



Fixed Wireless Access continues to fill crucial connectivity gap

Latest research finds fibre and FWA both play crucial roles in expanding internet connectivity and bridging digital divide – but on balance, fibre is still the fixed comms top gun

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Recent studies into the comms market have shown that over the past two years or so, optical fibre and fixed wireless access (FWA) based on 5G networks are the two fastest-growing fixed broadband technologies in the countries it covers, and analyst Tarifica said that while fibre still offers unparalleled speed and reliability, FWA presents a compelling alternative – particularly in regions where laying physical cables is impractical or cost-prohibitive.

In the latest edition of its Data dive research, [Tarifica](#) used its Telecom Pricing Intelligence Platform (TPIP) to gather insights on FWA plans and compare them with their fibre alternatives. For example, how do their speeds and prices stack up against each other, which offers better value and what factors should

purchasers consider. The bottom line was that there were pronounced regional and geographic differences.

Looking at the US, the analyst noted that the push for nationwide connectivity has spurred interest in [5G FWA](#) as an offering for areas where laying physical cables is impractical.

FWA is available from operators AT&T, Verizon and [T-Mobile](#), the latter not having a fibre alternative. In most cases, fibre and FWA plans appeared comparable in terms of price and download speed. That said, available fibre throughputs were generally outpacing FWA in terms of upload speed and reliability.

The investigation concluded that while in the US 5G FWA does have an advantage in terms of coverage and simple plug-and-play setup, when it comes to connectivity, fibre appears to offer US customers more value for money.

Compared with the US, Germany – which has FWA and fibre offers from mobile network operators O2, Telekom and Vodafone – presented a more complicated landscape in the analysis. In Germany, FWA plans typically come with a monthly data cap – unlike with fibre – yet while fibre plans generally also offered faster speeds, FWA plans stood out for flexibility, comparing well with fibre plans from all three operators that required long-term contracts.

Even though it said FWA can be a cost-effective alternative to fibre for users seeking moderate speeds and data allowances – especially considering the shorter contract terms and diverse bundle options available – Tarifica stressed it was essential to note that, despite FWA's greater flexibility and generally lower prices, fibre still offered significantly faster speeds, and without any data caps.

In neighbouring France, there was a lot more clarity on the comparisons. The market was defined by fibre reigning supreme, with FWA playing a niche role.

Fibre plans fundamentally dominate the French market, offering additional included services and high-speed internet with symmetric upload and download rates. FWA plans, despite providing wide coverage and easy installation, generally lagged behind fibre in terms of speed and overall value.

In France, fibre is only obtainable as part of a triple-play plan also offering TV and fixed-line voice calling, and its upload speed is just as fast as its download speed. The least expensive fibre plan from Bouygues – at the full triple-play price – is both cheaper and faster than the lowest-end FWA plans from all three operators.

Weighing up the findings of its study, Tarifica said FWA fills a crucial gap in connectivity, providing a lifeline for communities where fibre infrastructure is unavailable and the affordability of FWA plans can offer relief for these residents accustomed to higher prices due to limited choices. However, the analysis concluded that when both options are available, fibre's superior speed and reliability provided greater value for the money, making it the preferred choice.