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Kind Attention: Advisor (CA & QoS)

Sub: IDEA's response to TRAI's Consultation Paper on Amendment to the Standards of Quality of Service for Wireless Data Services Regulations, 2012

Sir,

The Telecom sector has emerged as a key driver of economic and social reform in developing India. The subscriber numbers have crossed the 900 million mark and there has been unparalleled growth in 'Voice'. We are now in the second phase of growth where data is taking off with a great potential ahead. With high mobile tele-density compared to the low PC penetration, mobile phone has become the best medium to provide data services to the masses. Unlike many countries where Broadband services were introduced in a fixed line world, this experience in India is largely on a mobile platform. The adoption of smart phones and use of internet on the mobile is showing exponential growth. Over the period of time, the mobile phone has become the best alternative to pull content, especially for the rural and youth sector who require quality information be it related to agriculture, information related to market, technical researches and for socializing (which is gaining a lot of momentum). The adoption of affordable smart phones and content, applications/ OTT services like Facebook, Whatsapp etc has stirred the inquisitiveness of the common man to use data services over the mobile handset. The data market in India is evolving at a fast pace, and in such a scenario, the expansion and access to data services for the common man is of paramount importance first, before we move to complex factors like speed.

As compared to the rest of the world, India has the highest number of service providers in a service area, rock bottom tariffs along with the freedom to the subscriber to make a choice to port out of its mobile operator in case of any dissatisfaction, thus leaving no scope for the operator to compromise in delivering quality of service to the subscriber.

Apart from the above, we would like to highlight that the Authority, in its consultation paper has quoted test results taken from the test/FTP server by downloading/uploading a file, whereas the customer accesses the internet/http server which is completely in an uncontrolled environment (No QoS guarantee). Also, since the mobility of the user cannot be restricted, it is difficult for the TSPs to commit any download speed to the customer.



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Further in para 2.1 of the Consultation Paper, the Authority has noted the variation in the speed amongst the TSPs even for the same technology. It is important to note that the speed that was reported by the TSPs to the TRAI is taken in an ideal test scenario (i.e. data upload/download on/from FTP server from drive test kit, near site and in stationery mode). In addition, it can be seen from the table that even a single operator does not have a uniform speed constantly. Therefore the method adopted by TRAI for averaging this speed to come to a common number, which can be made applicable across all operators is not correct.

In view of the above, we submit that the minimum download speed that operators report to Authority is the speed in ideal condition and the same cannot be provided to the customer in practical conditions. It is also pertinent to note that this information cannot be provided to the customer as it may be construed as misleading information since the same is dependent on various factors as stated above, which are dynamic in nature and service provider does not have any control on the same.

We reiterate our belief that the time is not ripe for complex Regulations like 'speed 'on data services, The data market in India is still evolving. Let it first expand further and reach the common man before we move to complex factors like speed. Besides, the data quality is ensured by strong competition and wide selection of offers in the market. The need to provide transparent information to the end user notwithstanding, we believe that a transparent communication containing average speed and throttling of speed in various tariff offers to the customer should suffice, with a proviso that the average speed displayed is indicative and measured by the TSP in a test environment as per the methodology defined by TRAI and the actual customer experience may differ due to various factors such as number of subscribers browsing the data services, low coverage area, location of the customer, peak/ off peak time, kind of device is being used, type of application consuming data, external factors like website behaviour etc. This approach should meet the compliance and transparent communication requirement from the Authority.

In view of the above, we feel that it is premature to adopt highest standards of quality of service like speed for Wireless Data Services, which we will elaborate below in our response to the issues raised by the Authority in its Consultation Paper (CP).

### Issues

- Q1. What are your views on prescribing benchmarks for minimum download speed as above? Please give your comments with justification.**
- Q2. Should the service provider be mandated to inform the minimum download speed to customers along with each tariff plan? Please give your comments with justification**



## IDEA Comments

1. **Network conditions and Spectrum allocation:** The 2G network was primarily designed for voice services wherein a dedicated traffic channel is allocated to a subscriber. In the case of a data session, several subscribers are latched on to a common IP address and multiple sessions are initiated and conditions like speed can't be guaranteed especially with the limited spectrum we have in India. It is worth noting that the average spectrum allocation to TSPs in India is much lower than the international average. In the case of 3G, the quantum allocated is only 5MHz which is also not fully utilized for data and is clearly insufficient for meeting data requirements of the huge customer base in India. It will not be out of place to mention that many International Regulators feel that considering the burgeoning demand of data, even 10 MHz is not enough for expansion of data services, and therefore it is not appropriate to put mandatory complex conditions like speed which is not pragmatic in view of the Spectrum shortage. There is already traffic congestion over the available channels for data session and therefore the speed cannot be guaranteed. If the operators are forced to provide set speed, it will increase costs and resultant tariff for the common man and thus will be counter-productive for the 'inclusive' growth of data.

2. **Factors determining speed of transmission data:** The speed of data is dependent on several components such as number of subscribers latched on to the single IP address, network health, location of the subscriber, peak/off peak hours, device used, accessibility of the URL/web server, connectivity link between TSP and web server. Thus the speed is not entirely in the control of the service provider.

Further, the data speed is dependent on many variable factors in the mobile environment and end to end connectivity is not in control of the mobile operator as explained above, compared to the fixed line service where end to end connectivity could be controlled. As we understand, even in the fixed line service the data speed is not mandated as a QoS parameter, so it would be unfair to specify data speed as a QoS parameter in the mobile telecom environment

3. **International Practices:** The study of the international telecom regulatory environment shows that there are QoS norms mainly for voice and in the case of data, Regulators have not mandated the 'speed'. To avoid repetition, we would request you to refer to various International practices submitted by COAI and GSMA.

Notwithstanding the same, the internationally regulatory bodies do mandate the operators to give clear and complete information in their product advertisements like usage Terms & conditions, quantum of data and validity promised etc., which is also followed in India. TRAI may choose to further standardize the 'customer communication' to ensure transparency.



4. **Device performance:** Subscriber's device also imposes a limitation on supported speed, as well maximum data rate which can be used by explorer/browser on device. Moreover, the handsets are not supplied by the TSPs and the performance cannot be guaranteed as the speed is highly dependent on handset capability and its performance.
  
5. **Data throttling in the tariff plans offered:** Currently, there are various bill plans being offered to the customers, wherein fixed data payload is being provided and once that data limit is exhausted, there is data throttling, which will also have an impact on minimum download speed.

We hope that our submissions above will merit the consideration of the Authority. We would be pleased to give any further information the Authority may require in this regard.

Yours sincerely,  
For IDEA Cellular Limited



Rajat Mukarji  
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