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Tube to provide free WiFi for Olympics

By Mark Odell and Daniel Thomas



Passengers on the London Underground will get free WiFi services during the Olympic Games, allowing them to access internet and emails on most of the city's subterranean stations for the first time.

Transport for London has awarded a contract to [Virgin Media](#) that will see the telecoms group provide a free service for the duration of the games at 80 of the

capital's 270 stations.

The city's transport planners believe the move will help keep the capital moving when it hosts the world's biggest sporting event this summer, allowing passengers to access real-time travel information and react better to any disruption.

The service will only be available at stations, with trains remaining mobile-free zones because of the complexity of putting equipment into the narrow Victorian tunnels.

TfL said the coverage would focus on underground stations within central travel zones 1 and 2 ahead of the games – 55 per cent of the Tube network is overground and covered by mobile phone networks.

“This is a fabulous new and free resource which will be in place from this summer when London is being showcased on a global stage and playing host to millions,” said Boris Johnson, London's mayor.

Virgin Media, which is funding the roll-out, plans to expand coverage to 120 stations by the end of the year. Passengers, other than Virgin mobile and broadband subscribers, will have to pay for the service once the Paralympic Games finish in early September.

The reliability of London's public transport system is seen as one of the biggest risks to the success of the London Olympics and some £6.5bn has been spent on improving the ageing infrastructure over the past decade.

Sir David Higgins, chief executive of Network Rail and former head of the Olympic Delivery Authority, warned last month that the Games would be hit by transport failures.

WiFi provides fast and normally reliable service, although there are still questions over its security given the unlicensed spectrum. Virgin Media won the contract in competition from Sky.

WiFi networks are being rolled out across other parts of London in time for the Olympics, with authorities in Westminster having agreed a deal with O2, the mobile phone group, to provide free services.

Ernest Doku, technology analyst at uSwitch.com, said the move would be welcomed by many passengers and would placate those worried about the intrusion of people making calls on the Tube.

Other cities around the world, including Paris and Barcelona, have full mobile coverage on their metros, including on the trains.

“Those who like peace and quiet on their commute can take solace in knowing that while people will be able to browse the internet and send emails, They won't be able to make phone calls just yet.

“Of course, with millions of people expected to descend upon the capital this summer, it remains to be seen how robust this network will be, or whether speeds simply grind to a halt.”

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