

Testimony of Stanley Shor, Assistant Commissioner of Franchise
Administration
Committee on Technology
Oversight - LinkNYC
November 15, 2016

Good afternoon Chairman Vacca and members of the Committee on Technology. My name is Stanley Shor, and I'm the Assistant Commissioner of Franchise Administration for the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT). Seated with me today is Chad Rosenthal, DoITT's acting General Counsel, and Anne Koenig, DoITT's Senior Director of Public Communications Structures. We are pleased to speak with you today about LinkNYC, an ambitious, first-of-its-kind franchise to build a network of free Wi-Fi kiosks across the five boroughs. When we set out to take on this innovative project, we decided to replace outmoded payphones, while providing millions of New York City residents and visitors with an extremely in-demand service: free, high-speed Wi-Fi.

It must be noted that no other city has ever attempted a public Wi-Fi project of this scope. As the nation's largest city, New York is often looked to for leadership in technology. As more municipalities strive to become "Smart Cities," New York City is ahead of the curve and is setting the trend. We are excited about LinkNYC, and we are extremely confident in the ability of our franchisee, CityBridge, to successfully implement our vision. The product they've launched is evolving, and it has been rewarding to see the progress so far.

Although there had been discussion regarding the need to transform the City's payphones since 2012, it was this administration that prioritized broadband accessibility, getting practicable projects off the ground. In April of 2014, DoITT released a request for proposals (RFP) for public communications structures that called for, at minimum, free calling to 311, 911 and free 24/7 public Wi-Fi. In November of that year, CityBridge was awarded the franchise.

Under a non-exclusive franchise agreement with DoITT, CityBridge is authorized to build up to 10,000 LinkNYC kiosks to replace the public payphone infrastructure across the 5 boroughs over the course of the franchise term. In total, 7,500 LinkNYC kiosks will be installed over the first 8 years, and the City will receive a minimum of \$500 million in ad revenue over the first 12 years. This is a win-win situation for New York City: advertising on LinkNYC kiosks sustains and funds the entire project, ensuring no cost to taxpayers. All LinkNYC services are truly free for New Yorkers and visitors alike. And funds from this franchise are already allowing us to address broadband inequity; such as the City's investment of \$10 million to provide free broadband to thousands of residents in New York City Housing Authority developments across the City.

LinkNYC kiosks offer several beneficial services. The free Wi-Fi is extremely fast, with up to gigabit speeds, and a minimum range of 150 feet in each direction. Since Links will be installed along commercial corridors, many businesses and their customers will be able to take advantage of the Wi-Fi beyond the sidewalk. As many of us who use smartphones know, data usage can be quite expensive. A convenient, reliable, fast Wi-Fi network will allow New Yorkers to save a ton on their mobile phone bills. Links also serve as public telephones, but unlike payphones, nationwide calls from a LinkNYC kiosk are 100% free. The kiosks also have a dedicated button to quickly call 911 in an emergency. The tablet

interface offers wayfinding and allows any user to access City services through a 311 online application. Finally, each kiosk contains two USB ports for quick mobile device charging.

New Yorkers across the City are eager to take advantage of these services. That's why our franchise agreement with CityBridge commits to installing Links in each of the 5 boroughs. The project is currently in year 2 of construction, with approximately 7% of our entire rollout completed. Citywide, there are currently 558 LinkNYC kiosks installed, 434 of which are active. DoITT and Citybridge expect to steadily rollout more Link locations across the five boroughs in the coming year. Although some of our borough deployment targets are behind schedule, we are addressing the challenges head-on with CityBridge. The progress made over the past several months is substantial, and we are encouraged by the good work our franchisee is doing.

The City is pouring in a lot of time and effort into the success of this initiative. This transformational project is an important step towards Mayor de Blasio's goal of providing every resident and business access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service by 2025, and DoITT is honored to work in support of that effort. LinkNYC's success can easily be measured by its usage, and the usage will only increase as more kiosks are installed and activated. As of yesterday, there have already been over 45 million Wi-Fi sessions, used by 784,670 subscribers to date. All of these users have consumed a cumulative total of 363 terabytes of data cumulatively. For perspective, this amounts to approximately 181,000 New Yorkers' typical monthly 2 gigabyte-per-month data plan. That is the approximate equivalent of downloading over 90 million mp3s of music.

The tablet, which is the gateway to calls, 911, 311, and maps, has also been popular. In the month of October, users made over 4,000 911 calls and over 172,000 non-911 calls. The maps application was accessed over 40,000 times, and the 311 app was accessed approximately 13,000 times.

As CityBridge continues to install LinkNYC kiosks across the City, we have been actively engaging our partners in community and government. We have been receiving feedback from Council Members, Borough Presidents, Community Boards, and community advocates, in addition to data coming in via 311 and CityBridge from the public-at-large. All of the feedback we have received weighed heavily in the decisions we have made about adjustments to the kiosks' functionality. In response to noise complaints, CityBridge lowered the volume of the kiosks' speakers by 50% after 10:00 PM. When inquiries were received about the brightness of the ad screens, CityBridge implemented a dimming function that reacts to ambient light. Most importantly, in mid-September, we made the decision to disable the Internet browser of the tablet in response to reports of individuals using the Links for extended periods of time.

Adjustments to the system like these directly address public input to ensure that these valuable assets remain a boon to NYC's neighborhoods. We want people to know that these complaints, while valid, reflected a very small percentage of the hundreds of thousands of users who benefit from LinkNYC's useful free services. Nonetheless, since disabling the browser, complaint data and anecdotal feedback indicate that there has been a significant drop in issues relating to the congregation of individuals at kiosks. In fact, we have seen a noticeable increase in the number of tablet users and a severe drop in loitering complaints.

While we do not have any plans to bring back the browser, DoITT and CityBridge have been exploring the possibility of expanding the tablet's capabilities in the form of applications for specific uses. Additionally, DoITT and CityBridge have partnered to create time sensitive features, such as our efforts to engage New Yorkers in the election process. In October, the front page of the tablet featured a link to register to vote, and it was clicked on 4,283 times. Earlier this month, a similar page was featured that helped users find their polling site for the general election. That link was clicked 3,015 times. These are the types of features that we hope to continue to do in the future.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify before the Committee today. DoITT and CityBridge will continue to work with the Council as we deploy LinkNYC across the 5 boroughs. We welcome your feedback, and we are happy to answer your questions.