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URCA Paves the Way for 5G Services in The Bahamas

The Utilities Regulation and Competition Authority (URCA) released its final decisions on the regulatory framework that will facilitate the rollout of fifth-generation (5G) mobile services across the country.

The introduction of 5G will create opportunities for faster internet speeds, more reliable mobile connectivity, greater network capacity and a new generation of digital services for Bahamian consumers, businesses and public institutions.

Importantly, the framework establishes mandatory coverage requirements and deployment timelines to ensure that the benefits of 5G extend beyond New Providence and Grand Bahama to the Family Islands.

The publication of URCA's *Statement of Results and Final Decisions on the Implementation of a 5G Regulatory Framework in The Bahamas (ECS 10/2026)* follows an extensive public consultation process, which included engagement with mobile network operators, industry stakeholders and other interested parties.

Bringing 5G to the Family Islands

URCA has established mandatory coverage and rollout requirements to ensure that the benefits of 5G are extended across The Bahamas:

- **New Providence:** At least 90 percent outdoor population coverage within 18 months.
- **Grand Bahama:** At least 80 percent outdoor population coverage within 24 months.
- **Family Islands:** Each operator must introduce 5G services on at least two designated Family Islands within 36 months, with qualifying coverage across designated areas of all identified major Family Islands within 48 months.

Operators may share infrastructure and network resources to facilitate deployment, subject to regulatory requirements.

These timelines generally commence from the effective date of the respective spectrum grants. All coverage and deployment commitments will be binding and enforceable by URCA.

Better connectivity for Bahamian consumers

The new framework establishes measurable standards designed to deliver meaningful improvements in the quality, reliability and performance of mobile networks.

Among the minimum requirements are:

- Network capability supporting download speeds of at least 100 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 50 Mbps in designated urban and high-demand areas.
- Faster network response times to support more responsive digital applications.
- Annual average network availability of at least 99.9 percent, excluding qualifying force majeure events.
- A minimum of eight hours of backup power at 5G base stations.
- Enhanced cybersecurity and network security safeguards.

Operators will be encouraged to exceed these requirements, including through additional backup power capacity, faster service restoration following major outages and accelerated deployment to underserved communities.

These measures are particularly important in The Bahamas, where reliable communications are essential during hurricanes and other emergencies.

Supporting innovation and economic growth

Beyond improvements to everyday mobile services, 5G technology has the potential to unlock new opportunities across the Bahamian economy.

Greater network capacity, faster connectivity and improved response times can support advances in education, healthcare, tourism, financial services, logistics, manufacturing and public safety.

URCA's framework also creates opportunities for businesses to explore private 5G networks, which can be tailored to the specific operational needs of enterprises and industries.

Through controlled trials and established licensing arrangements, businesses will have opportunities to explore innovative applications of 5G technology, supporting greater productivity, operational efficiency and digital transformation.

Protecting public health and safety

Public health and safety remain important considerations in the introduction of 5G services.

URCA will require operators to comply with internationally recognized limits for exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMF), including those established by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection.

Operators will also be required to conduct compliance assessments for new 5G sites, provide relevant information to URCA upon request and cooperate with the Authority in addressing public inquiries and concerns.

URCA will undertake public education and awareness initiatives, drawing on evidence and guidance from internationally recognized scientific and public health bodies, and engaging relevant local public health authorities where appropriate.

URCA will also be releasing a public consultation on EMF safety in the Electronic Communications Sector before the end of the first quarter of 2027.

Additional safeguards will be established in coordination with the Civil Aviation Authority Bahamas to protect aviation operations around major airports.

Encouraging investment and competition

URCA has adopted a streamlined, transparent spectrum assignment process designed to encourage investment, promote competition and deliver measurable benefits for consumers.

The initial assignment will utilize the 600 MHz and 3.5 GHz frequency bands, subject to the necessary technical and regulatory processes. Together, these bands will support wider geographic coverage and the capacity needed for high-speed mobile services.

Under the assignment framework, operators must demonstrate their ability to meet mandatory requirements and commit to additional improvements in coverage, performance or resilience.

The process is designed to encourage operators to compete on the quality, reach and reliability of the services they intend to deliver to the Bahamian public.

The next steps towards 5G

URCA will now proceed with the publication of its 5G Spectrum Band Plan and the finalization of the Invitation to Apply (ITA), which will set out the requirements for eligible mobile network operators to acquire 5G spectrum.

The Invitation to Apply is expected to be issued during the first quarter of 2027, subject to the completion of the necessary preparatory steps.

Commercial deployment will follow the completion of the spectrum assignment and licensing processes.

URCA will also undertake a broader public education campaign on the 5G framework for the benefit of the public and various other stakeholders.

The publication of the final regulatory framework represents a major milestone in the modernization of The Bahamas' electronic communications sector and lays the foundation for a more connected, resilient and digitally enabled nation.

URCA thanks all stakeholders who contributed to the consultation process and looks forward to continued engagement as The Bahamas moves towards the introduction of 5G services.

More information on what the 5G framework in The Bahamas will look like can be found here.

The full *Statement of Results and Final Decisions* is available on URCA's website at www.urcabahamas.bs.

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