

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2683

Title: Open Wi-Fi in London

Executive summary:

This decision form seeks the expenditure of up to £20,000, for the Connected London team to procure a consultant to provide a discovery brief exploring open Wi-Fi in London. The brief will explore the technical feasibility, delivery models and commercial potential for a free, open-access Wi-Fi network across London. Open Wi-Fi would improve the visitor experience for non-UK residents to London by making it easier for them to access the internet and relevant information during their stay; and in doing so improve visitor satisfaction in the city.

Decision:

That the Assistant Director of Connectivity, Air Quality, Transport and Infrastructure approves the expenditure of up to £20,000, to commission an expert consultant to undertake a discovery brief exploring open Wi-Fi in London. This will enable a better understanding of how the GLA, and London & Partners, might: help non-UK visitors to London access the internet more easily through a city-wide WI-FI network; and help establish the open Wi-Fi in London project.

AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Elliot Treharne

Position: Assistant Director of Connectivity, Air Quality, Transport and Infrastructure

Signature:



Date:

20/11/2023

PART I – NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. Internet access is essential to help visitors in London plan their day and navigate the city. Less than half of visitors to London strongly agree with the statement that they could access good Wi-Fi during their trip. Roaming costs for non-UK visitors are expensive. Alternatives such as buying a new sim card or e-sim card, or mobile Wi-Fi, can be confusing and unreliable. Free visitor Wi-Fi will help improve London's reputation in visitor welcome and value for money.
- 1.2. Without internet access, visitors are less able to navigate and explore more of the city, and find things to do. Customer review data shows London scores lower than our global competitors for internet access, which significantly lowers visitor satisfaction when in the city.
- 1.3. The GLA is working with London & Partners on the open Wi-Fi project to help us better understand how we might help non-UK visitors to London access the internet more easily. This is a key deliverable in London's Visitor Experience Strategy, led by London & Partners.
- 1.4. The project also supports the Digital Access for All mission, by creating free internet access within the areas where the open Wi-Fi network can be deployed.
- 1.5. Through a discovery brief, we would like to better understand potential delivery models and, if they are fit for purpose, technical requirements, potential coverage, costs, timings, scale and an outline delivery plan.
- 1.6. This will require consulting with key stakeholders such as the Wireless Broadband Alliance; Wi-Fi and mobile network operators; boroughs overseeing key destinations across the capital; international cities with experience of delivering OpenRoaming (such as Tokyo); and other relevant stakeholders.
- 1.7. Westminster Council has been trialling OpenRoaming, a wireless roaming technology from the Wireless Broadband Alliance. This allows users to seamlessly connect to Wi-Fi networks that have adopted the technology, without the need for passwords or additional credentials.
- 1.8. Canary Wharf and the London Stadium have already implemented OpenRoaming. The technology is operating internationally, including in Tokyo.
- 1.9. This technology appears to provide a relatively simple and cost-efficient way to harness existing Wi-Fi networks in London to create a single city-wide network.
- 1.10. London & Partners has the support of the wider tourism industry for this initiative. It can leverage its extensive network to encourage implementation – targeting large network owners in areas with high visitor footfall.
- 1.11. The value of the contract has been determined based on experience from similar projects where consultant day rates of between £290 and £882 have been quoted. The project will require six weeks of consultant support, so we have applied a medium value of £571 to determine a £20,000 contract.
- 1.12. The GLA will run a competitive mini-tender. It has identified more than three consultants who have relevant experience delivering discovery briefs relating to digital infrastructure.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. The key objectives as part of the discovery brief are as follows:
 - to gain a full overview of OpenRoaming and any alternative models, e.g. Passport

- to better understand the minimum requirements for participating networks in relation to key issues, such as network speed, security and technical considerations
- to better understand which legal/compliance regulations need to be considered
- to better understand the barriers preventing visitors from connecting to the network, e.g. phone type or age
- to ascertain the scale required to ensure the network covers enough of London's visitor hotspots
- to ascertain the timings of a realistic roll-out plan to achieve this scale
- to determine how we get stakeholders to buy in to the concept (e.g. early consultation and workshops)
- to better understand the costs and technical requirements
- to determine whether incentives are required (and if so, what these might look like)
- to identify the benefits /considerations to network owners who join the federated network
- to identify the options to fund the network
- to identify the available options for the collection of a user's data, and how might this be implemented (e.g. user data and aggregated behavioural data)
- to identify who could access the data and for what purposes (e.g., would participating networks get access to data?).

2.2. The key outcomes for the project are as follows:

- explore if London can create an official London Wi-Fi network, which users log in to once and can then access throughout the city
- provide free internet access to visitors in key visitor destinations across the city
- a secondary benefit to be explored in a future phase is whether the service could support residential and or commercial premises without internet access.

3. Equality comments

3.1. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, as public authorities, the Mayor and the GLA are subject to a public-sector equality duty and must have 'due regard' to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

Protected characteristics under section 149 of the Equality Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage or civil partnership status.

3.2. The open Wi-Fi project will contribute to the growth of London's economy; and will directly or indirectly help create economic development opportunities and digital experience for a wide variety of

Londoners and visitors to the city through improved digital access, and improved affordability of connectivity.

- 3.3. Officers have considered the likely impact of this proposed decision on groups with protected characteristics. They have concluded that there are no adverse impacts; and that impacts are likely to be positive.

4. Other considerations

- 4.1. The solution being considered uses existing Wi-Fi infrastructure that may not be reliable or quick enough to provide visitors with a satisfactory internet connection. This will be assessed as part of the consultation.
- 4.2. The provision of free Wi-Fi across the city may impact existing Wi-Fi provision partnerships in the city.
- 4.3. Sufficient scale is required to roll out a 'city-wide' network. The scoping exercise will assess the criteria for a minimum viable product.
- 4.4. There is a risk of overly focusing on which technology to adopt, rather than on other delivery considerations (such as partnerships required and a delivery plan). These factors will be considered as part of the scoping.

[Link to Mayoral strategies and priorities](#)

- 4.5. The Digital Access for All mission is for "every Londoner to have access to good connectivity, basic digital skills and the device or support they need to be online by 2025".
- 4.6. The project delivers part of the work envisioned by the Mayor's Smarter London Together Roadmap, published in 2018, under mission 3, 'world-class digital connectivity and smarter streets'.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is requested for expenditure of up to £20,000 to commission an expert consultant to undertake a discovery brief to better understand how the GLA, and London & Partners, might: help non-UK visitors to London access the internet more easily through a city-wide Wi-Fi network; and help establish the open Wi-Fi in London project.
- 5.2. Of this expenditure, £6,000 will be funded from within the Connectivity budget. The remaining £14,000 will be funded from the wider Connectivity, Air Quality, Transport and Infrastructure approved budget for 2023-24.
- 5.3. All expenditure will be incurred within the 2023-24 financial year; and all relevant budget adjustments will be made.

6. Planned delivery approach and next steps

- 6.1. The project will be delivered according to the following timetable:

Activity	Timeline
Procurement	November 2023
Consultant start date	November 2023
Consultant shares finalised discovery brief	February 2024
GLA and L&P review next steps for project	Spring 2024

Appendices and supporting papers:

None.

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will be published either within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? YES

If YES, for what reason: Deferring until the end of procurement to avoid revealing budgets, and to get best value.

Until what date: 18 December 2023

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under the FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form ? NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Sara Kelly has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Corporate Investment Board

A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Corporate Investment Board on 20 November 2023.

✓

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL SERVICES:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature:

Sara Kelly

Date:

21/11/2023