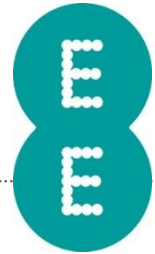


EE Parliamentary briefing: national roaming



What is national roaming?

National roaming is the concept of customers using multiple networks within a domestic market. Where a customer's own network is unavailable, the customer would be able to use another network if there was available coverage. While superficially attractive, national roaming is technically complex, expensive and slow to deliver, would not materially improve rural coverage, and risks reducing both the quality and quantity of mobile coverage.

Realities of national roaming

It wouldn't address not-spots and only minimally increases coverage

National roaming would not address "not-spots"; these can only be resolved by building new infrastructure. Network coverage data has indicated that national roaming would have only a very small increase on overall coverage as operators have roughly equivalent coverage.

It would dis-incentivise operators to invest in infrastructure

Introducing national roaming would discourage operators from investing in the infrastructure needed to address not-spots. At present operators compete to offer the best coverage. National roaming would erode operators' incentives to invest in better infrastructure and lead to levelling down of services, particularly in rural areas where there are expensive ongoing operating costs.

It would be highly challenging to implement

Implementing national roaming among all operators everywhere in the UK presents a vast and un-proven technical challenge, would likely take years to deliver and come at a significant cost to each of the networks to attempt to align their infrastructure.

It would reduce customers' call quality and increase dropped call rates

Under national roaming, customers would need to entirely lose coverage on one network before they could use another. This would lead to a poor user experience (e.g. higher dropped calls), as customers made the transition between two networks. This problem would be particularly marked for customers travelling between sites at speed, for example on road or rail.

It would increase costs for customers

National roaming would lead to networks paying the charges set by their competitors. Networks would need to agree commercial terms, and it is highly likely that networks would increase their own prices as a result. This would be exacerbated by the fact that phones 'stick' on networks, meaning that phones which were roaming could stay on another network for much longer than needed.

There are no benefits for emergency services

National roaming would not provide any benefits for emergency calls, as since 2009 it has been possible to call 999 from another network when your home network is unavailable.

About EE

EE is the UK's most advanced digital communications company and the first in Britain to offer superfast 4G mobile services alongside fibre broadband. EE services customers on EE, Orange and T-Mobile plans, with a vision to deliver the best network and the best service to its 27 million customers.