

ERGO

Analysing developments impacting business

DOT LAUNCHES CENTRALIZED ROW PORTAL

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On 7 May 2022, the Department of Telecommunications ("DoT") launched a centralized portal 'Sugam Sanchar' to facilitate 'Right of Way' ("RoW") permissions and approvals.

Background

With a view to promote 'Ease of Doing Business', the DoT has streamlined the process to obtain RoW approvals by launching a centralized portal, i.e., Sugam Sanchar, which will allow applicants to file and track their applications in real-time. RoW approvals include land and space usage permissions for establishment and maintenance of underground or overground telegraph infrastructure by any telecom licensee and / or infrastructure provider.

Through the Sugam Sanchar portal the DoT has brought together all stakeholders including the Central and State / Union Territory government(s), local bodies, and service providers to facilitate the RoW application process through a single platform.

This will allow telecom service providers, infrastructure providers and internet service providers to file and obtain RoW approvals for laying telecom infrastructure from state / union territory governments and local bodies through the Sugam Sanchar portal. Earlier, service providers were required to approach the State and Union Territory governments directly to obtain such approvals. Additionally, the DoT is in the process of integrating Sugam Sanchar with the existing RoW portals of central ministries / departments such as RoW portal of Ministry of Defence.

Salient features of Sugam Sanchar

- **End to end processing of RoW applications:** Through Sugam Sanchar, applicants can file, monitor and track their applications at all stages. A snapshot of the application process is provided below:



- **Fee calculator and list of documents required:** The portal provides State / Union territory wise application fee and list of documents required for each kind of application. RoW policies of States are also provided on the portal.
- **Monitoring of pendency by the Ministry of Communications:** Data and information relating to pendency of RoW related applications at the State / Union Territory and district levels will be available on Sugam Sanchar and will be monitored by the Ministry of Communications, which is expected to ensure faster approval of applications.
- **Centralized help desk:** A centralized customer service call centre has been established to support RoW applicants and other stakeholders.

Comment

As the introduction of 5G in India nears, it is necessary that the regulators take all steps to ensure availability of 5G ready infrastructure across the country. Also, the rollout of 5G will require fiberization and densification of networks. Thus, speedy and transparent processes for obtaining RoW permissions will enable service providers to establish such infrastructure in a cost-effective and efficient manner. Notably, the streamlining of RoW application procedure was also recommended by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India ("TRAI"), where it also highlighted that faster RoW permissions will help attract investments in the sector and reduce the cost of telecom infrastructure for both service providers and end-users.

Since Sugam Sanchar has been launched fairly recently, its execution and adoption are yet to be tested, especially because multiple authorities / departments will be involved across Centre, States and district levels. Even so, the launch of Sugam Sanchar is harmonious with the government's initiatives towards 'Ease of Doing Business'.

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