

# RailTel plans to expand its broadband services in East and North India

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State-run RailTel Corporation is planning to expand its retail broadband service, RailWire, in East and North India this year. The company will target rural areas and smaller towns where internet connectivity through Wi-Fi and telecom companies continues to be an issue.

RailTel has close to one lakh retail subscribers in the Southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala over the last couple of years; and around 10,000 retail users in the eastern and northern parts of the country.

RailTel works mostly with local cable operators and other access network providers to reach out to retail customers. It has created over

45,000 Rkm (route kilometres) of optic fibre network alongside railway tracks, connecting 4,500 towns and cities across the country.

According to K Manohar Raja, Executive Director, Enterprise Business: "RailTel, is in the process of selecting managed service partners (such as cable operators) for reaching out to its retail customers, particularly in rural areas. These managed service partners will launch and operate RailWire services on a revenue-sharing model. The company has already floated the request for quotation."

"We have been able to add close to one lakh retail users in South India; and this year we will add customers in east and north India," Raja told *BusinessLine*.

According to Raja, the first phase was largely "exploratory" with the company putting in place its technology, and, stabilising the revenue model.

"With the revenue model stabilising, we intend to scale up. We plan to bring on board more entrepreneurs who will provide the service to retail users," he said.

## RailWire Sathi

For RailWire, a large number of users, particularly in the rural areas, are unable to use the internet because of lack of knowledge. RailTel, has therefore rolled out the 'Sathi' programme in order to help them out. Under this programme, it is exploring the possibility of setting up Wi-Fi hotspot kiosks at railway sta-

tions to assist people to access a range of online services, including e-commerce, online banking, e-ticketing and various government schemes.

## Free Wi-Fi services

RailTel, in partnership with Google, has already rolled out free public Wi-Fi services across 400 railway stations falling under A and A1 categories. The company also plans to roll out similar services in close to 700-odd stations falling under B and C categories, henceforth.

"We are evaluating various options. The idea is to provide assisted internet services to people, particularly in rural areas. This will also create employment opportunities for several people at the village level," he said.