

PRESS RELEASE

BIF Calls for Public Wi-Fi to be Recognised as a Crucial Complementary Layer of the Broadband Infrastructure

Cautions that a Mobile-Only Future Could Deepen India's Digital Divide and Stifle Digital Economy Growth

New Delhi, 3 June 2026: Responding to TRAI's Consultation Paper on the Proliferation of Public Wi-Fi Networks in India, the Broadband India Forum has called for a fundamental shift in India's broadband strategy. BIF warmly lauded the TRAI's approach of formally positioning Public Wi-Fi as a Complementary Broadband Infrastructure Layer essential for affordable and ubiquitous broadband access.

In its submission, BIF cautioned that while India has emerged as one of the world's largest consumers of mobile broadband data, excessive dependence on mobile networks alone may prove insufficient to support the country's future digital ambitions.

Public Wi-Fi should no longer be viewed merely as a hotspot deployment programme or a limited entrepreneurial initiative. Instead, it should be treated as an essential broadband access layer capable of improving affordability, enhancing indoor connectivity, increasing spectrum efficiency, offloading traffic from congested mobile networks and expanding meaningful digital participation across the country.

The Forum has urged TRAI to recommend a comprehensive national strategy for Public Wi-Fi built around four pillars: infrastructure enablement, ecosystem scale, technology modernisation and user awareness and adoption. Among its key recommendations, BIF has called for:

- i. Large-scale and systemic integration of PM-WANI with BharatNet, State Fibre Networks, Smart Cities infrastructure and public digital assets to accelerate hotspot deployment across urban and rural India;
- ii. Launch of a nationwide awareness campaign to educate consumers, businesses and local entrepreneurs about the affordability, trust & safety and benefits of Public Wi-Fi;
- iii. Strengthening PM-WANI through a combination of few Super PDOAs, scalable PDOA and App Provider ecosystems capable of aggregating fragmented hotspots into trusted, interoperable and investment-worthy digital platforms;
- iv. Development of enabling open interoperability standards for seamless roaming, interoperable authentication, and common discovery frameworks to make Public Wi-Fi as easy and frictionless to use as mobile broadband;

- v. A national roadmap for next-generation Wi-Fi technologies, including Wi-Fi 6E and Wi-Fi 7, supported through affordable device availability, domestic manufacturing incentives and building-readiness frameworks;
- vi. Creation of Public Wi-Fi clusters, corridors and district-level deployment plans instead of relying solely on isolated hotspot installations;
- vii. Stronger participation by municipalities and local bodies as digital infrastructure facilitators rather than merely permission-granting authorities;
- viii. Leveraging existing fibre infrastructure of RailTel, PowerGrid, utilities, municipalities, Smart Cities and cable networks to reduce deployment costs and improve geographic reach;
- ix. Encouraging diversified monetisation models including subscriptions, digital wallets, roaming packs, venue-sponsored access, advertising-supported connectivity, tourism-linked services, enterprise Wi-Fi offerings and retail-bundled broadband experiences; and
- x. Public funding, where required, may be targeted towards market-failure situations, underserved geographies and ecosystem development objectives. Funding frameworks should seek to enable the market, and may focus on usage, uptime, service quality and sustainability outcomes rather than deployment numbers alone.

Mr. T.V. Ramachandran, President, Broadband India Forum, said:

"Public Wi-Fi is one of the most strategic digital public infrastructures with the potential to bridge the digital divide. PM-WANI, which opened India's Public Wi-Fi ecosystem after decades of regulatory restrictions, should be provided a fair and sustained opportunity to achieve scale. For this, it is important to create an ecosystem where TSPs and ISPs increasingly view Public Wi-Fi not as a competing or isolated connectivity layer, but as a complementary broadband growth opportunity which enhances customer experience, supports network efficiency and improves broadband adoption."

About Broadband India Forum

Broadband India Forum (BIF) is an independent policy forum and knowledge-based think-tank that works for the development and enhancement of the entire broadband & broadcasting ecosystem in a holistic, technology - neutral and service-neutral manner. BIF has established itself as a thought leader and a credible and effective voice, to help propel the nation to achieve the country's ambitious vision of creating a Digital India. To achieve this, BIF works to promote the rapid development of policies, to facilitate affordable and high-speed ubiquitous broadband throughout the country.