the framework by TSPs/ISPs which restricted Public WiFi. It is also important to note that, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India has already issued a draft Telecommunications Tariffs Order (TTO) for fixing the tariffs for internet access for PM-WANI.
- **Expediting Availability of affordable Public WiFi by allowing one SSID for Private Use & Second for Public Use in the same Access Point:**
 - Another game-changing amendment is allowing PDOs to use the existing Access Points working at homes or offices/enterprises for establishing Public Wi-Fi hotspots by configuring 2nd Service Set Identifier (SSID) and integrating the same with a registered PDOA, after prior intimation to ISP/TSP. This would be a tremendous boost for enabling existing WiFi hotspots with surplus bandwidth to be purposefully utilised which would ultimately benefit end users and consumers.
- **Improving Quality of Service Through Mobile Data Offload (MDO)**

- PDOs have now been permitted to accept MDO from the Telcos, thereby helping ease the congestion on the mobile network, thereby making it more efficient. By doing so, PDOs will help improve the Quality of Service of the mobile customers of the Telcos/ISPs. This would help in commercial gain for telcos.
- The contrary and erroneous arguments of TSPs that PM-WANI is redundant and it can cause revenue loss are simply a deflection from the real issue of high pricing imposed on bandwidth by TSPs, which has stifled growth. If India were to establish 50 million PM-WANI hotspots, as targeted, TSPs could gain an additional ₹60,000 crore in revenue annually from bandwidth sales in addition to the benefit they will get by having more broadband users, which they might not reach otherwise.
- **Improving PM WANI Use Case (and benefits to consumers) through Inter-PDOA Roaming:**
 - By allowing roaming arrangements between PDOAs, (something that was envisaged in the original WANI architecture mooted by TRAI), inter-PDOA Roaming would be enabled besides facilitating the use of a single account for seamless roaming from one hotspot to another. This would go a long way in improving the use case for PM-WANI and bring untold benefits for the consumers.
- **Encouraging micro-entrepreneurs who can run PDOs:**
 - BIF also believes that the structural amendments to the PM WANI Guidelines (given the potential of reduced cost of commercial agreements/multiple access points/improved quality of service, etc.). will encourage more individuals to run PDOs within their local community, thus creating lakhs of micro-entrepreneurs in India.

These amendments are likely to unlock the potential of PM-WANI for both Public Wi-Fi providers and users, making affordable internet accessible to millions. BIF highlights that Public Wi-Fi is not just a convenience; it is a necessity for bridging the digital divide and empowering millions of citizens. To achieve the Hon'ble PM's vision of a "Digital India" with full digital empowerment to all its citizens including those at the 'bottom of the pyramid' and to achieve inclusivity or the principle of 'Antyodaya', **PM-WANI Public Wi-Fi hotspot proliferation is an absolute necessity.**

Emphasizing the long-term impact of these amendments, **Mr. T.V. Ramachandran, President of BIF, said:** *"These are extremely important amendments clarifying and enabling the full and effective implementation of PM-WANI from the Department of Telecommunications which will go a long way to help proliferate PM-WANI based Public WiFi across the length and breadth of the country. The amendments will help unleash the true potential of PM-WANI by providing structural changes through ease of doing business, which shall help in directly addressing the bottlenecks that have hindered the growth of PM-WANI thereby making it a truly transformative force in achieving the goals of 'Digital India'"*