



Roaming team
Ofcom
Riverside House
2A Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 9HA

28 September 2023

By email only to: RoamingConsultation@ofcom.org.uk

Consultation on mobile roaming: Strengthening customer protections.

Dear Roaming team,

Please find attached Virgin Media O2's (VMO2) response to the above consultation, set out in Annex 1. We are happy to discuss any aspect of our response, or provide further information, as Ofcom requires.

Yours sincerely,

Virgin Media O2 UK

Annex 1

Question 1: Do you agree with our proposals to introduce rules and accompanying guidance requiring providers to send customers roaming alerts that include information on roaming charges, mobile bill limits and where to access more information?

VMO2 supports the introduction of rules and accompanying guidance, to ensure the consistency of information across industry for customers who are roaming. As a general point, for Ofcom's consideration, VMO2 has found that the longer the notification message, the less likely customers will respond to, or indeed heed, the information contained within it. If there are too many calls to action or too much information contained within the notification, its impact is diminished.

Opt-out functionality

VMO2 questions the necessity of the opt-out functionality, and more specifically the ease of the customer being able to opt-out of these crucial notifications. VMO2 considers that making the opt-out functionality via a text back process, allows customers to opt-out of these important notifications too easily, without necessarily thinking about the consequences, in full. Furthermore, it seeks to undermine the importance of the content by advertising the opt-out functionality within the body of the message.

Should a customer exercise the opt-out facility, VMO2 does not consider that this risk is mitigated by sending a message once a year, during peak travelling periods, to remind the customer that they are opted out of notifications. It is counter intuitive to send a message to customers, who have chosen to not receive messages, about messages that they may or may not wish to receive, providers may as well just send the relevant notification. This is particularly relevant in light of Ofcom's own research highlighted in paragraph 3.11 of the consultation document.

There is a stronger argument to send a roaming message containing important and relevant information, the customer can ultimately choose to read it or not. Customers travel throughout the year, not only for leisure, therefore, being able to pre-empt the most useful time of year for all customers is virtually impossible.

Furthermore, it's largely impossible to establish whether customers are inadvertently roaming or actually roaming, therefore roaming notifications are appropriate to be sent. Unless we have their home address as registered as living near a border, and we can exempt them from permanent roaming.

Modern smartphones can block or mute specific numbers, so if the point is that customers are inconvenienced by receiving these messages and no longer wish to receive them, they can self-manage with ease.

In addition, there is a likelihood of an increase in calls to customer services querying roaming charges, from customers who would have forgotten they had opted out of the notifications and would otherwise have been informed of potential charges being incurred. The notification would have served as a prompt to take necessary action, to avoid these charges altogether.

Irrespective of whether providers still offer roam like at home, this does not mitigate rest of roaming charges, where a customer may be going from an EU country to a non-EU country on a work trip or carrying out a multi-country holiday, where they may experience different rates at different times during their trip.

Allowing business (microenterprise) customers to opt-out of roaming notifications, may not be appropriate if they are an employee and not the account holder. The account holder may wish for their employees to receive the notifications to enable them to be mindful of any additional charges that the business may incur. Additionally, it may prompt them employee to contact the account holder to take necessary action to add a roaming bolt-on or Spend Cap, to reduce rest of world roaming charges.

Spend Caps

[REDACTED].

[REDACTED].

Additionally, VMO2 requests that Ofcom consider the flexibility of whether to include the Spend Cap limit within the notification, depending on the individual provider's roaming offering. Where a provider does not allow any out of bundle or roaming charges without a relevant bolt-on, the information relating to Spend Caps is irrelevant to the context of the notification.

Question 2: Do you agree with our proposals to introduce rules and accompanying guidance requiring providers to:

(a) have and publish measures to enable customers to reduce and/or limit expenditure related to inadvertent roaming while in the UK and

(b) provide information on how to avoid inadvertent roaming both in and outside of the UK?

VMO2 has no specific comments in respect of Question 2 parts a) and b)

Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed implementation period of 6 months from publication of the statement and changes to General Condition C3 and guidance?

VMO2 considers that the proposed period of 6 months is too short. There are several adjustments to our existing processes that are required to enhance the current messaging. The inclusion of Spend Cap information and in addition, the opt-out response (should Ofcom reject arguments for its necessity, as set out above), would require development work.

Different systems store the Spend Cap data and likewise the Bon Voyage messaging is sent via a different platform to other notifications, so it would not, contrary to Ofcom's assumptions as set out in the consultation document, be a straightforward amendment to the existing bon voyage messaging.

[REDACTED]. We would request that Ofcom consider an implementation period of 12 months.