

**For Immediate release**

## **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India**

**TRAI releases recommendations on 'Improving Backhaul Telecom Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Himachal Pradesh'.**

**New Delhi, 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023** – The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has today issued its recommendations on '*Improving Backhaul Telecom Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Himachal Pradesh*'

TRAI has been continuously endeavoring towards improving backhaul and access telecom infrastructure especially in remote, hilly, and high-altitude terrain areas of the country from time to time. The Authority in its earlier recommendation on 'Improving Telecom Connectivity and Infrastructure in Far-Flung areas of Himachal Pradesh' dated 12th December 2022 had highlighted the need for a comprehensive investment plan for the core transmission backhaul network, covering all tehsils/talukas in four identified districts (Chamba, Kullu, Lahaul & Spiti, and Mandi), and also stated that a separate recommendation will be released addressing the issue. These four districts are relatively remote and underdeveloped compared to other parts of the state, leading to a lack of proper telecom and backhaul infrastructure.

2. In continuation of the aforesaid recommendation, TRAI has done a comprehensive assessment of core transmission backhaul network in the aforementioned four districts of Himachal Pradesh. This was done by engaging in extensive interactions with relevant stakeholders, including TSPs, State Government officials, Senior officials from the security forces etc. to gain insights into the ground-level situation.

3. Accordingly, with an aim to establish a robust, sustainable, and resilient backhaul telecom network, the Authority suo-moto has finalized the recommendations on 'Improving Backhaul Telecom Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Himachal Pradesh'. These proactive endeavors will ensure that even in geographically challenging regions, access to reliable and advanced telecom services is available.

4. The salient features of the recommendations are as follows: -

- (i) A separate dedicated amount be set aside either out of USOF or from separate budgetary support from Central Government to cater for rolling out of high speed 4G/5G based cellular mobile

coverage (including backhaul) at forward border area locations of strategic importance having significant troops deployment in HP as well as other states. The fund should also cater to operating expenditure of such sites.

- (ii)** USOF through BSNL should undertake a ground survey and fund the roll out of OFC backhaul connectivity from Tissa Block Headquarter to Udaipur via Pangri Block Headquarter.
- (iii)** DoT/ USOF must re-engage with MoD to obtain one pair of OFC on lease for a period of five years (on mutually agreeable terms and conditions) from any of the captive OFC media network (also a national asset) of the latter, to secure a readily laid out OFC media resource for rolling out 4G/ 5G based cellular mobile services and high-speed internet connectivity in pan-India forward locations adjoining border areas using funds set aside either out of USOF or from separate budgetary support from Central Government as proposed in paragraph 2.28 of chapter 2. Further a clause must be introduced in the contract document stating that it should be mandatorily incumbent upon the USOF nominated implementing agency to roll out its own OFC fibre within five years of contract allotment, to completely release the OFC media leased from Armed Forces in a functional state of re-use.
- (iv)** BSNL should engage with operating IP-1 in the region of Chamba and Lahaul & Spiti districts respectively for the utilization of readily available dark fibres. These dark fibres will facilitate the transition of BSNL's operations in block headquarters of Bharmour, Mehla, Tissa, Salooni, and Spiti (Kaza) respectively, from radio/satellite-based medium to a linear optical fibre-based transmission backhaul. This strategic approach will not only enhance BSNL's existing bandwidth capacity for the backhaul infrastructure but will also lead to significant savings in operational expenditure (OPEX) by eliminating the need for bearing high VSAT bandwidth charges.
- (v)** DoT must engage with the Government of HP to harmonize its Right of Way policy of 2021 with the Indian Telegraph Right of Way Rules, 2016 Amendment dated 17.08.2022 in which, a provision at paragraph 6 (3) of Part II (Charges for restoration) also mandates telecom licensee(s) to furnish an undertaking supported by a Performance Bank Guarantee (amounting to 20% of the restoration charges for immovable properties) to bear the

responsibility for promptly restoring any damages incurred during laying out of any underground telegraph infrastructure.

**(vi)** DoT should issue a revised amendment to its OM No. F.No.19-1/2019-SU-I dated 12.10.2020, applicable to all Ministries/Departments of the Government of India, Central Public Sector Undertakings, Autonomous Bodies, etc., under the central government, incorporating the following provision:

**a.** In cases where there is non-existence of BSNL/MTNL network coverage or unavailability of capacity/network infrastructure for internet/broadband, landline and leased line requirements at any of the Pan-India location(s), BSNL/MTNL shall grant the 'No Objection Certificate' (NoC) to the concerned ministry/Government Department within 30 days from the date of receipt of the application or from date of receipt of clarification on any observation of BSNL/MTNL, whichever is later, failing which the NOC will be presumed to have been granted.

**(vii)** On lines of its earlier recommendations on "Improving Telecom Coverage and Backhaul Infrastructure in far-flung areas of Ladakh" dated 24.04.2023 it has been recommended that:

**a.** All TSPs operating in Lahaul & Spiti, Chamba, Mandi, and Kullu districts of HP, must grant access to their spare backhaul transmission resource capacity to any eligible licensed TSP/ISP, including implementing agencies of ongoing and future USOF projects. This access should be provided on fair and non-discriminatory terms and conditions, either through lease/rent or on mutually agreed terms.

**b.** To facilitate resource pooling and the formation of optical fiber-based self-healing rings, the Authority recommends formation of a committee at the earliest. This committee should be headed by a senior officer from the Telecom Enforcement, Resource and Monitoring (TERM) field unit of Himachal Pradesh at the LSA level. It should also include suitable representatives from all TSPs operating in the LSA. The committee's role inter-alia will be to periodically review and resolve representations related to resource sharing and pooling at the LSA level.

**c.** In case any affected entity faces obstacles or issues, a second-level committee should be established at the DoT headquarters. This committee will review all such cases periodically and provide resolutions through intervention at higher levels, if necessary.

**(viii)**In line with its earlier recommendations on '*Use of Street Furniture for Small Cell and Aerial Fibre Deployment*' dated 29.11.2022 the Authority has recommended that the charges paid by lessee (a TSP) to any lessor TSP for the use of spare backhaul media transmission resource capacity of the latter, should be omitted from the Gross Revenues of the lessor TSP to arrive at Applicable Gross Revenue (ApGR) of such Lessor TSP. The required modification may also be carried out in UL, NLD and ISP licenses.



**(V. Raghunandan)**

**Secretary, TRAI**