

3. TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR

3.1 TRAI issues Tariff Order for retail broadband services for Public Data Offices under the PM-WANI Scheme

In June 2025, TRAI capped wholesale broadband prices for Public Data Offices under the PM-WANI scheme to boost affordable public Wi-Fi access. This tariff regulation aims to lower costs for PDO entrepreneurs while ensuring ISP viability, addressing a key barrier to expanding digital inclusion across India.

Refined Reflections:

India's PM-WANI scheme, aimed at expanding affordable public Wi-Fi, received an important policy update in June 2025 when TRAI set price limits on broadband plans for Public Data Offices. This change addresses a key problem: high internet costs have made it hard for small vendors to join the scheme and slowed its growth. By capping what internet providers can charge PDOs, the government is trying to make internet access more affordable while keeping the business model viable for service providers.

This is part of a larger effort that started earlier in 2025 with simpler licensing and fewer rules for PDO operators. However, without controlling wholesale broadband prices, adoption of the scheme remained low. The new tariff rules tackle this problem directly and could help PM-WANI scale faster.

At the same time, questions remain about how this price cap will affect internet service providers in smaller cities. There is a risk that it might reduce their motivation to offer high-quality connections or innovate in network solutions. For PM-WANI to succeed, price controls need to be supported by measures such as financial help for small vendors, efforts to improve digital skills, and investments in rural internet infrastructure. This step shows a more mature approach to regulation, one that understands digital access must be both available and economically sustainable for those delivering it. If done right, it could be the turning point for widespread, low-cost public Wi-Fi in India.

Official Notification: Telecommunication Tariff (71st Amendment) Order 2025