

Ruckus Wireless: Wi-Fi is transforming transportation

Faster, more dependable Wi-Fi connectivity that works even in a crowded train, bus station or terminal is critical to meeting passenger and operational needs, and as more and more Wi-Fi is being deployed across transportation and fleet hubs in South Africa, the use of and demand for more of it, is growing locally across Africa.



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Michael Fletcher, sales director for Ruckus Wireless sub-Saharan Africa says; "Each day, thousands of people pass through transportation hubs such as airports, train and bus stations, and with business and leisure travelers carrying smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices, the demand for high capacity high performance Wi-Fi connectivity has not just become a 'nice to have' amenity, but rather an expected service, like electricity and running water. The City of Tshwane's Bus Rapid Transit system, A Re Yeng, is a perfect example of this."

Tshwane's bus system began operations in December 2014 and with it came a world-first in mobile connectivity, with the rollout of uninterrupted free Wi-Fi along the trunk route for commuters on board as an expansion of the City of Tshwane's free Wi-Fi network. Since inception, a total of 163,126 unique users has used the Tshwane Free Wi-Fi service, with a total of 6,461,327 sessions being accumulated, with a total usage of 21242.3GB being uploaded and downloaded.

Real-time access to information

Says Zahir Khan, COO of Project Isizwe, which has been integral to Tshwane's free public WiFi efforts; "The A Re Yeng buses come equipped with a connection to Tshwane's Wi-Fi service, offering 250MB of free Wi-Fi access per device per day, giving travelers the ability to do things like look for jobs, access learning materials online and keep in touch with their friends while on the move around the city. Looking at the statistics and growth of the system, it is evident that the demand is growing in South Africa."

Passengers need real-time access to schedules, gate and ticket information, maps and/or other guidance as they pass through the bus terminal. Wi-Fi not only provides an ideal method for these activities, it also provides a platform for new revenue generating services such as additional Wi-Fi access or 3G/4G offload, as well as support for bus terminal operational needs such as point-of-sale, digital signage, and video security.

A need for better wireless connectivity for logistics

Continues Fletcher; "From a commercial perspective, there is also a global trend for transportation cargo and fleet services to become more involved in value-added activities such as cargo processing and logistics, which will require new processes, practices and technological advances around stock control and integration, as well as better wireless connectivity."

Steven Sutherland, sales director for MiX Telematics, agrees that Wi-Fi plays a crucial role here. "Wi-Fi is critical, especially when it comes to companies that are using Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model to run and/or keep an operational eye on their businesses. In the fleet sector specifically - across Africa - WiFi enables constant, reliable connectivity for managers that are on-the-go - offering them the opportunity to remain connected when they might not be otherwise. This enables real-time access to their fleet and their business data at any given time."

As drivers and remote workers become more and more included in day-to-day processes through the application of smartphone and tablet-based applications, so too does the reliance on Wi-Fi networks and coverage.

"Essentially, it's about smart transportation management, which facilitates the management of fleets in real-time, remote access to in-cab video, efficient user connections, real-time alerts and geo-location of all vehicles," adds Sutherland.

High-density Wi-Fi as a critical enabler

Transportation hubs - both from a consumer and commercial perspective - are often very large facilities that require wireless connectivity everywhere, both inside and out. Getting reliable and complete Wi-Fi coverage across a facility can be expensive and time-consuming. Because the density of client devices over the course of the day can dramatically impact demand - it can result in poor connections, low user satisfaction, and unacceptable network quality.

"This isn't acceptable anymore, and as infrastructure and transportation hubs develop across the regions and cities move towards becoming smarter not only in terms of operational processes and service delivery, but also connecting citizens - we are likely to see high-density Wi-Fi take its rightful place more and more as a critical enabler," concludes Fletcher.

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