

Frequencies for 4G Network to Be Distributed

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The Communications and Press Ministry on Thursday approved the plan proposed by the 4G consortium that will see Long Term Evolution, or LTE, technology be used to build the next-generation mobile communications network in Russia.

Industry experts said that this could mean 4G network construction could now begin as early as next year.

According to media reports, MTS and MegaFon could gain an advantage over other operators as a result of the planned frequency distribution, since they will be assigned frequencies in Moscow and the Moscow region.

About 16 percent of all mobile subscribers are in that market.

The first tender for newly allocated frequencies is to be completed by February 2012 and is

open to any company to participate, a participant at the meeting of the State Committee for Radio Frequencies, which is part of the communications ministry, told The Moscow Times.

Winners of the tenders will have to clear the frequencies from any current users, which could entail substantial costs and time delays, as the process requires close cooperation with the previous frequency owner.

Some frequencies will be assigned without tender. Scartel, which operates under the brand name Yota, has been assigned new frequencies because it will give up existing ones that are necessary for the LTE solution to work.

LTE promises faster mobile data communications than 3G — up to 100 megabits per second. Its successor, LTE advanced — which is "true" 4G according to industry standards and will be the ultimate functionality of the new networks — can offer speeds up to 1 gigabit per second.

Osnovo Telecom, a Defense Ministry operator, was assigned frequencies without a tender, so it can continue working on developing and modernizing Defense Ministry communications.

MTS and MegaFon will also surrender some of their higher-range WiMax frequencies in exchange for getting additional channels assigned for building their LTE networks.

However, none of these assigned frequencies can be used until after the tenders for the other LTE frequencies are completed in February 2012, industry players confirmed.

Tele2, a Swedish telecoms operator with 19 million subscribers in Russia, which is not part of the 4G consortium, expressed cautious optimism at Thursday's announcement.

We hope that all operators will be admitted to this process. Tele2 confirms its readiness to apply [its] practical experience in LTE for the rapid creation of 4G networks in Russia, said Alexander Bakhorin, Tele2 Russia spokesman.

It's a good signal for the industry that competition for LTE frequencies will be open for all companies; Tele2 will take part if the conditions are transparent, he said.

"Technological neutrality is the most effective way of LTE introduction," Bakhorin said.

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