



# Smart Use of Mobile Data Roaming Services

**Telecommunications Users and Consumers Advisory Committee**

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# Mobile Data Services Development in Hong Kong

- Increasing popularity of various smart mobile devices
- Rapid growth of mobile data services
  - Mobile data usage (total usage in HK)
    - Increased from 13 491 Tera-bytes (TB) in May 2014 to 17 245 TB in May 2015
    - An increase of about 28%
- Such an increase reflects the growing popularity in the use of mobile data services, consumer complaints may increase accordingly



# Consumer Complaints about Billing Disputes

- Complaints about billing disputes
  - 2013-14: 1 128 cases
  - 2014-15: 651 cases
- “Mobile bill shock”
  - 2013-14: 611 cases
  - 2014-15: 356 cases
- Problem of “mobile bill shock”– consumers receive unexpectedly high mobile bill charges
- Some complaints were caused by unintentional or inadvertent use of mobile data services, particularly the expensive mobile data roaming services



# Examples of Mobile Data Roaming Services Complaints

- **e.g. 1: A citizen connected his mobile phone to the Wi-Fi of a hotel on the Mainland. He later received a SMS informing him of the use of mobile data roaming services and was charged for more than \$18,000**
  - As the citizen did not turn off the mobile data roaming function on his phone, the phone might switch back to access the mobile data roaming services when the Wi-Fi signals were weak
- **e.g. 2: Another citizen coming back to Hong Kong from the Mainland turned on the mobile data services immediately after crossing the border but was later charged for using mobile data roaming services**
  - Given the propagation characteristics of radio waves, over-spilling of mobile network signals cannot be avoided completely. Hence, it is possible that a user can still connect to the Mainland's mobile networks at certain locations in the border areas of Hong Kong
- **e.g. 3: A citizen subscribed for data roaming day pass service before his trip to France. But on the day when he was near the border between France and Germany, he was charged for the use of day pass in both countries**
  - The user might unintentionally connect his mobile phone to the mobile networks of a neighboring country, when he was near the border between two countries



# Use of Mobile Data Roaming Services Abroad

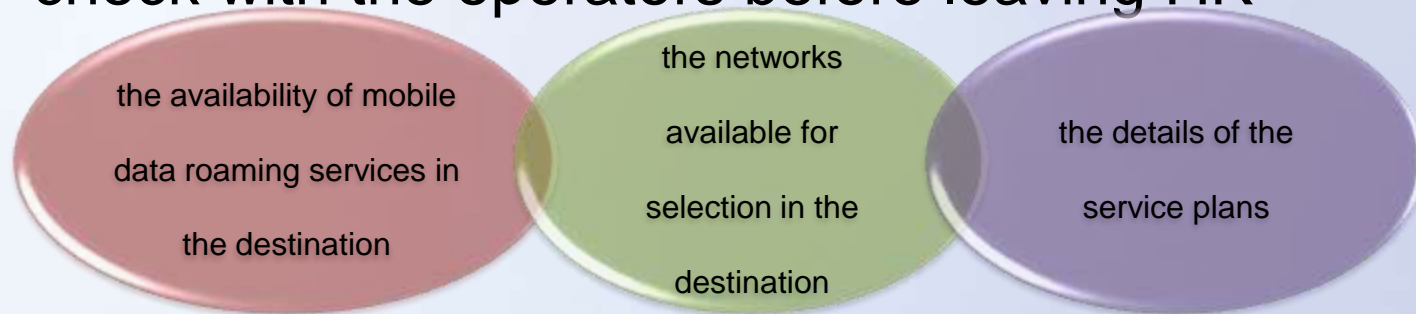


- In general, mobile data services will be activated when mobile phones are used for browsing websites and running certain mobile apps
  - For example, sending/receiving email, instant messaging, accessing social networking sites, video streaming and Internet sharing (also known as “tethering”)
  - Consumers should be careful to avoid the unintentional use of mobile data roaming services while travelling abroad
- High Mobile Data Roaming Charges
  - The charges of mobile data roaming services are much higher than that of local data services
  - Taking the charge of \$0.1 / KB as an example, downloading a song (4 MB) costs about **\$400**, while watching one minute of high resolution video streaming (10 MB) costs about **\$1,000!**
- Consumers should be aware of the details and calculation methods of mobile data roaming services, and read carefully the terms and conditions of the services. If in doubt, consumers should make enquiries with their mobile network operators before leaving Hong Kong

# Measures to Avoid Unexpected Mobile Data Roaming Charges

## General Advice

- If mobile data roaming services are **required**, consumers may:
  - check with the operators before leaving HK



switch off the automatic update functions for emails and other apps

consider purchasing a local pre-paid SIM card of the destination

consider choosing a charge-capped data roaming service plan



# Measures to Avoid Unexpected Mobile Data Roaming Charges

## Charge-capped Data Usage Service Plan

- **Data Roaming Day Pass**

- Flat-rate data roaming daily plan (typically **less than HK\$200 per day**) for data usage

- When selecting a **data roaming day pass**, consumers should be aware of:

- service activation method and cut-off time
  - definition of “a day” as defined by different operators
  - usage packages are usually only applicable to designated destination(s) and/or network(s)
  - avoiding “network switching” by configuring the handset to manual network selection so that the connection will be confined only to the designated network(s)



# Mobile Data Roaming Services not Required while Travelling Abroad

- Customers **not requiring** mobile data roaming services while travelling abroad may:



request the operator to temporarily deactivate the roaming privilege for mobile data services (keep the voice call roaming services only)



disable **both** the mobile data function and the mobile data roaming services for the handset (this feature is only available on certain handset models) **before leaving Hong Kong**



bring another handset without mobile data function for use outside Hong Kong



# Using Wi-Fi to Access the Internet while Travelling Abroad

- When Wi-Fi signals are weak or there is no Wi-Fi coverage, the handset may switch to the GPRS/3G/4G networks of the destination automatically for data connection



- When using Wi-Fi to access the Internet while travelling abroad, consumers may:
  - disable both the mobile data function and the mobile data roaming services for the handset (this feature is only available on certain handset models)
  - if mobile data function is not switched off, check frequently to ensure that the mobile devices have not switched to GPRS/3G/4G data services while using Wi-Fi for accessing the Internet
  - check the mobile data usage periodically to see whether there is any unusual increase of usage volume



# Avoid Inadvertent Use of Mobile Data Roaming Services Locally

- On outlying islands or in border areas, the signals of the local mobile networks may be weaker at certain locations, a consumer's mobile phone may automatically connect to the mobile networks on the Mainland through roaming services
- If this happens, the consumer's mobile phone will show that it is connected to a Mainland network and calls made or received, including mobile data services, will be charged according to roaming rates
- To prevent inadvertent use of data roaming services, consumers may:
  - request the operators to deactivate/suspend the roaming services, and re-activate the services when needed
  - configure the handset to “manual network selection” or other similar modes so as to ensure that it will remain connected to the designated local network



# Measures Taken to Address “Mobile Bill Shock” by the Government and the Industry

- OFCA has published for public information on its website the measures adopted by individual operators to address mobile bill shock, including:
  - allowing customers to opt-out individual services
  - setting a charge ceiling
  - setting a usage cap
  - alerting customers through short messages as their pre-determined usage threshold is reached
  - alerting customers when their roaming data usage is triggered
- Details
  - [http://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer\\_focus/education\\_corner/guide/advice\\_mps/billshock/index.html](http://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer_focus/education_corner/guide/advice_mps/billshock/index.html)



# Measures Taken to Address “Mobile Bill Shock” by the Government and the Industry

- OFCA issued various **consumer alerts** to remind consumers to pay attention to the use of mobile data services
  - [http://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer\\_focus/education\\_corner/alerts/mds/index.html](http://www.ofca.gov.hk/en/consumer_focus/education_corner/alerts/mds/index.html)
- Remind consumers to pay attention to mobile data usage through TV and radio APIs





# Measures Taken to Address “Mobile Bill Shock” by the Government and the Industry

- Other consumer education activities include:
  - Roving exhibitions
  - Public seminars and roving drama for schools
  - Photo storytelling competition
  - Publication of consumer information on the use of communications services in the form of comic strips in newspaper



# Thank You