

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY
OVERSIGHT ON PARKS WIFI AND INTRO. NO. 428 / FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO EXPAND WIFI IN CITY PARKS
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2015**

Good afternoon Chair Vacca and members of the City Council's Technology Committee. I am Stanley Shor, Assistant Commissioner for Franchise Administration at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT. I am pleased to join the Department of Parks and Recreation today to testify on the topic of parks WiFi, and Intro. No. 428, which would require issuance of a five-year plan to expand WiFi access in City parks.

Mayor de Blasio – and prior to that, Public Advocate de Blasio – has long been a vocal proponent of increased access to broadband as a means of attaining greater equality and inclusion for all New Yorkers. In one of his first major technology addresses as mayor, during Internet Week in May 2014, he echoed this theme:

“The goal is quite simple – we must have universal, affordable, high-speed internet access throughout this city...It's essential for everything we need to do to be a fair and just city, because we can't continue to have a digital divide that holds back so many of our citizens.”

The de Blasio Administration committed to delivering upon this vision last April in [One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City](#). To close New York City's digital divide once and for all, OneNYC sets forth a goal that **every resident and business will have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service everywhere by 2025**. To that end, the Mayor has committed to a \$70 million investment in broadband infrastructure over the coming years; he has also announced a \$10 million program to bring free, high-speed broadband service to more than 16,000 New Yorkers in five public housing developments in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. The Administration's goal of broadband, everywhere, by 2025 also encompasses City parks as contemplated in Intro. 428. As we work to develop a plan for ubiquitous broadband coverage, parks and public spaces will figure within the larger framework of a coordinated, equitable citywide rollout.

Working closely with Counsel to the Mayor Maya Wiley and her staff, and partners across the city, DoITT works daily toward the goal of universal broadband through a host of initiatives. These range from promoting competition in the residential and commercial broadband markets; to investing in networks for free or low-cost, high-speed residential access for low-income communities; to successful citywide implementation of the LinkNYC network, which will replace payphones with free, high-speed WiFi access points in neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

The vision for a more digitally-inclusive New York City espoused by the top levels of this Administration is indicative of the priority that Mayor de Blasio and his leadership team have made the expansion of affordable broadband access, and empowers DoITT to continue its multi-year efforts in this regard – primarily through our role in administering the City's telecommunications franchises. The expansion of WiFi in parks and public spaces is a prominent part of these efforts and one on which we have made substantial progress to date.

The vast reliance on mobile devices by many New Yorkers – indeed, by many Americans generally – makes availability of WiFi in the city's public spaces an increasing necessity. According to a recent Pew Research Center study on the country's smartphone use,¹ nearly two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) own a smartphone – up from 35 percent just four years earlier – and for many of these users, mobile devices serve as a main means of access to the digital world. Furthermore, the study revealed that 10 percent of Americans own a smartphone but do not have any other means of broadband access aside from their phone's data plan.

¹ [“U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015,” Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, April 1, 2015](#)

The study further revealed that certain groups are smartphone-dependent at even higher levels – 13 percent of Americans in households earning less than \$30,000 annually (against just 1% of those earning more than \$75,000); as well as 12 percent of African Americans and 13 percent of Latinos (as compared to just 4 percent of whites).

It was in anticipation of this continuous upward trend that DoITT negotiated for the implementation of WiFi in dozens of City parks as a condition of cable television franchise renewal agreements with Time Warner Cable and Cablevision in 2011. Pursuant to these agreements, the companies were to invest \$10 million to install and maintain public WiFi in approximately 32 parks across all five boroughs through 2020. Four years on, as these companies complete their build and additional partners (which I will describe below) continue to roll out service in additional parks, that number has expanded substantially. Today there are approximately 200 sites in 116 parks equipped for WiFi across all five boroughs, with service currently projected to extend to 125 parks overall.

Including parks WiFi as part of the City's cable franchise renewals placed the responsibility of designing, building, installing, and maintaining these networks with entities with proven track records of doing so – both in New York City and across the country. And it did so at no taxpayer cost, without granting Cablevision or Time Warner Cable exclusivity to any section of any park, or any group of parks.

The WiFi service in these parks is free at all times to Cablevision's Optimum Online and Time Warner Cable broadband subscribers. Non-subscribers can connect for three free, 10-minute sessions per month and, beyond that, at anytime for 99 cents per day. The Parks Department worked closely with DoITT and the franchisees to identify the chosen parks based upon a number of factors, including use potential, viability of buildout, siting of trees and facilities, and access to infrastructure for backend connectivity.

This approach allowed the City to identify and direct installation in parks in communities that have been traditionally underserved – not just in the most-visited or popular parks. Prior to the cable franchise agreements, New Yorkers and visitors had WiFi access in more than a dozen parks and public spaces, including Times Square, Union Square, Bryant Park, and City Hall Park. The availability of WiFi in these spaces was made possible by partnerships with nonprofit and private sector sponsors, including Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and, while available to all, these services were predominantly in the most heavily-trafficked parks. Incorporating WiFi provision into our cable franchise agreements allowed the City to build on these previous efforts while affecting more direct allocation of resources to new areas.

In addition to BID- and cable-provided WiFi, AT&T also announced in 2011 that it would install free WiFi in City parks as part of a five-year initiative. That network now spans 27 locations in 21 parks across the city, and I will shortly be turning it over to my colleague, Robert Garafola, Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget at the Parks Department, to describe that and other programs in more detail.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the City's efforts on parks WiFi implementation as part of the de Blasio Administration's commitment to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service everywhere over the next decade. We look forward to continuing our work with the Council and partners citywide to deliver upon this promise.

I will now turn it over to the Parks Department for further remarks, after which we would both be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.