Londoners 'three times more likely' than Brummies to get latest 5G

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Birmingham/London, UK: Fresh research using the SignalTracker app [1] shows that Vodafone customers in London are three times as likely to get the latest type of 5G [2] compared to those in Birmingham. In both cities, users of Vodafone's premier service - 5G Ultra - were actually on 4G at least 70% of the time.

SignalTracker performed thousands of tests in London and Birmingham and found that the selling point of Vodafone's flagship service - "standalone 5G" [3] - was only available in 27% of London tests and a mere 9% of Birmingham tests.

In London, the best signal was found primarily in central locations like Westminster, Lambeth, Soho and Waterloo while outer regions such as Barking, Bromley and Kingston suffered worse signal.

This remained superior to Birmingham however, which despite being part of a push by Vodafone to rollout 5G technology, had results for standalone 5G limited to the city centre and the Bullring centre exclusively. A six minute walk into nearby Digbeth saw signal quality immediately drop down to 4G even on a 5G Ultra plan.

High prevalence of 4G

In Birmingham, 90% of tests on 5G Ultra were in fact 4G and when the 5G icon was showing, 82% of the time it was actually 4G.

This is due to a quirk of smartphones which the SignalTracker app highlights, where the device shows a 5G symbol but in reality is connected to 4G. The 5G icon displays because the base station has 5G capabilities even though they are not being used by the connected device.

Vodafone's 5G Ultra service is advertised as being ten times faster than 4G but in the Birmingham tests 5G standalone was accessible only 9% of the time.

Similarly in London, 72% of 5G Ultra tests were 4G and when consumers saw the 5G icon, 57% of the time, it was actually 4G.

SignalTracker is produced by PolicyTracker, a company specialising in the wireless sector.

"This can lead to confusion for customers," PolicyTracker's Managing Director Martin Sims said, "particularly in Birmingham many will wonder why a premier service isn't delivering the promised 5G standalone more frequently.

"In both cities, on Vodafone's 'ultrafast' 5G standalone service, the majority of our tests came back as 4G.

"It is a disappointing reminder of how far the UK's 5G rollout has to go."

SignalTracker tells you whether you have an actual 5G connection, as shown in the screenshot. It also gives the signal strength, bands used and download speed. You can save the results to compare networks and assess performance in a variety of locations. The app is available from Google Play.

For our full research, visit: https://signal-tracker.net/londoners-three-…to-get-latest-5g/

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London :: Birmingham :: 5g :: Vodafone :: 5g Ultra :: Signaltracker :: Signal Strength :: SignalTracker App ::

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Notes for editors:

[1] About Signal Tracker
The figures quoted come from over 15,500 tests carried out by PolicyTracker in London and Birmingham over the past three months using SignalTracker. This is an Android app and is available on Google Play.

It allows consumers to compare the service from different operators using metrics such as signal strength, speed and bands used. Users can save this information for different locations. See the website for more information.

The SignalTracker app can also provide this detailed spectrum usage data for commercial and regulatory organisations.

[2] Vodafone 5G Ultra
Vodafone 5G Ultra is the mobile operator's 5G standalone service. It promises greater coverage, ten times faster speeds than 4G and the ability to connect in busy places such as festivals and stadiums.

The companies benchmark is that on 5G Ultra, you can download a full HD film in "approximately three minutes".

A sim only plan for "Unlimited Max" - their fastest service - costs £36 a month as of June 2025.

[3] 5G Technology
Most UK actual 5G connections are 5G non standalone (5G NSA). They connect to the existing 4G computer network using a 4G band but download data using a 5G connection. The technology's next stage, 5G standalone (5G SA), does not use the 4G network but currently has limited deployment.

[4] Publishing rights
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