New mobile app shows that nearly 40% of 5G connections are actually 4G

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London, UK: Research by the new app SignalTracker shows that although your mobile may say 5G, it frequently has a 4G connection. In UK tests, when the 5G icon was displaying, 38% of tests were in fact a 4G connection.

This is because most phones show 5G when the base station they are connected to has 5G equipment *potentially* available. The actual connection may be 4G or 5G.

On some phones the icon becomes more distinct when an actual 5G connection is made, but on other phones the same icon is shown whether 5G is merely available or whether it is actually connected.

Our signal survey of Central London shows actual 5G connections in red and 4G connections where the 5G icon is displayed in blue (See map). These results come from all the UK mobile networks.

Actual 5G is about twice as fast as icon-only connections, averaging 49 Mbps as against 27 Mbps in our tests.

Results for individual operators

Displaying the 5G icon when there is only a 4G connection is more common with some operators than others. For Three, the 5G icon means real 5G 94% of the time and for Vodafone the figure is 93%. For O2 66% of 5G tests had a genuine 5G connection but for EE it was only 32%. [1]

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.

SignalTracker is produced by PolicyTracker [3], a company specialising in the wireless sector.

"This issue is not being clearly explained to consumers," said Managing Director, Martin Sims. "Achieving a 5G connection everywhere may not be possible and most people will accept this. But the public deserve clear information about what they are getting."

"Mobile networks are an amazing engineering achievement", he said. "The best way to get public support for optimising this incredible technology is to keep them fully informed."•

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Notes for editors:

[1] About Signal Tracker

The figures quoted come from over 11,000 tests carried out by PolicyTracker over the past two 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.

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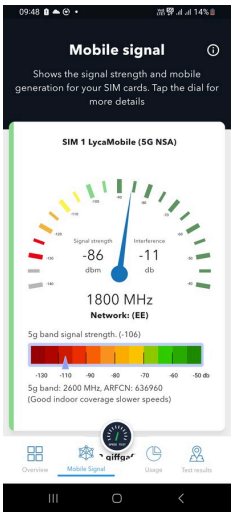

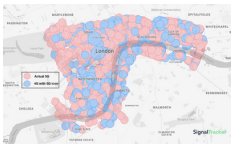

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[2] 5G Technology

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 Stand Alone (5G SA), does not use the 4G network but currently has limited deployment.

[3] About PolicyTracker

SignalTracker is produced by PolicyTracker, which provides news, research and training about spectrum policy.

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