



Press Release

TRAI regulation on Call Drops – Wrong solution for a real problem



New Delhi, October 16, 2015: COAI acknowledges the problems being faced by consumers owing to call drops and is directing all efforts to address the issue. In fact, over the past few weeks, much improvement has been observed in the network quality across circles in India. This progress is being shared by the operators with the DoT on a regular basis. Further, the telecom industry has invested about Rs. 50,000 crore on infrastructure and spectrum in 2014-15. These investments have ensured improvement in network coverage and capacity enhancement with almost 70,000 additional cell towers being installed by the operators in the last 6 months to boost connectivity.

In this context, COAI feels that the regulation proposed by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is a wrong solution to a real problem. The TRAI's proposed directs telecom operators to compensate users for call drops at the rate of Re. 1 per call drop, up to a maximum of three calls per day.

TRAI's observation that there is no improvement in the QoS/call drops after conducting the second drive test in Septembers 2015, is not in consonance with the reports submitted to DoT by operators, which shows marked improvement in the operators' networks over the past 8 weeks. The evaluation of a pan-India issue based on Drive tests conducted only in Delhi and Mumbai appears to be questionable.

Further, the regulation raises significant issues which require clarification, especially when many reasons for call drops are beyond the control of the operators. In addition to issues such as lack of site availability and Right of Way (RoW) for in-building solutions, non-operational towers, tower sealing by local authorities, license conditions which do not require coverage of 100% of a service area or in-building coverage, raise troubling issues of the appropriateness of the TRAI ruling.

Also, there are implementation challenges in the proposed regulation which would create confusion and reconciliation issues. For example, when a call gets dropped, irrespective of the fact whether it has dropped from the network from which the call originated, or the one in which it was received, the consumers at both ends of the call may feel that the call has dropped from their own network and may demand compensation from their respective service providers. Such situations could give rise to disputes and multiple calls from subscribers to customer care centres. Further, a turnaround time of 4 hours to ascertain the service provider whose network has erred, and intimating the same to the customer with details of the compensation to be provided, is not realistic.

Commenting on TRAI's decision, **Mr. Rajan S. Mathews, Director General, COAI**, said, *"Compensation to the consumers for call drops is not the correct approach and will not resolve the underlying problems which are in the main, beyond the immediate control of the operators. Until and unless adequate infrastructure is allowed to develop, the issue cannot be resolved. Fixing the problem of adequate network infrastructure, mainly cell towers, adequate and affordable spectrum, educating citizens on EMF safety norms to address their fears and opposition to cell towers, removing local government delays and opposition to cell towers, etc., are the effective ways to address the problem."*

According to COAI, the right approach to the issue would be to address the lack of cell-sites, which in turn, would help boost the network capacities and improve the quality of the services. There are several challenges faced by operators in installation and continued operations of mobile infrastructure such as difficulties in getting clearances for installing sites; non-renewal of lease due to reasons such as EMF related misconceptions; power supply issues, fibre cuts due to other infrastructure projects, etc. These operational challenges coexist in an environment of shortage of spectrum at a time when data traffic growth is surging and is only adding to the woes of the industry and more importantly the customers.

To solve this problem, it is crucial that the State governments and other relevant bodies implement DoT's tower guidelines in all Indian states, and draft guidelines against any possible coercive action on cell sites without the consent of State TERM cells. Further, issues of paying a nominal one-time administrative fee to recover administrative expenses, granting all requisite permissions, time-bound Single Window Clearance of applications and priority of provision of electricity connection to cell sites, will go a long way in building a more robust and efficient telecom infrastructure in the nation. A 30 day procedure for approval of tower installation applications would be immensely helpful towards ensuring a speedy and effective development of the requisite mobile infrastructure.

We live in a connected world and the industry is committed to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's vision of a Digital India. About one lakh new towers will be needed over the next 24 months to support a burgeoning subscriber base and cellular operators are working to bolster existing networks to be able to meet the demand. For this, operators will need the continuing assistance of the Government and the citizens, so as to facilitate seamless connectivity for one and all.

About COAI

COAI was constituted in 1995 as a registered, non-governmental society. COAI's vision is to establish India as the global leader of innovative mobile communications infrastructure, products and services and achieving a national teledensity of 100%, including broadband. The association is also dedicated to the advancement of modern communication and towards delivering the benefits of innovative and affordable mobile communication services to the people of India.

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