



## PM WANI

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This article is based on **“Connecting more people: on PM WANI”** which was published in The Hindu on 12/12/2020. It talks about the prospects of the newly launched PM WANI (Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) Scheme.

Recently, in a bid to fuel broadband internet proliferation across the country, the Government of India launched **PM WANI (Prime Minister Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) Scheme**. The scheme aims to bring large scale deployment of Wi-Fi hotspots through the country to drive up connectivity options and improve digital access.

The scheme envisages setting up of public Wi-Fi networks and access points by local Kirana and neighbourhood shops through public data offices (PDO will be set up on the lines of Public Call Offices (PCOs)) that will not involve any licence, fee or registration.

Apart from, Public Wi-Fi being a low-cost option to reach unserved citizens and grow the economy, it can revolutionise the tech world and significantly improve Wi-Fi availability across the length and breadth of India.

### Intended Benefits of PM WANI

- **New Wave of Internet Users:** PM WANI will be able to connect a new wave of users not just to commercial and entertainment options, but also to education, telehealth and agriculture extension, and bring greater accountability to the government by boosting transparency and interactivity.
- **Enabler for Digital India:** The scheme would enable small shopkeepers to provide Wi-Fi service. This will boost incomes as well as ensure youth gets seamless internet connectivity.

It can also strengthen the **Digital India mission**.

- **Cutting The Red Tape:** Through PM WANI, the government is hoping that by cutting through layers of bureaucracy and eliminating licences and fees, it can make it easy even for a tea shop owner to register online as a service provider, opening up new income avenues.

- **Domino Effect on Economy:** According to the TRAI report, public Wi-Fi system on the WANI architecture can lead to a 10% rise in net penetration which in turn can lead to a 1.4% increase in GDP.
- **Bridging the Digital Divide:** PM WANI can result into a rapid scale-up of the Internet in rural India, which will be transformative, given the low level of penetration — 27.57 subscribers per 100 population in 2019.  
Wi-fi linked to broadband fibre service can be the fastest route to bridging the existing gap.
- **Low-Cost Alternative:** Upcoming **mobile technologies such as 5G** may provide good quality data, but they involve high investment in the new spectrum, connectivity equipment and regular subscriber fees.  
The WANI system offers a way forward to connect low revenue consumers.

## Issues Regarding PM WANI

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- **Security Risks:** A public WiFi network has several security issues. That's because several people access the network at the same time on the same spot.  
Thus public Wi-Fi is at a high risk of sending out confidential data (like passwords, pins etc.) over the network.
- **Low Speed:** As public WiFi network is usually accessed by several people at the same time, it results in a considerable loss of bandwidth resulting in a slow network speed  
It is due to this fact, Google and Facebook's attempts to provide public Wi-fi got shut down earlier this year.
- **Cheap Mobile Data:** As per TRAI in 2019, India now has among the cheapest mobile data per GB in the world, with mobile data prices having reduced by 95% in the last five years.  
As 4G has become cheap and widely accessible, is there still a need to drive Wi-Fi in this manner, rather than the "leapfrogging" of technology that people have frequently talked about in the context of India

## Way Forward

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- **Strong Cyber-Security Architecture:** What the citizen expects is robust service, protection of data integrity, transparency on commercial use of data, and security against cyberattacks.  
PM WANI should ensure the public data is protected and safe. In this context, the enactment of the **public data protection bill, 2019**, is the need of the hour.

- **Ensuring Competition:** The government must also ensure true unbundling of hardware, software, apps and payment gateways in the WANI system, as advocated by TRAI, to prevent monopolies.

Also, increased competition will address the low data speed issue.

## **Conclusion**

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If executed properly, the public data offices (PDOs) of PM WANI can do what the PCOs did for phone calls, going well beyond 'ease of doing business' to genuinely empower citizens and providing "ease of living".

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

PM WANI scheme can revolutionise India's tech world and significantly bridge the digital divide in India.

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