Google launches cheaper internet

By Ali Twaha

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Google has launched what it calls Wi-Fi hotzone networks in Kampala, which will allow the public to connect to reliable and affordable fast internet services.

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The access network is now available in 120 locations after Google signed an agreement with Roke Telkom. Google also plans to expand its reach further to 300 locations in the country.

Google has laid more than 800km of fibre cables, which it says are highly resilient. According to Ms Ela Beres, the head, Project Link at Google, the initiative will relieve internet service providers (ISP) and mobile network operators the burden of investing in costly infrastructure.

"The service providers are the ones dealing directly with the customers. They define the quality of the service for the network-- they market directly to the end users and set the pricing. The end user interaction is with the ISP not with us," said Beres, during the official launch of the project at Protea hotel in Kampala recently.

In 2013, Google announced Project Link for Africa, starting off with Kampala as the first beneficiary. The project enables internet service providers and mobile network operators to provide high quality broadband at lower costs through shared infrastructures such as the metro fiber and Wi-Fi networks.

Google said it was making the broadband wireless network available to companies in order to widen internet access even to those who might not afford to pay the high fees usually associated with such services.

Through Project Link, Google says, the 1.2 million people living in the central business district should be able to access internet services cheaply. Google is now focusing on expanding the same infrastructure to Ghana in the cities of Accra,

Tema and Kumasi.

According to statistics from the Uganda Communications Commission, the steady shift to smartphones has seen internet penetration increase to 23.3 per cent, translating to 8.5 million internet users as of June 2014, up from 6.8 million the previous year.

John Nasasira, the minister of Information Communications Technology, urged players to share infrastructure. This, he said, would help improve penetration and bring down the cost of internet services.

"The model of [infrastructural] sharing will reduce on internet costs," he said "... we will get the right policies in place to attract investors. On our side, I think we should reduce taxes in some areas."