



Comments : Consultation Paper On the “Proliferation of Public Wi-Fi Networks in India”

Consumer Guild, Lucknow, as a Consumer Advocacy Group member of TRAI, strongly supports the expansion of Public Wi-Fi as a critical utility for advancing digital inclusion, particularly for low-income users, students, and small businesses. However, such proliferation must be anchored in consumer protection, data privacy, and affordability. From a consumer perspective, affordability must remain central—tariff transparency, availability of low-cost access plans, and interoperability across providers are essential to ensure seamless and non-discriminatory usage. Consumers frequently face issues such as inconsistent speeds, sudden disconnections, and lack of clarity regarding data limits. Accordingly, minimum quality-of-service benchmarks, along with real-time disclosure of network performance parameters, should be mandated. Public Wi-Fi ecosystems must avoid fragmentation; repeated authentication requirements or compulsory downloading of multiple applications create unnecessary barriers to adoption. A dedicated, user-friendly two-tier grievance redressal mechanism should be integrated within Public Wi-Fi platforms, enabling consumers to rate access points and directly log complaints regarding network quality.

Further, consumer protection and data privacy concerns require urgent and sustained attention. Users accessing public networks are inherently vulnerable to risks such as data breaches, phishing attacks, and misuse of personal information. It is therefore imperative that robust encryption protocols, secure and standardized authentication mechanisms, and transparent user consent frameworks are uniformly enforced across all Public Wi-Fi providers. Consumer awareness initiatives must also be undertaken to educate users about safe internet practices in public environments. In addition, grievance redressal systems must be simple, accessible, and time-bound, allowing consumers to report service deficiencies or security concerns without procedural complexity. The Guild emphasizes that the growth of Public Wi-Fi should not be driven solely by infrastructure expansion, but must equally prioritize trust, safety, reliability, and a strong consumer-centric regulatory approach.
