What is central London's best mobile network?

Thursday 10 July, 2025

London, UK: Has a poor mobile connection ever ruined your night out? Have you been unable to WhatsApp your location to friends or end a hire bike ride? Have you been unable to download vital tickets outside a venue? Unable even to check your bank account?

Londoners have increasingly come to see the above problems as a fact of life in the capital – made all the more unbelievable when the city has been at the forefront of a rollout of the UK's 5G rollout.

Using the free SignalTracker app, we have performed thousands of tests in central London to find out just which mobile operator – EE, O2, Three and Vodafone – offers their customers the best 5G speeds and the best coverage. All tests have been done with the cheapest offerings using each network.

The minimum needed for a reliable internet connection is 20 Mbps download speeds, so the maps below only show results above that threshold.

The results

In our tests, Vodafone has come out the best, followed by EE and the O2 and Three. Vodafone does not have the fastest network but this is balanced out by its vast coverage. Three has the fastest network with an average download speed of 50 Mbps but in central London it has very patchy coverage with too many dead zones. These areas could lead to the issues Londoners are all too used to – hence the downgrade in Three's standing.

Vodafone's average network speed is just behind at 48 Mbps, with EE and O2 the slowest at 35 and 32 Mbps respectively. A further factor for customers to consider is if their phone is actually getting 5G. The 5G icons doesn't necessarily mean that the phone has a 5G connection, confusingly, it can mean that 5G equipment is available on the base station the phone is connected to and the actual signal is 4G.

Here Vodafone also performs the best: 89% of their test results actually were 5G. Three was second with 59% with EE and O2 were far behind. 87% of EE speed tests were actually 4G even though the 5G icon would have been displayed on the phone.

The SignalTracker app is free to download from the Google Play Store and means anyone can test the quality of the mobile network in their area. You can also use your phone's second SIM to see if another network would be better. Maybe changing operator will stop those network fails ruining your evening!

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