

## **Will examine DoT proposal to merge circles into one zone: TRAI**

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NEW DELHI: Telecom regulator Trai will examine a recent Department of Telecom (DoT) proposal to merge all 22 telecom circles in the country into a single service area, a move that could lead to the end of costly roaming charges for Indian mobile phone users, an official said on Sunday.

A senior Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) official said the regulator will look into the issue of merging all the telecom circles into one, but did not give a clear timeline within which TRAI could come out with a consultation paper on the issue.

The government is considering the merger of the 22 telecom circles in the country into either a single service area or four separate zones to enable subscribers to move freely across states without paying extra charges for roaming.

As per the recommendations of a core team of the Telecom Ministry: "There could be either one service area covering the entire country, or there could be four zones each covering a particular region."

The core team was constituted by the Department of Telecom to give recommendations on strategic issues related to licencing matters. Roaming services allow cellphone users to continuously make and receive calls while travelling outside the geographical constraints of their home network by using a visited network.

Carriers charge a higher rate for roaming. Fees for roaming are not standard and differ from operator to operator. If implemented, the mobile users will not have to shell out extra money when they travel from one state to other. However, the operators will be hit hard if such a step is taken.

Operators had paid a huge premium for bagging 3G airwaves in certain circles, so if all the circles are merged, they stand to lose.