

From: "Levitt, Karen" <karen.levitt@vancouver.ca>

To: "Direct to Mayor and Council -

Date: 4/17/2025 1:04:49 PM

Subject: Council Memo - Expanding Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside and adjacent neighbourhoods - RTS 16310

Attachments: Council Memo - Expanding Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside and adjacent neighbourhoods - RTS 16310.pdf

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Dear Mayor and Council,

Attached please find a outlining staff's response to the March 2024 Council motion entitled "*Expanding Free Public Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside and Adjacent Neighborhoods.*"

- In response to this Council direction, staff will be working with Rogers to add approximately 200 new access points to expand the free VanWiFi network – the great majority of which will be in the Downtown Eastside, in locations such as social housing buildings, drop-in centres, cafes, businesses.
- This will be done as part of an existing agreement with Rogers through which the City provides Rogers access free of charge to City-owned assets such as streetlights and buildings for equipment mounting, and in exchange Rogers provides free public WiFi in a range of locations.
- As a result, these access points will be installed at no incremental capital or operating cost to the City.
- Installation of these new access points will take place over Q3/Q4-2025, and is anticipated be completed by early 2026.

Thanks,

Karen

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**Karen Levitt**, Deputy City Manager  
karen.levitt@vancouver.ca

The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm/Musqueam, Skwx̱u817 \_wú7mesh/Squamish and səliłwətał/Tsleil-Waututh nations

## MEMORANDUM

April 17, 2025

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC  
Teresa Jong, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Mellisa Morphy, Director of Policy, Mayor's Office  
Trevor Ford, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Tadhg Healy, Chief Technology Officer

FROM: Karen Levitt  
Deputy City Manager

SUBJECT: Expanding Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside and adjacent neighbourhoods

RTS #: 16310

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### Purpose

In March 2024, Council approved the motion titled *"Expanding Free Public Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside and Adjacent Neighborhoods."* The motion directed staff to report back to Council by end-2024 with a plan, timeline and budget for this Wi-Fi expansion (full resolution in Appendix A).

This memo presents Council with staff's plan to respond to this direction. As this plan involves no incremental capital or operating cost to the City, staff is sharing this information with Council in memo format.

### Context

- Wi-Fi is delivered via a set of access points, which are network devices that allows wireless devices to connect to a wired network. (Essentially the same thing as a Wi-Fi router in a home.)
  - Each access point has an access range of approximately 30-50 metres.

- Therefore, the more access points a Wi-Fi network has, the more widely available the service is for users.
- The City has existing agreements with each of TELUS and Rogers that grants them access free of charge to City-owned assets such as streetlights and buildings for equipment mounting. In exchange for this, TELUS and Rogers provide free public Wi-Fi in a range of locations across the city, including community centres, parks and other public realm locations. These agreements are in place from 2015 to 2035.
- Through these arrangements with TELUS and Rogers, the City currently offers 408 free public Wi-Fi access points across Vancouver (Rogers = 365 and Telus = 43), branded under the name #VanWiFi.
- Over the past several years, approximately 200 Wi-Fi sites – primarily located in the downtown core – were eliminated due to business closures and economic changes, in large part due to the Covid-19 pandemic. All of the lost locations had been provided by Rogers.

### **Determining the need**

- Community engagement undertaken in Q4-2024 at Oppenheimer Park, Evelyn Saller Centre, and at 312 Main Street informally surveyed approximately 100 individuals.
- It was found of these individuals, approximately one-third currently do not have a mobile data plan and use either free Wi-Fi or a pay-as-you go data plan.
- Further, BC Housing affirmed that expanding free Wi-Fi enables people who are vulnerable in the community to have better access to online services that may be essential to their health, and well-being, e.g., the ability to book medical appointments, apply for or access to social services including affordable rental housing applications, access life-saving apps to prevent overdoses, connect online with family and friends, weather alerts, and other critical uses.

### **Way forward**

1. **Add 200 access points.** In response to the March 2024 Council direction, staff will work with Rogers to add approximately 200 Wi-Fi access points, with the great majority of these being in the Downtown Eastside.
  - These additions will allow users to access VanWi-Fi in more locations within the Downtown Eastside, e.g., within social housing buildings, drop-in centres, cafes, businesses.
  - Staff anticipates that these new access points will be provided by Rogers, and staff have secured written confirmation that Rogers will provide these new access points.

- For these incremental access points, site selection and use protocols will be developed in collaboration with BC Housing, social service providers, Business Improvement Associations, and local businesses.
- Installation of these new access points will take place over Q3/Q4-2025, and is anticipated be completed by early 2026.

### Financial implications

- The addition of 200 new access points will be done at no incremental capital or operating cost to the City, leveraging the aforementioned existing agreements.
- Table 1 below shows the approximate value to the City of the TELUS and Rogers provision of Wi-Fi access points under the existing agreements.

**TABLE 1. ESTIMATED CITY OF VANCOUVER VANWI-FI COST SAVINGS  
ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING ROGERS AND TELUS AGREEMENTS**

	CAPITAL COST @		APPROX. NO. ACCESS POINTS	TOTAL CAPITAL COST, \$M	
	LOW ESTIMATE	HIGH ESTIMATE		LOW ESTIMATE	HIGH ESTIMATE
Outdoor access point	\$2,500	\$6,000	420	\$1.1	\$2.5
Indoor access point	\$1,500	\$3,000	180	\$0.3	\$0.5
Total			600	\$1.3	\$3.1

	OPERATING COST @		ESTIMATED NO. ACCESS POINTS	TOTAL OPERATING COST PA, \$M	
	LOW ESTIMATE	HIGH ESTIMATE		LOW ESTIMATE	HIGH ESTIMATE
Connectivity, monitoring and support	\$1,100	\$3,800	600	\$0.7	\$2.3

All the best,



Karen Levitt  
Deputy City Manager

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**APPENDIX A**  
**MARCH 13, 2024 COUNCIL DIRECTION,**  
**EXPANDING WIFI IN THE DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE**

**WHEREAS**

1. *Access to free public Wi-Fi is an important tool in reducing the digital divide, expanding opportunities for people to connect with family and build stronger social supports, and improving equitable access to knowledge, skill development, employment and healthcare. As the world moves more and more online, those without connectivity are being left behind;*
2. *The City of Vancouver recognizes the significant role free Wi-Fi plays in the lives of people experiencing homelessness. It offers a vital link to online resources, essential services, and a means to stay connected with loved ones;*
3. *Internet or cellular service is also required for people to access a continuum of services and resources including:*
  - a) *The City of Vancouver's shelter hotline*
  - b) *Telehealth for physician access*
  - c) *The 811 nurse hotline*
  - d) *A range of warning and alert systems, including drug toxicity alerts*
  - e) *Access Central, a telephone line that provides access to withdrawal management (detox) in the Vancouver Coastal Health region*
  - f) *Virtual support services such as the Lifeguard App and Brave App, which offer 24/7 support and supervision for people at risk of overdose and connections to local resources*
  - g) *The National Overdose Response Hotline, which provides 24/7 anonymous and confidential support over the phone through trained peer supporters*
4. *These programs save lives, connecting people to shelter, housing, healthcare and more. However their reach and impact relies on making them as accessible as possible to the people they are intended to serve, including through expanded access to cellular or internet connection;*
5. *Access to public Wi-Fi also provides more opportunity for the city to communicate to community members during emergencies. During health outbreaks and extreme weather events it would strengthen the ability for the city and community organisations to reach residents with important information and updates;*
6. *Expanded free public Wi-Fi also benefits tourism and small business, allowing locals and visitors to locate local businesses and attractions and stay connected while away from*

*home. These benefits would strengthen economic and community development efforts in neighbourhoods including Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona and Hastings Crossing; and*

- 7. The City of Vancouver currently provides 521 free public Wi-Fi locations across Vancouver, in partnership with Telus and Rogers, provided through a mix of private and public access buildings, such as community centres, branches of the Vancouver Public Library, City and Park Board buildings. This includes an established footprint of free Wi-Fi in the DTES through city owned facilities as well as VanWi-Fi.*

*THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to report back by the end of 2024 with a plan, timeline and budget for expanding free public Wi-Fi in the Downtown Eastside. And that this work include but not be limited to:*

- A. Engaging with community and social service organisations and local businesses about their capacity and interest in hosting public Wi-Fi access points.*
- B. Engaging with social housing partners and BC Housing to explore the possibilities of adding Wi-Fi access points in BC Housing, non-profit and city owned social housing.*
- C. Engaging with community organisations and BIAs in adjacent neighbourhoods about expanding free public Wi-Fi access in Gastown, Chinatown, Strathcona and Hastings Crossing.*
- D. Engaging with private sector telecom providers to explore opportunities for further collaboration and potential expanded free Wi-Fi capacity and access in the Downtown Eastside.*

**APPENDIX B**  
**ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED CONCERNING**  
**DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE VANWI-FI EXPANSION, Q4-2024**

- 1. WISH** – WISH Drop-In Centre Society
- 2. PACE** – Providing Advocacy, Counselling, and Education Society
- 3. BWSS** – Battered Women's Support Services
- 4. DEWC** – Downtown Eastside Women's Centre
- 5. SisterSquare (Atira)** – SisterSquare operated by Atira Women's Resource Society
- 6. Aboriginal Front Door** – Aboriginal Front Door Society
- 7. Astoria Washroom Trailer** – Astoria Washroom Trailer (operated by Atira Women's Resource Society)
- 8. UNYA** – Urban Native Youth Association
- 9. Kingsway Community Station (RainCity)** – Kingsway Community Station operated by RainCity Housing and Support Society
- 10. Watari (Alexander Location)** – Watari Counselling & Support Services Society (Alexander Street location)
- 11. Carnegie Community Centre** – Carnegie Community Centre
- 12. Directions Youth Services** – Directions Youth Services (Family Services of Greater Vancouver)
- 13. PHC Addictions Medicine** – Providence Health Care Addictions Medicine
- 14. Vancouver Police Department** – Vancouver Police Department
- 15. Hastings Crossing BIA** – Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association
- 16. Hastings North BIA / East Village BIA** – Hastings North Business Improvement Association (East Village BIA)
- 17. Strathcona BIA** – Strathcona Business Improvement Association
- 18. Chinatown BIA** – Vancouver Chinatown Business Improvement Area Society
- 19. Gastown BIA** – Gastown Business Improvement Society
- 20. BC Housing** – British Columbia Housing Management Commission
- 21. The Dugout** – The Dugout Drop-In Centre Society
- 22. Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House** – Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House
- 23. Guru Nanak's Free Kitchen** – Guru Nanak's Free Kitchen
- 24. Muslim Food Bank** – Muslim Food Bank and Community Services Society
- 25. Quest Non-Profit Grocery Markets** – Quest Outreach Society (operates Quest Non-Profit Grocery Markets)
- 26. DUDES Club** – Downtown Urban Knights Defending Equality and Solidarity Club (DUDES Club)

**27. La Boussole** – La Boussole, Centre  
Communautaire Francophone

**28. Evelyne Saller Centre** – Evelyne Saller  
Centre (City of Vancouver)

**29. Mission Possible** – Mission Possible  
Compassionate Ministries Society

**30. Strathcona Policing Centre** –  
Strathcona Community Policing Centre