

DAVE MILLETT



“The transition to 5G has the potential to transform our daily lives, but only if the UK is at the forefront of this move to the next generation of wireless network technology”

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT 5G?

- 1)** It's fast; about 10 times faster than 4G. Meaning a high-definition film should only take about a second to download. It would also enable much touted virtual reality games.
- 2)** There will be less latency than 4G. This is important in relation to future technology; imagine even a minute delay when applied to a driverless car communicating with traffic lights, or the gap between a surgeon remotely controlling a laser during surgery.
- 3)** 5G offers greater capacity, which means more devices can connect and communicate at the same time. This is obviously important for the Internet of Things (IoT) as we connect our heating, front-door cameras and even BBQs to the web.

That all sounds great but with the UK ranking 54th in the world for 4G coverage, what hope do we have that 5G will be any different?

The Government has consistently failed to get the operators to improve coverage and yet these same networks, Vodafone, EE, O2 and Three, all won part of the bandwidth needed for the 5G networks. So why will this auction result in a better outcome than with 4G?

At least Ofcom recognises some of its past failures. It has said that its next auction in 2019 will include “coverage obligations” attached to some of the licences, which would “...require winning bidders to roll out improved mobile coverage in rural areas and the nations”.

But these obligations are not attached to the 5G auctions.

Forcing networks to offer free roaming across the networks would dramatically improve the situation. You can roam free across Europe – but not in the UK. The Government

is talking about 5G services being launched in 2020 at the earliest – while the USA, South Korea, Japan and many other countries in Asia are already way ahead of us. China, for example, is expected to have 40% of the worldwide 5G connections by 2025 – and this will have a hugely positive impact on jobs and China's GDP. In the USA, 5G is expected to be available in some cities as early as Q4 of 2018.

The UK Government regularly talks about the strength of the country's digital economy. For that to succeed, grow and attract inward investment, we need the right infrastructure, and to be at the forefront, not lagging behind the rest of the world.

All this investment in 5G technology will need to be paid for. Yet the network operators are facing revenue pressures from applications such as WhatsApp. The heritage mobile networks have seen text message volumes fall by 40% over the last four to five years. This is a big drop in revenues – so 5G is likely to cost us more, plus we'll need new 5G-compatible phones.

5G represents a great opportunity for the UK to make up for the mistakes it made over 4G and the current terrible lack of broadband availability. But

Ofcom needs to hold the operators accountable for failures to deliver and it needs to be radical about releasing the capacity within the spectrum. The UK Government encouraged the oil industry with tax breaks and perhaps it should be looking to do something similar with companies hoping to exploit the capabilities of 5G. **CA**



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