

Path To Gigabit Fixed Wireless Access

A Review Of Fixed Wireless Access Technology And Economics

A Technical Paper prepared for SCTE•ISBE by

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Table of Contents

Title	Page Number
Table of Contents	2
1. Introduction.....	4
2. Reasons for FWA Momentum.....	5
3. Fixed Wireless Access Network.....	6
4. Spectrum Options for FWA	7
5. Starting Up and Evolving FWA Network	8
6. 3GPP Data Rate Evolution.....	9
7. Beamforming Technology	10
8. CBRS for FWA	11
9. Massive MIMO for FWA	12
10. FWA with 5G	15
11. Improving 5G mmWave Reach	16
12. Summary of Technical Section	20
13. FWA Business Considerations.....	21
14. FWA economics	21
15. CBRS Business Case Example	23
16. mmWave and CBRS Business Case Example.....	23
17. FWA business models	24
18. CBRS FWA Field Experiences.....	24
19. mmWave and CBRS Field Trial experiences.....	27
Conclusions.....	27
Abbreviations	28
Bibliography & References.....	28

List of Figures

Title	Page Number
Figure 1: Fixed Wireless Access network	6
Figure 2: LTE throughput ladder	10
Figure 3: Digital Beamforming	11
Figure 4: Analog Beamforming	11
Figure 5: Coverage under broadcast beam	12
Figure 6: Beamforming with SU-MIMO	13
Figure 7: Beamforming with MU-MIMO	14
Figure 8: Comparison of 4T4R and 64T64R user throughput and coverage	15
Figure 9: Combining mmWave and mid band.....	17
Figure 10: Dual Connectivity and Carrier Aggregation	18
Figure 11: Dual Connectivity Data Bearer Architecture	18
Figure 12: mmWave and CBRS LOS Bandwidth vs Distance.....	20
Figure 13: mmWave and CBRS NLOS Bandwidth vs Distance	20
Figure 14: Downlink throughput under different RF conditions.....	25
Figure 15: Setting for multiple user MIMO testing in ideal radio conditions.....	25

Figure 16: FWA with beamforming and MU-MIMO in rural area	27
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List of Tables

Title	Page Number
Table 1: Broadband access technology comparison	4
Table 2: Spectrum for FWA.....	7
Table 3: Results of throughput testing with 16 layer MU-MIMO in good radio conditions	26

1. Introduction

Consumer demand for home broadband access continues to be strong. Network operators are looking to grow their revenue by expanding services they offer. Home broadband offers that revenue growth opportunity.

1. Operators can expand home broadband services to unserved and underserved communities. Rural markets are one example of underserved communities.
2. For some network operators, even communities served by existing Internet service providers are attractive target for business expansion. These operators bring something new to the market, like higher data rate or lower cost or some other valuable feature.

When thinking about greenfield opportunities, operators must consider technology options available to them. Below we compare technology options for providing home broadband service.

Table 1: Broadband access technology comparison

Technology	Unserved/Under-served (mostly rural markets)	Urban and suburban markets
DSL	It is expensive to build out DSL plant in rural areas since there is limitations on how far from central office can the plant be extended. Laying new copper is also an expensive proposition	DSL is less competitive with DOCSIS or fiber in more urban markets. For instance, maximum rates offered by VDSL2 could be greater than 100 Mbps with a range of around 500m from DSLAM node. G.fast promises higher data rates for shorter straight loops. For instance, 600 Mbps for 200m distance. Speed limitation start kicking for longer distances. Also copper is hard to maintain. There is no viable path for bit rate evolution beyond that.
DOCSIS HFC	May not be cost effective to expand cable plant into rural areas	DOCSIS 4.0 FDX or ESD offers 10 Gbps shared downstream capacity. It is an attractive option but fiber and 5G offerings could disrupt DOCSIS.
Fiber	Running new fiber to rural communities can get very expensive	Fiber is the leading medium for data transmission with virtually unlimited bandwidth. However, green field FTTH installations may not be economically viable. Similarly upgrading HFC or DSL plants to FTTH may only be feasible for selected communities

3GPP wireless (LTE/5G)	Since there is no need to run copper or fiber over long distances, 3GPP wireless constitutes an economic option to provide rural broadband service as long as the capacity needs and path loss are acceptable.	<p>New technologies like massive MIMO and availability of more spectrum in 5G mmWave bands enhance available capacity and range of a single cell site. This improves business feasibility of fixed wireless access FWA services.</p> <p>New operators can disrupt existing DOCSIS and fiber-based offerings.</p> <p>Established operators should study leveraging 3GPP wireless to defend and grow their business.</p>
Proprietary wireless	Proprietary wireless technologies are by definition not standards based, they may be limited to one vendor, have smaller ecosystem, an uncertain roadmap & lack of economies of scale and limited long term support	Whether rural or urban, proprietary technologies face similar hurdles.

In this paper, we focus on 3GPP based FWA, as a promising technology for future home broadband access. We investigate the following in the coming pages:

1. Can today's wireless technology support FWA?
2. Is there a viable business case for FWA as compared to alternatives (DOCSIS, FTTH)?
3. Do any network operators have profitable FWA home broadband business?

2. Reasons for FWA Momentum

Several factors are coming together, boosting industry push for FWA:

1. Technology advances: Higher order modulation, massive MIMO, beamforming, carrier aggregation, multiple user MIMO are some of the features in LTE that are improving spectral efficiency of LTE. This has the dual effect of improving system capacity, but also cell edge bit rates – suitable for FWA. 5G adds further improvements to spectral efficiency by leaner air interface design.
2. Spectrum is the lifeline of wireless access. New spectrum has become available in mid band and higher bands. This spectrum offers wider channels and thus order of magnitude higher throughput than traditional cellular and PCS bands. LTE also allows use of unlicensed or semi-licensed frequencies in 5 GHz band and 3.5 GHz CBRS in conjunction with licensed bands to further uplift data rates.
3. As more and more network operators include FWA in their consumer offerings, a device and terminal ecosystem has developed. FWA offerings started in developing countries where high speed wireline infrastructure is lacking. That has helped to nurture the FWA ecosystem for everyone. One of the most important factors is formation of global ecosystem driving economies of scale. CPE price is a big factor in overall business case and hence it is important to have global economies of scale.

4. Governments realize the productivity gain and development effects of broadband connection availability to all citizens. Governments at many levels (federal, state, city) want to encourage deployment of high-speed home broadband in their jurisdictions. US federal government CAFII initiative is an example of subsidizing build out of rural broadband networks. CAFII program encourages network operators to ramp up broadband deployments in un/under served, mostly rural or exurban areas. RDOF (Rural Digital Opportunity Fund) focuses on areas unserved at 25/3 in traditional price cap territories and provides \$16B funds to serve ~6M potential home locations with speed tiers of 25/3, 50/5, 100/20, 1000/500 Mbps (Downlink/Uplink).

3. Fixed Wireless Access Network

FWA largely reuses MBB network architecture, with similar nodes as mobile broadband sans network features related to terminal mobility.

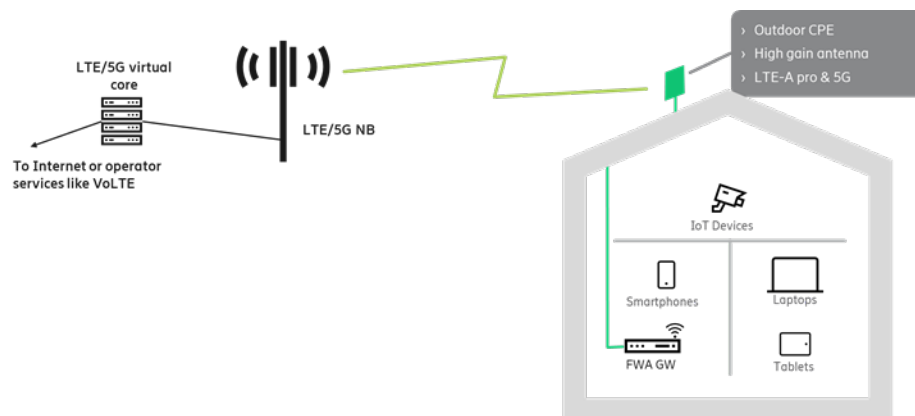


Figure 1: Fixed Wireless Access network

LTE or 5G or dual LTE/5G CPE is installed on the rooftop of the home. This is typically a professional installation. Some operators offer indoor CPEs which are self-installed by the homeowner. Outdoor CPE has high gain antenna and LTE/5G modem to provide connection towards nearest LTE or 5G base station. Operators may provision an FWA GW inside home or integrate it with the outdoor CPE. FWA GW provides home broadband management functionality to the operator.

FWA network comprises of standard 3GPP architecture with an LTE/5G base station and core network. Operator can choose their own deployment strategies. Some considerations below:

1. Dedicated base station and frequencies for FWA or sharing base station and frequencies between FWA, MBB, IoT and other operator services
2. Dedicated core network for FWA or shared with other operator services
3. Physical or virtualized core and radio base station
4. Placement locations of radio and baseband processing of base station, as well as user and control plane components of core network
5. Type of transport between remote (base station) site and aggregation and data center sites.

FWA may require different architectural optimizations different from MBB. For instance, both user plane and control plane design of core network could be different for FWA subscribers. FWA service has fewer users per cell, thus lower control plane load and light-

weight control plane nodes. On the other hand, data consumption is higher in the user plane. A more distributed user plane would be beneficial to improve network performance and reduce transmission costs. Similarly, centralizing baseband processing would have lower utility with reduced pooling gains and might not be worth the increased fronthaul transmission costs.

4. Spectrum Options for FWA

Spectrum is the lifeblood of wireless communications. Not all spectrum is the same. Table below summarizes spectrum options commonly used for FWA.

Table 2: Spectrum for FWA

Frequency	Benefits	Challenges	Availability
Mid band FDD (PCS, AWS etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Widely available ecosystem – Licensed – Good propagation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fully utilized in urban and suburban areas – Narrower channel bandwidths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Now
2.5 GHz TDD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ~200 MHz of licensed spectrum – Best propagation amongst TDD spectrum – US ecosystem available today – Highest predictability due to licensed spectrum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cost of acquiring spectrum – Majority of spectrum in populated areas is owned 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Now
3.5 GHz CBRS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 150 MHz of spectrum – Global LTE ecosystem – Good balance between propagation, power and reuse – Interference managed via SAS (Spectrum Access System) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Spectrum demand in urban and suburban areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Late-2019 for GAA and PAL spectrum available by 4Q 2020
3.7 GHz C-Band	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 280 MHz of spectrum – Global LTE ecosystem – Better propagation and power compared to CBRS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Cost of acquiring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Auction Dec 2020; Deployment 1st phase: Dec 2021, 2nd phase: Dec 2023
5 GHz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 555 MHz of spectrum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Propagation challenges - Maximum of 36 dBm EIRP. – Prone to interference due to contention-based access method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Today

5.9 GHz- 6.425 GHz	- 500 MHz of spectrum	- Following unlicensed framework established for 5 GHz	- Estimated 2022
24 GHz – 39 GHz	- Channels of 100 MHz possible - Carrier agg of 400 MHz or more	- Significant challenges - propagation	- Starting mid-2019
57 GHz – 71 GHz	- 14 GHz of spectrum - Suitable for point-to-point	- Significant challenges - propagation and atmospheric absorption	- Partially Today; Partially in 2022

Operators providing MBB services could use any of the spectrum above for FWA depending on utilization of their spectrum resources. Greenfield operators could start off with CBRs spectrum in combination with 5 GHz band and perhaps also upcoming mmWave high bands.

Carrier aggregation of LTE/5G bands becomes a critical feature for FWA services:

1. There may not be enough spectrum in one band
2. Spectrum may not be contiguous
3. Combining high bands with lower bands improves cell edge rates and extends the coverage
4. Higher peak and average rates can be offered
5. Higher UL Data Rates may require carrier aggregation with other frequency bands

5. Starting Up and Evolving FWA Network

As network traffic grows and as operator offer higher rate broadband services, there will be a need to enhance and upgrade the FWA network. Operator with existing cellular assets could follow a network strategy as below.

1. Use existing MBB cell-site infrastructure for FWA sites, by just adding carriers or slices for FWA. This enables cost effective start up for FWA services
2. Install outdoor CPEs on rooftops of homes or on sides of buildings. Outdoor CPE enable better coverage, longer range and higher system capacity
3. For many existing operators, legacy bands are fully occupied by MBB DL traffic. There may still be capacity left over, specifically in the UL portion of FDD bands that could be given to FWA traffic
4. Operators could upgrade legacy FDD bands to 4T/4R configurations or even FDD massive MIMO to squeeze more network capacity out of legacy FDD bands

5. Operators could add TDD band in 2.5 or 3.5 GHz (with massive MIMO radios). TDD bands are well suited to FWA. Spectrum costs tend to be lower and TDD profiles could match asymmetric downlink heavy nature of home broadband traffic
6. Operators can add mmWave 5G sites in high traffic demand areas to offload FWA traffic from larger macro type sites. mmWave 5G could also be used to provide very high throughput (~ 1 Gbps) service to selected neighborhoods
7. To evolve networks further and to take advantage of 5G's better spectral efficiency and operational ease, operators could upgrade 4G bands to 5G. Since operators need to support both 4G and 5G terminals, there will be a need to operate 5G network together with 4G using schemes like real time spectrum sharing. Real time spectrum sharing allocates spectrum proportionally to 5G and 4G users, as per real time usage demand, without the need to partition spectrum statically and reducing data rates for legacy 4G users
8. Operators could introduce virtualized RAN running on COTS hardware and centralize deployment and management of pieces of FWA RAN functionality especially in Sub-urban and Urban areas.

Greenfield FWA operators that do not have existing spectrum assets could start with step 5 above. Greenfield operators would need to consider their migration strategies to 5G as well. 5G migration that could be accomplished with software upgrade to 4G eNBs and 4G CPEs provide a more compelling option. Even greenfield operators must consider implications of providing 5G and 4G services on the same spectrum, as their user base migrates over time from 4G to 5G.

6. 3GPP Data Rate Evolution

Following picture shows data rate evolution of 3GPP technologies. In LTE, this evolution is accomplished primarily by adding carrier aggregation and spatially multiplexed layers, using 4x4 MIMO and higher order modulation like 256 QAM. Carrier aggregation allows operators to bond together narrower spectrum from several frequency bands into one larger logical channel. This increases data rate to the user. 4x4 MIMO enables transmission of up to 4 layers of spatially multiplexed streams, using the same air interface time and frequency resources. Compared to single stream, 4x4 MIMO could quadruple effective data rate. Higher order modulation attempts to send more bits of information on a single OFDM symbol, thus enhancing end user bit rate.

5G NR introduces leaner air interface and wider carriers in mid (2.5-6 GHz range) and higher (> 6 GHz range) bands. Data rate enhancement support is available both in base station and UE equipment.

To provide an attractive FWA service, operators should aim to start off higher on the data rate ladder and strive to climb even higher with the right network infrastructure and terminal/CPE solution.

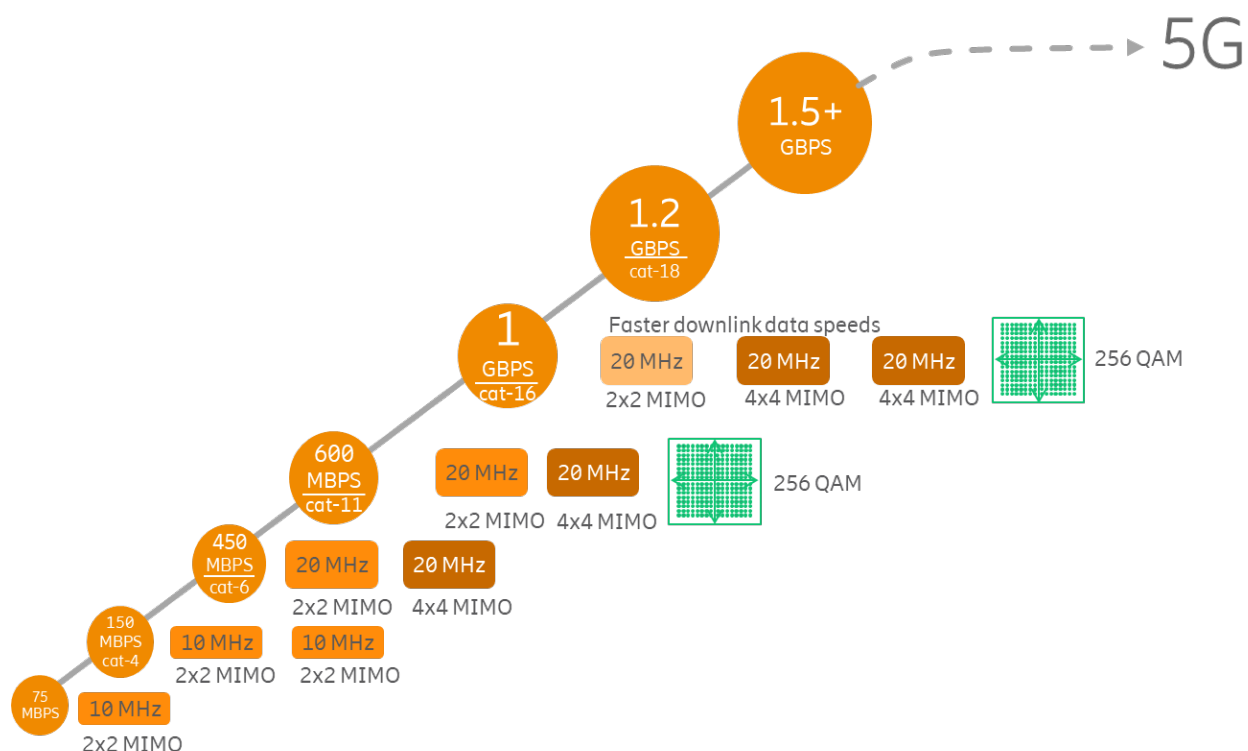


Figure 2: LTE throughput ladder

7. Beamforming Technology

Beamforming is the single most important advance in Technology needed for FWA. Beamforming can be done in many different ways. Most of them (not mechanical tilt included) involves time- or phase-shifts of the different antenna elements in an array. Time shift is the most “correct” way to do it, since it is independent of the frequency (e.g. within the bandwidth of the transmitted signal). But phase shift is in most cases easier to achieve practically.

The two main solutions for beamforming are: Digital and Analog Beamforming.

Digital beamforming has the benefits that it can be done in the baseband and in the frequency domain. This means that the scheduler and Link Adaptation directly can control the beamforming weights (phase shifts that control antenna pattern) simultaneously for different sub-bands within the same OFDM symbol, as illustrated in the figure below.

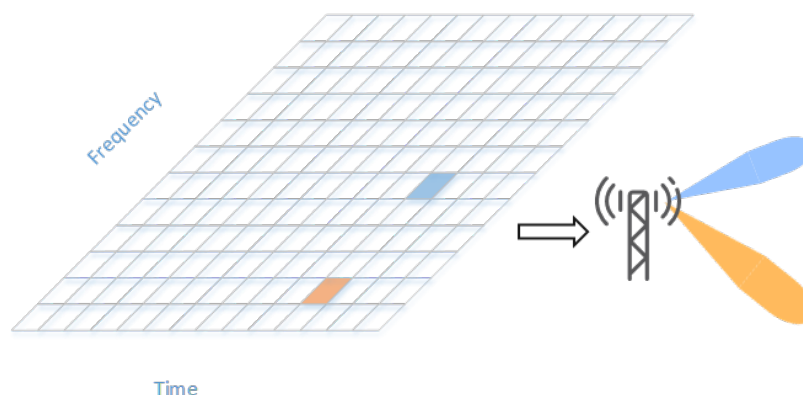


Figure 3: Digital Beamforming

Analog beamforming applies the weights in the time domain, i.e. all symbols within the OFDM symbol get the same weights (same beam direction), which means that Frequency Domain Scheduling, multi-user scheduling or frequency selective beamforming is not possible.

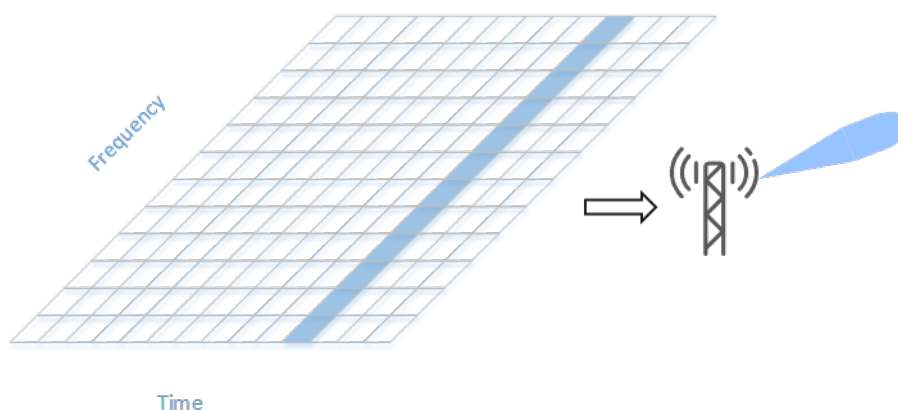


Figure 4: Analog Beamforming

8. CBRS for FWA

CBRS band in 3.5 GHz spectrum could be a good option for FWA services because:

1. Relatively larger amount of spectrum is available. 150 MHz total allocated for all users. 70 MHz would be dedicated to PAL operation in a licensed mode of operation, while 80 MHz would be available for GAA unlicensed operation. GAA interference and coexistence is managed by SAS. Even though GA is unlicensed, GAA operation is expected to be more predictable because of spectrum coordination functionality provided by SAS.
2. CBRS supports TDD operation, which is well suited to FWA.
3. CBRS provides a good compromise between coverage and capacity. The nature of the spectrum allows practical implementation of massive MIMO radios in this band. Using massive MIMO

radios and multiple user MIMO, capacity enhancement - even over narrower frequency bands – is possible.

4. Strong FWA ecosystem is developing in CBRS band.
5. CBRS implementations are beginning with LTE. We expect migration to 5G in CBRS from 2020.

9. Massive MIMO for FWA

Traditional cell sites broadcast signal from LTE sector in all directions covered by that sector. In some places, there would be users that can take advantage of the signal. But most likely, there would be many places where there are no users and the signal broadcasted spatially over wider area would be wasted. Moreover, this wide beam pattern from base station antenna causes inter-cell interference in neighboring cells. The result, from the point of view of a UE, is that total signal levels are lower, and the interference is relatively higher, resulting in a low baseline SINR. Lower SINR implies lower throughput.



Figure 5: Coverage under broadcast beam

Massive MIMO aims to solve this problem by employing beamforming. Large number of antennas are used in the base station radio to form narrower beams at the UE location. Because RF power is focused into narrow beams, desired signal level to the UE increases. Additionally, since the cell site is not broadcasting in the coverage area of the sector for traffic channel – it only transmits narrow beams, intercell interference to adjacent cells is reduced. Consequently, SINR experienced by UE improves and so does the throughput. Beamforming tracks channel conditions and strives to maintain optimum beam structure in the cell.

For FWA service, massive MIMO beamforming is useful in enhancing SINR and improving throughputs to the CPE. However, beamforming by itself only provides marginal improvements. Even though we have a higher sector capacity X in the cell, it is still shared between CPEs served by the cell. If there are 16 CPEs served by the cell at one instance in time, each CPE would get $X/16$ th of the throughput. These

CPEs are being scheduled in separate resource blocks as indicated by different colors of beams in the picture below, thus sector capacity is split among the CPEs.

Massive MIMO improves capacity but also coverage.

1. SINR improvement over cell edge implies cell edge could be pushed farther from the site, increasing cell range.
2. There is an indirect effect. On many occasions, DL rates are impacted by lack of UL coverage, since UL channel suffering from poor radio conditions may not be able to handle TCP flow control. TCP ACKs/NACKs may not be received from UL channel for DL data transmissions. Large number of base station RX antennas improves UL link budget, extending UL coverage, improving TCP flow control and indirectly helping DL.

5G massive MIMO beamforming adds beamforming to UE in addition to LTE eNB. This could result in further improvement in throughput.

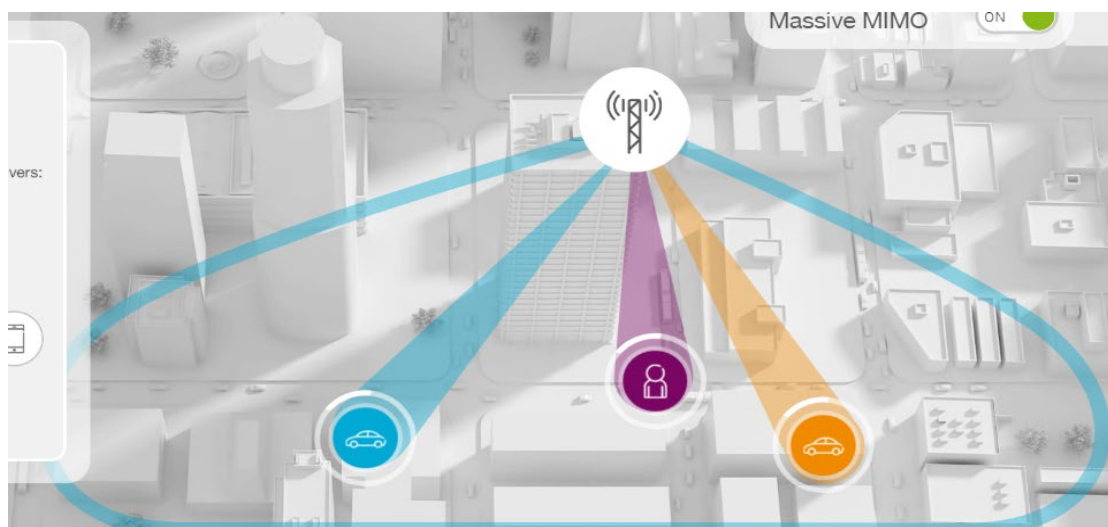


Figure 6: Beamforming with SU-MIMO

If the CPEs are orthogonal, so that beams transmitted to the CPEs do not interfere (i.e., overlap spatially), we could allocate the same resource blocks all over again to each CPE. This is shown by the same color of beam in the picture below and is called multiple user MIMO. If the sector capacity is X and there are 16 (full-buffer) users simultaneously receiving data in the cell, each user can be assigned as much as full capacity X . There are two benefits of multiple user MIMO.

1. System capacity is enhanced. In the example above, baseline sector capacity was X with just beamforming. After adding multiple user MIMO, sector capacity becomes $16X$ (since each of the sixteen users is receiving data with throughput X). This is order of magnitude improvement in system capacity, compared to when a single stream was sent to the UE.
2. User throughput improves also. Depending of the SINR experienced by user, their throughput would vary. But since we are allocating potentially all RBs to each user, individual user throughput would improve. For the example above, we assume all users are in good radio conditions, each user's throughput could be as high as X , which is a 16-time improvement.

We can think of multiple user MIMO creating 16 virtual sectors inside one physical sector in this example.

One consideration for multiple user MIMO is that users need to be orthogonal or spatially separated far enough, such that beams don't overlap. A more intelligent scheduling algorithm would aim to increase UE orthogonality by exploiting not only spatial but also temporal selection of transmissions.



Figure 7: Beamforming with MU-MIMO

Since home broadband offers very high data buckets, capacity enhancement of LTE/5G network is always an important consideration. This is true for high subscriber density urban and suburban areas, but also for low density rural areas. In rural areas, improvements in coverage from massive MIMO beamforming may also be of interest. See picture below from field measurements conducted by Ericsson. Here we are comparing DL throughput for 4T4R system with 64T64R systems with massive MIMO. We can see that massive MIMO systems have better range.

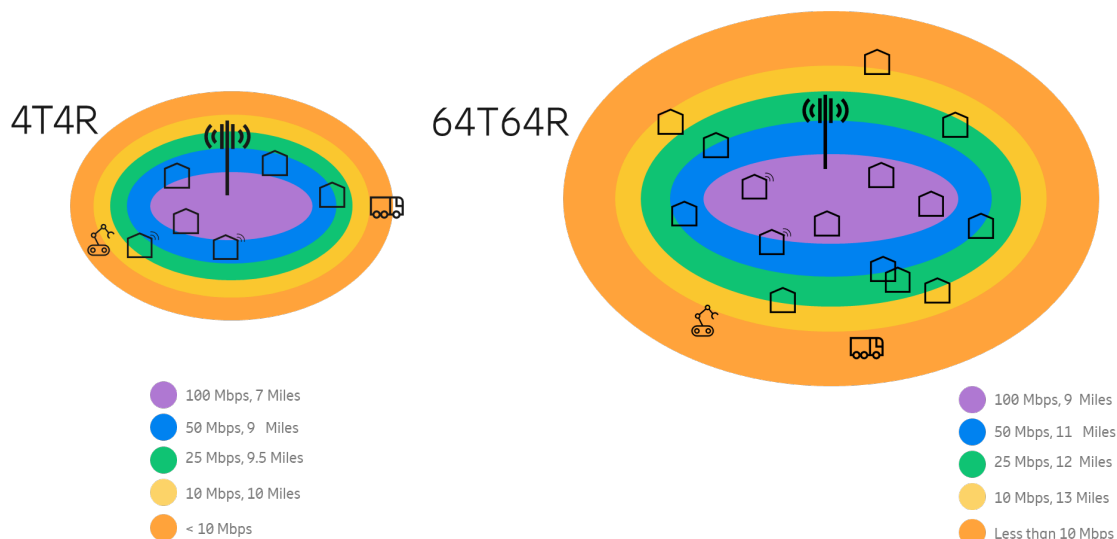
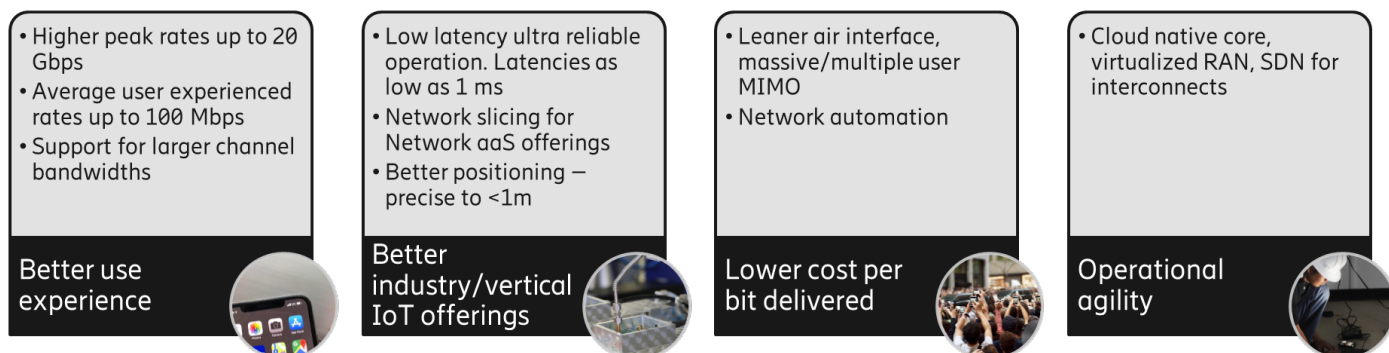


Figure 8: Comparison of 4T4R and 64T64R user throughput and coverage

10. FWA with 5G

Picture below summarizes key benefits of 5G NR.



FWA operator can utilize each one of these aspects of 5G to their benefit.

1. 5G offers much higher peak and average data rates, allowing FWA operators to offer faster speeds.
2. Converged operators, offering MBB and FWA services, can use 5G's enhanced QoS and network slicing mechanisms to better use common RAN, transport and core infrastructure and provide guaranteed FWA SLAs to their subscribers – reducing their network costs
3. 5G leaner air interface and inherent support for massive MIMO/multiple user MIMO allows operators to transmit more data using limited spectrum, reducing cost per bit delivered. Additionally, mmWave bands with higher channel bandwidths could also allow lower cost per bit of FWA data
4. Cloud native core RAN and transport virtualization, software defined networking and use of COTS hardware enables agile operations and cost-effective networks

11. Improving 5G mmWave Reach

mmWave spectrum offers large channel bandwidths and large amount of spectrum. This enables peak data rates up to 20 Gbps. However, propagation of mmWave spectrum is challenging and range is smaller – less than 1 km. FWA deployment of mmWave and mid-band can improve on some of the propagation limitations as below:

1. 5G mmWave antenna arrays can be miniaturized, so large number of antennas can be built in mmWave radios. The antenna arrays allow use of massive MIMO and beamforming. In 5G mmWave, beamforming is used to mostly improve coverage by focusing the RF energy in the direction of intended receiver.

2. Outdoor CPEs become even more critical for 5G mmWave to avoid building penetration losses and to provide line of sight from 5G base station radio to 5G UE.
3. Dual connect operation further enhances coverage, which is typically UL limited. In NR Non-Stand-Alone(NSA) operation, UL from anchor LTE carrier in lower frequency bands could be used to improve cell range. In NR SA operation, a mid band NR carrier can be aggregated with mmWave NR carrier, further improving the effective range of NR cell. This is shown in picture below.

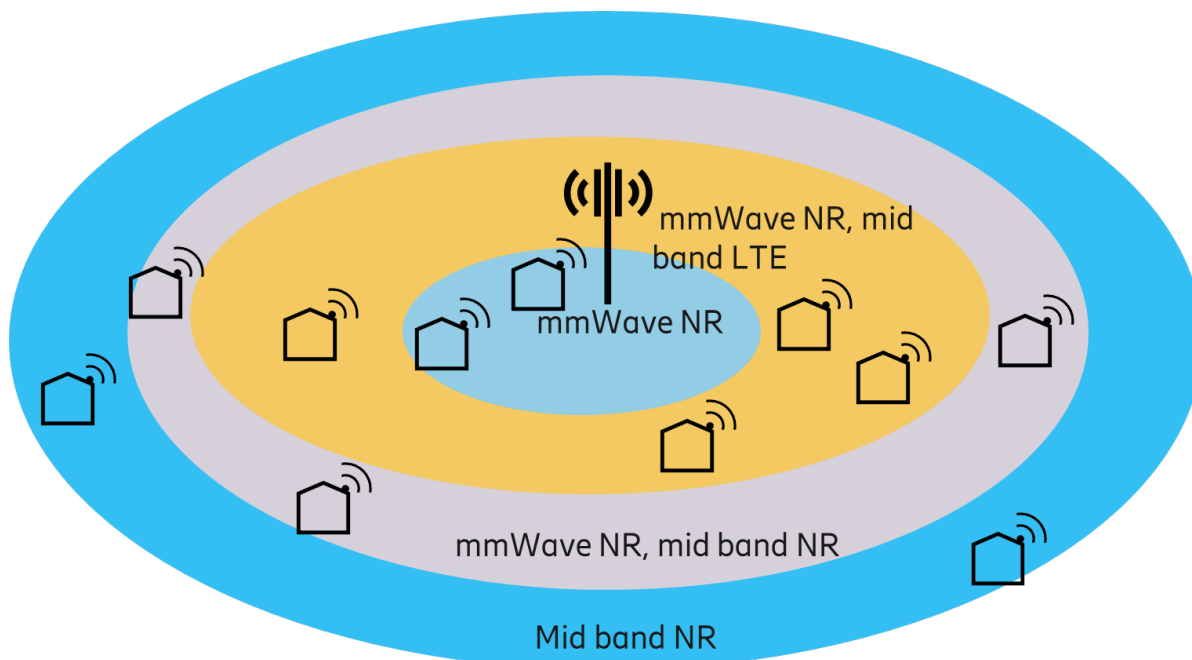


Figure 9: Combining mmWave and mid band

Technology of combining mmWave and Mid-bands:

To meet the ever-growing demand for wireless data and applications, service providers must find new sources of spectrum while using existing spectrum efficiently. In addition to enabling new applications and delivering higher data speeds, 5G is unlocking new sources of spectrum in both the mid-band and high-band radio frequencies. Though these new bands are a welcome addition to a service provider's spectrum assets, the mid and high-band coverage is limited by the radio uplink signal quality and characteristics associated with operating within the higher bands. In order to maximize the benefits provided by these new bands, solutions are needed to extend cell coverage.

UL coverage is challenging at higher bands, and also has significant DL throughput impact when losing UL coverage. How much can we extend the range where higher band DL can be used by considering interworking with lower/mid bands?

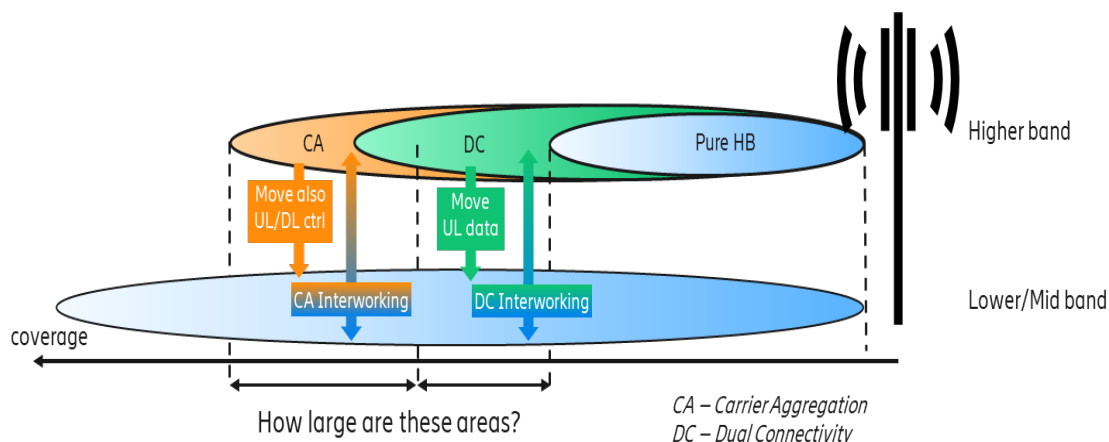


Figure 10: Dual Connectivity and Carrier Aggregation

The first step in the process is Dual Connectivity. In NR NSA operation, UL from anchor LTE carrier in lower frequency bands could be used to improve cell range. Dual Connectivity as defined in 3GPP will allow DL and UL data to switch between LTE and NR independently based on the best performance.

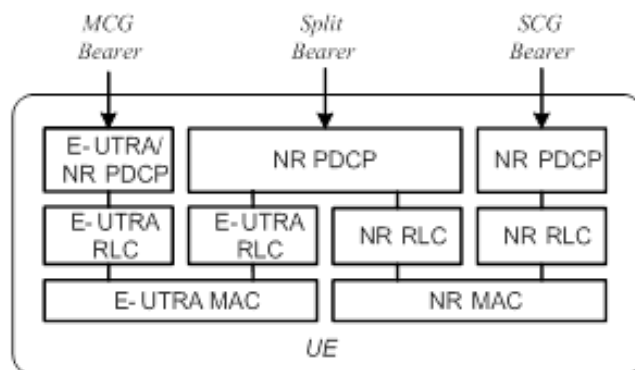


Figure 11: Dual Connectivity Data Bearer Architecture

UL and DL decoupling provides enhanced 5G coverage and performance by picking the best NR or LTE leg for uplink and downlink separately. NR coverage is extended by combining the high speed and low latency of NR with the high coverage and high reliability of LTE. Service utilization is maximized because leg switching can be used even with fast changing radio conditions. Allows e.g. the LTE spectrum, with superior coverage, to be used for uplink user data, while the NR spectrum, with superior peak data rate and latency, is used for downlink.

Benefits

1. Enhanced NR coverage by leveraging LTE for uplink
2. Increased UL and DL performance

For Dual Connectivity(DC), data is split at PDCP layer and unlike carrier aggregation, Layer1, MAC and RLC will be different for master cell group (MCG) and secondary cell group (SCG). From a link budget perspective, DC will need all L1 control channels on all bands, whereas Carrier Aggregation only needs a limited set of control channels on secondary cells.

With Dual Connectivity, on the UL Data channel (PUSCH) can be moved to low/mid band LTE. The coverage is improved but is often then limited by other UL control signaling.

With Carrier Aggregation, UL L1 control channels can also be moved to NR low/mid band and hence results in a better link budget when combining mmWave NR and mid-band/low band NR.

5G mid-band and high-band coverage limitations by developing a flexible 5G Carrier Aggregation solution which supports control and data traffic on the uplink using a lower frequency band which increases coverage, and on the downlink with a mid or high frequency band which increases capacity and data throughput. With 5G Carrier Aggregation, a service provider can support the 5G uplink operating on a lower band with the 5G downlink operating on a mid, or high-band thereby providing the best of all worlds – better coverage, increased capacity, and higher data speeds.

These solutions enable service providers to optimize the use of their spectrum assets when deploying 5G. A better 5G network will provide more subscribers with higher data speeds while enabling a host of new, low latency applications.

In the scenario considered in the analysis below, aggregating a 5G mid-band with a 5G high-band can improve high-band coverage by up to 7dB extending the high-band cell coverage area by up to 2.5 times. The extended mid-band and high-band coverage also enables a greater offload of traffic from the mid bands to the high-bands providing a higher throughput at the cell edge.

Link Budget Analysis for FWA using mmWave and CBRS using Carrier Aggregation:

- 3.5 GHz, 3X20 MHz, 28 GHz: 400 MHz Carrier Aggregation, CPE : CBRS -> 26 dBm EIRP/20MHz, mmWave CPE : 45 dBm EIRP.
 - Propagation Model : 3GPP RMa LOS, UE height : 5m, RBS Height : 90% Coverage Probability, BS EIRP of 62 dBm on 28 GHz, and 50 dBm/20 MHz on CBRS
1. LOS scenario:

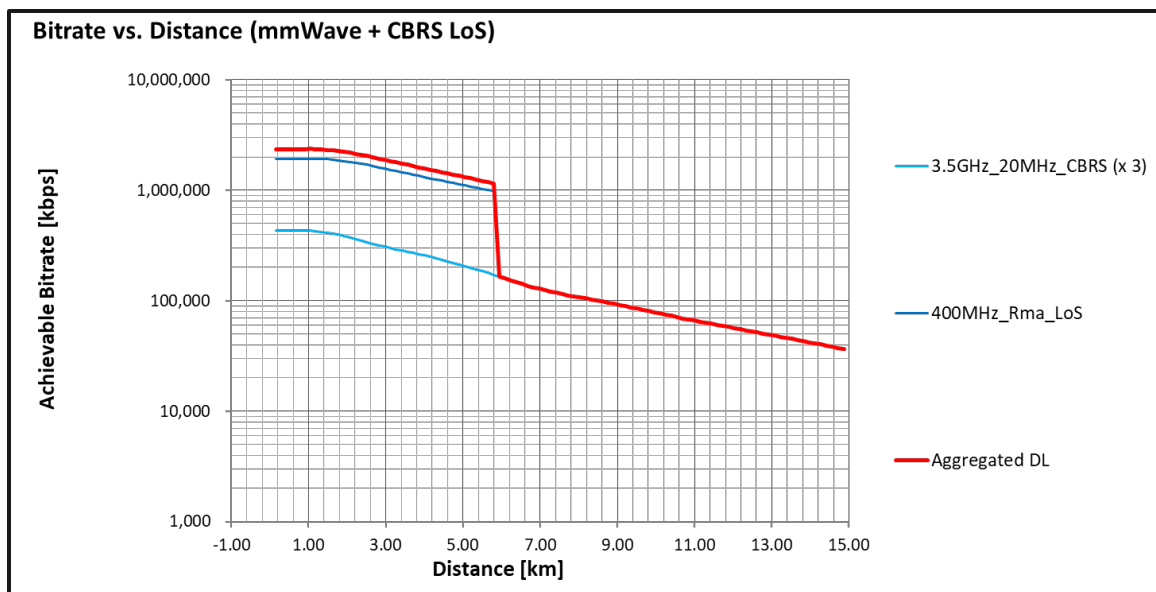


Figure 12: mmWave and CBRS LOS Bandwidth vs Distance

2. NLOS scenario:

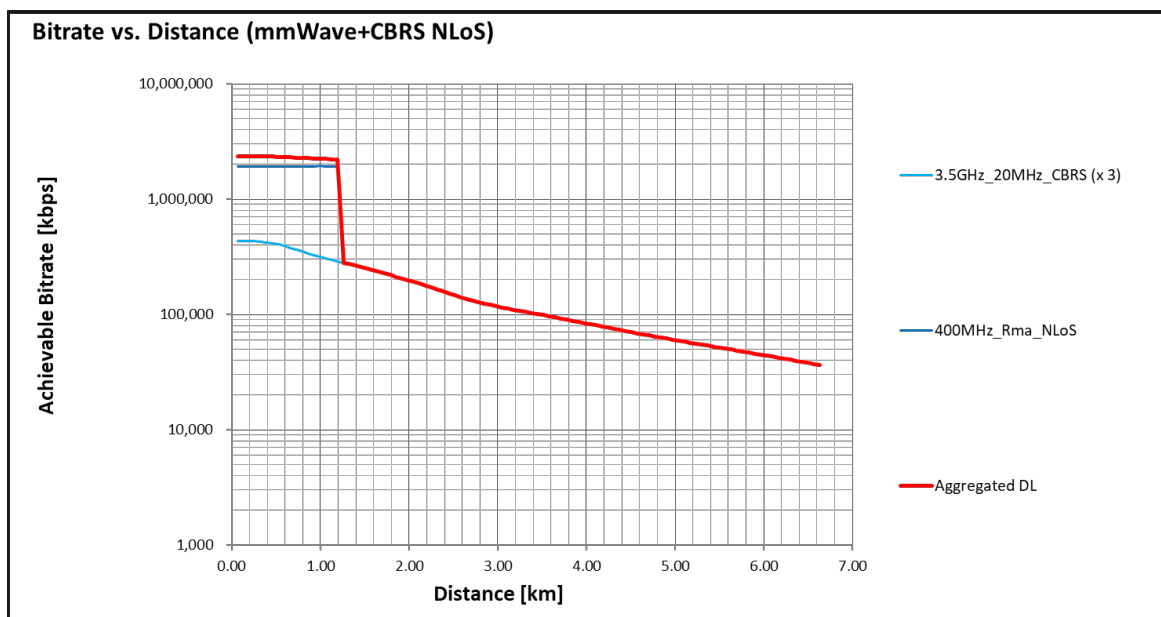


Figure 13: mmWave and CBRS NLOS Bandwidth vs Distance

12. Summary of Technical Section

We summarize our discussion of FWA technology below.

1. 3GPP LTE and 5G provide compelling option for FWA services both for existing and new operators.
2. LTE and 5G FWA solutions are applicable to rural, as well as suburban and urban markets.
3. Operators can start off with LTE and then climb the throughput ladder to more system capacity and higher end user rates.
4. Especially for new operators, CBRS provides an attractive way to start up FWA service offerings
5. 5G mmWave spectrum could be useful add on to mid band FWA. 5G mmWave based FWA could also be used in urban areas on its own.
6. Massive MIMO and multiple user MIMO are key techniques to increase system capacity and FWA user throughput.

We conclude that we have the technologies and spectrum today to enable FWA services both for new and existing network operators. In later section of this paper, we show actual FWA field experiences.

13. FWA Business Considerations

FWA can help operators with their business challenges:

1. Existing operators that have legacy wireline networks like DSL may find it costly to maintain and to upgrade. Operators that want to expand footprint or upgrade existing capabilities could do that with wireless.
2. The yardstick from broadband has moved since subscribers consume more data and expect faster speeds. Wireless technologies can allow operators to enable fiber like capabilities.
3. In some cases, wireless could be cheaper option than deploying fiber.
4. Expanding wireline plants can be time consuming esp. when it comes to the last mile. Wireless can help operators shorten cycle time and reduce customer churn.
5. Wireless networks are multi-service. Once established for FWA, operators can use them to generate new revenue from services like MBB roaming or IoT connectivity.

14. FWA economics

Below we look at factors effecting economics of FWA.

Cost of spectrum. Licensed spectrum could be expensive. For example, operators spent upwards of 40 BUSD for AWS3 spectrum licenses. Since spectrum is expensive, it is important to squeeze maximum utility from it. One strategy is to use inexpensive unlicensed or lightly licensed spectrum for FWA such as CBRS and 5 GHz spectrum. Another strategy is to use mmWave bands (28 GHz, 24 GHz, 37 GHz, 39 GHz etc) for capacity. 37 GHz mmWave also mmWave band offer large amount of spectrum for relatively lower costs.

Cost of network equipment. Since spectrum is scarce and expensive, operators should look at acquiring high performance base station equipment with advanced feature and functionality for FWA like massive MIMO, 5G etc. Similarly, base station sites could be expensive to procure, construct and maintain. A high-performance base station solution that maximizes coverage could also lower the overall costs of deploying and maintaining an FWA network. In previous sections, we saw system capacity improvements

from massive MIMO. Assuming a massive MIMO base station could provide 4x capacity improvement, that will translate into building 4x less sites and spending about 4x less on acquiring spectrum.

Network equipment also includes the LTE or 5G core network and any transmission and aggregation equipment in the operator transport network.

Cost of Site Acquisition and Construction could be significant and even higher than cost of network equipment on the site. Existing operators could leverage their MBB sites to lower site related costs. New FWA operators could also aim to reduce site related costs by deploying high performance base station equipment and by introducing automation in their deployment processes.

Site OPEX comprises of rent payments, backhaul costs, electricity bills and general maintenance costs. Site rent and backhaul comprise the major portion of OPEX costs. TCO for self-owned backhaul would be better than leased line OPEX over the long run. One factor to evaluate here is building of own microwave backhaul.

Cost of CPE. Operators would deploy 100x more CPEs than the number of base stations. For this reason, FWA business cases tend to be sensitive to the cost of CPEs. So, there is a need to drive down the cost of CPE. However, the specs of the CPE could impact network performance and system capacity. A lower spec inexpensive CPE may be detrimental to system capacity – forcing operator to spend more on spectrum and network infrastructure. Outdoor CPEs with high power and high gain antenna enhance network performance and system capacity. The biggest issue with Outdoor CPE is that they require professional installation which dwarfs the cost of the CPE equipment itself. Indoor CPEs could be self-installed by the subscriber. On the other hand, self-install prevents operators from providing SLAs. In the indoor model, you will have opex costs associated with losing signal and hence using more radio resources, churn and in some cases an inability to serve. So outdoor model is best suited for providing a FWA broadband service with SLAs compared to indoor CPE deployments. Operators need to weigh all the cost and performance tradeoffs before crystalizing their CPE strategy.

Technology choice could be critical for the overall business case. A technology that requires frequent upgrades could be costly and may incur disruptions to service. Along this line, effortless upgradability of LTE to 5G (via software without hardware rips) could be beneficial. Since migration of users would not happen overnight, operators should also consider coexistence of LTE and 5G users in the best possible way. Here real time spectrum sharing between LTE and 5G users becomes critical. Without it, operator may be forced to procure new spectrum for 5G.

Subscriber density impact the business case for FWA. A higher subscriber density is preferable to generate higher revenues per cell site and offset operator's network CAPEX and OPEX expenses, but comes at the penalty that higher density makes fixed line competition more cost effective.

Similarly, a higher market share will allow operator to generate more revenue per site up until they reach their spectral capacity. An FWA business case resting on too small or too large market share or density of subscribers could be challenging.

Traffic growth projections factor into the business case in terms cost of future network expansion. This is tied to data speed offerings, since faster speeds may require FWA network densification or more spectrum etc. More traffic and higher data speeds could require more sites, more spectrum or more infrastructure equipment.

15. CBRS Business Case Example

It is possible to realize a viable business case for FWA – i.e., an FWA solution with positive cash flow and cost structure better than alternate solutions. Below we show a sample business case for rural and suburban FWA. In this scenario, operator could achieve less than \$300 cost per home passed with a positive cash flow in 3.5 years.

Budgetary Value*	Performance	Time to Revenue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suburban and Rural: – \$<300 Cost per Home Passed – 600 homes/sq. mile – Suburban – 10 homes/sq. mile – Rural – Cash flow positive <3 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10, 25, 50, and 100 Mbps Service – Network supports, 2 Mbps Busy Hour Throughput per HHC with a 28% YoY growth – Aligned with Marketing take rates, pricing, and targeted network design metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Network Deployment can begin now

16. mmWave and CBRS Business Case Example

Below we show a sample business case for rural and suburban FWA using mmWave Frequency and CBRS spectrum. In this scenario, operator could achieve less than \$550 cost per home passed with a positive cash flow in 4 years.

Budgetary Value*	Performance	Time to Revenue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Suburban and Rural – \$<550 Cost per Home Passed – 500 Homes/sq.mile – Cash flow positive <4 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 100, 250, 500, and 1000 Mbps Service – Network supports, 6 Mbps Busy Hour Throughput per HHC with a 28% YoY growth – Aligned with Marketing take rates, pricing, and targeted network design metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Network Deployment can begin 1H 2021

Business case metrics used:

Cost per home passed: This is the cost of building FWA coverage for the number of homes in the service area. This cost does not include customer premises costs.

Cost per home connected: This is the cost of providing connectivity to a customer, including networks and customer premises equipment costs.

Time to revenue: Month or year to cash flow positive Return on investment

17. FWA business models

Operators have been trying different business models for FWA. Below, we list a few:

1. Rural high speed FWA. NBN in Australia provides broadband service to rural subscribers. Offering includes 1000 GB bucket with data speed as high as 100 Mbps. To achieve coverage and performance, NBN uses 60 to 100 MHz of licensed TDD spectrum. NBN provides service to otherwise un/underserved communities.
2. 5G FWA. Verizon has launched an FWA service over mmWave 5G variant for \$50-70 per month with no contract. The 5G type FWA service is being deployed in targeted urban and suburban areas and it is meant to compete with existing cable, fiber and other home broadband offerings.
3. Converged MBB and FWA service. Here operator can offer a service to connect a WiFi router, MiFi devices, tablets etc. via the same network. Data consumption from all devices is pooled into a single bucket. Some of the supported devices are mobile and can roam outside of home. This offering has features of both mobile broadband and fixed broadband. T-mobile has just launched the service based on this model.
4. Rural FWA and IoT network: A rural operator provides FWA service and using the same network can offer up low power wide area or massive IoT for smart farms.
5. Rural FWA and MBB roaming: A rural operator deploys FWA LTE network. With network slicing, any residual capacity in the network could be used to accommodate roaming MBB subscribers.

18. CBRS FWA Field Experiences

In this section, we look at field trial results from FWA. We highlight performance potential of new technologies like massive MIMO and NR.

In the first instance, we show results from a rural FWA trial using CBRS spectrum. The cell site is configured as 4T4R and we are using two 20 MHz LTE carriers. Outdoor CPEs are used in this set up. Since, this configuration is closer to standard LTE, we can use this as baseline for comparisons.

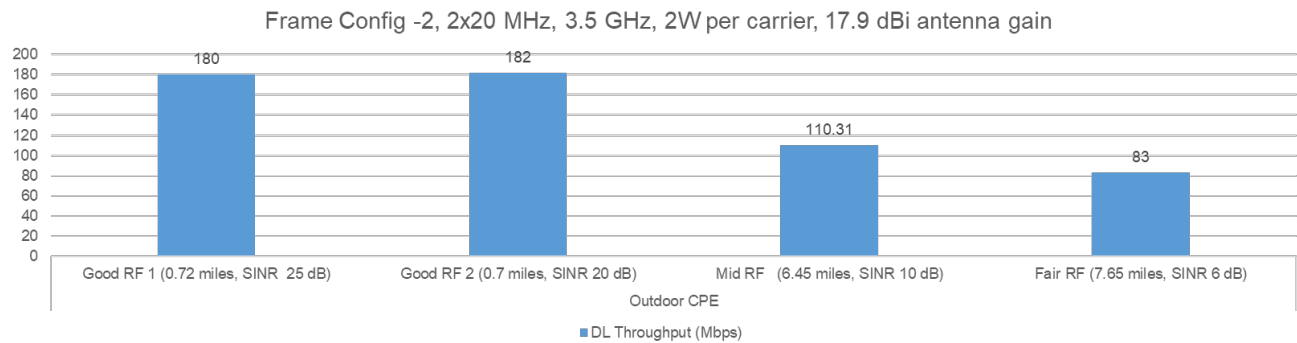


Figure 14: Downlink throughput under different RF conditions

Peak throughput of 180 Mbps in the DL was seen at 0.7 miles from the site. An average home would experience 110 Mbps. One measurement was taken at around 7 miles from the site with 110 Mbps speed in the DL.

Each 20 MHz channel offered average sector capacity of 50 Mbps. Assuming busy hour demand of 2 Mbps per home, each sector would be able to support 50 homes. The number of homes supported by each sector could be increased by adding more CBRS spectrum (more than 2x20 MHz).

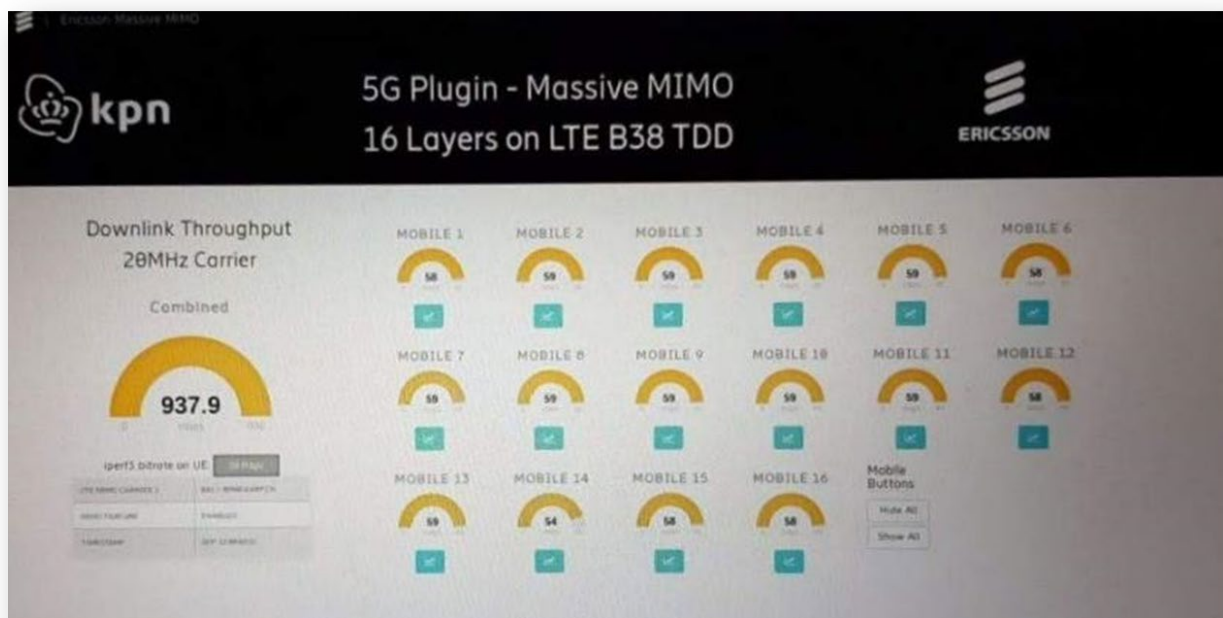
In the next instance, we show how massive MIMO can improve system capacity and individual CPE throughput. We note that CPE placement is ideal, i.e., CPEs are in line of sight and under good RF conditions. They are also spatially separated to minimize inter-beam interference and allow the possibility of achieving good multiple user MIMO gains.



Figure 15: Setting for multiple user MIMO testing in ideal radio conditions

These tests use a single 20 MHz LTE carrier with 256 QAM modulation in mid band TDD spectrum. 16 CPEs are configured to transmit simultaneously. System is set up to use up to 16 layers in DL. Total system throughput of ~937 Mbps was observed in the DL.

Table 3: Results of throughput testing with 16 layer MU-MIMO in good radio conditions



Finally, we show coverage capacity a massive MIMO and 4T4R FWA system in rural area. We used a single 20 MHz carrier in mid band with outdoor CPEs.

With Massive MIMO, high single user throughput performance is achieved with 10 CPEs between 6 to 8 km away from the cell site and 3 CPEs with in 500 meters of the site.

Total system capacity of 250 Mbps was achieved for 8 MU-MIMO layers with 8 CPEs in the 6-8 km distance. The 4T4R, we achieved a system capacity of 80 Mbps in a 20 MHz channel when testing 8 users. So in summary Massive MIMO 64T64R system achieved 3X more capacity compared to 4T4R.

Total system capacity of 400 Mbps was achieved for 13 MU-MIMO layers when tested Massive MIMO product.

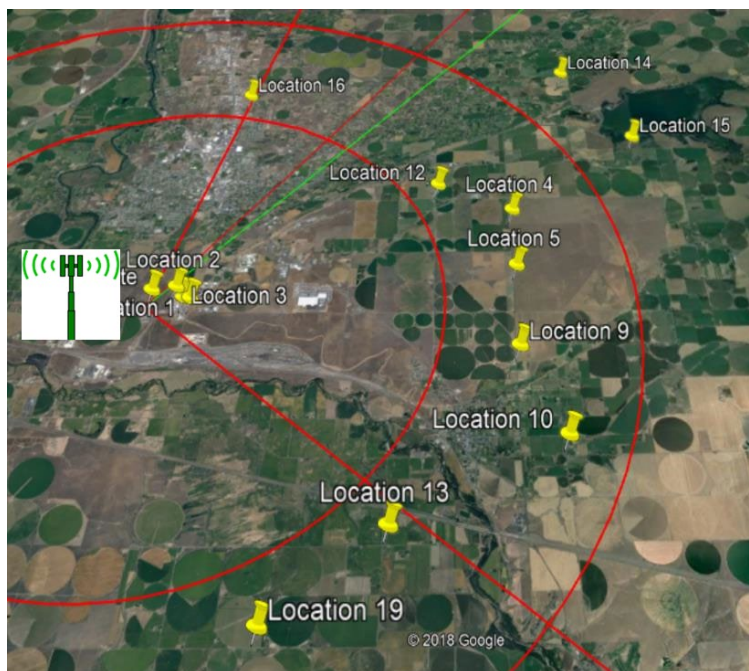


Figure 16: FWA with beamforming and MU-MIMO in rural area

Also, maximum cell range tests with Massive MIMO products demonstrated that speeds up to 50 Mbps can be achieved in a 20 MHz up to 20 Km distances in LoS conditions.

19. mmWave and CBRS Field Trial experiences

Prototype FWA CPE Devices with mmWave and 3.5 GHz support (Dual Connectivity) are currently being tested. Also, Outdoor FWA CPE devices with mmWave and CBRS will be available 1H 2021.

Conclusions

In this article, we have shown:

1. FWA technology components are in place.
2. There is a viable business case for FWA.
3. Operators have been experimenting with different business models.
4. Deployments that began with rural FWA are moving into suburban and urban areas. Several operators in the US and globally have already been operating profitable FWA business.

FWA has the potential to disrupt existing broadband business. SCTE members could leverage FWA to further build out their own home broadband offerings.

Abbreviations

AP	access point
bps	bits per second
FEC	forward error correction
HFC	hybrid fiber-coax
HD	high definition
Hz	Hertz
ISBE	International Society of Broadband Experts
SCTE	Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers

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