

# Mobile operators agree to 2G deadline

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The three major mobile operators submitted official letters to the telecom regulator supporting the plan to shut down 2G mobile service on Oct 31, 2019 to pave the way for the 5G adoption.

All three companies said they have prepared related backup systems to transfer 2G users to the 3G and 4G systems, including creating public awareness and offering new promotion packages.

Takorn Tantasith, secretary-general of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC), said the plan will be submitted to NBTC board for approval at the next meeting.

The three operators are Advanced Info Service (AIS) through its subsidiary Advanced Wireless Network (AWN), Total Access Communication's (DTAC) TriNet and True Move H Universal Communication (TUC).

Mr Takorn said imports of 2G phone units have clearly been declining since 2014, when 117,486 2G phones were imported, declining to 11,300 units in 2015, 10,670 in 2016, and 10,930 units in 2017.

After the NBTC board approves the plan, operators must suspend all related equipment use for the 2G system to comply. The NBTC office will not allow import of 2G equipment in the near future.

The NBTC and operators plan to inform the public about the transition from January. The operators have to prepare for the transition, including giving handsets

to existing 2G users and offering promotion packages in which the voice service is cheaper than 2G.

"There has been some misunderstanding over 3G and 4G services for the public," he said. "Some 2G users believe 2G service is cheaper than 3G or 4G in terms of voice, but the opposite is true."

The NBTC has ruled the maximum voice charge for 2G service is 0.99 baht per minute. Operators offer the service for 0.97 baht per minute on average.

For 3G and 4G services, the NBTC ruled the maximum voice tariff is 0.69 baht per minute. Operators offer the service for 0.60 baht per minute on average.

Moreover, some 2G users are concerned 2G systems offer more privacy than service through 3G and 4G networks, especially voice service.

Mr Takorn said people's right to communication is protected by law no matter the network or system used.

"Nobody can tap into others' private communication unless they are allowed by a court order," he said.

The NBTC has reported there are 126 million mobile subscribers in the country, of which 120.8 million operate via 3G and 4G systems. The remaining 5.2 million use 2G networks.

Of the 5.2 million 2G users, 2.2 million subscribe to DTAC TriNet, 2 million to AIS, and 1 million to TUC.

Mr Takorn said existing 2G users will benefit when they are transferred to 3G and 4G networks because the tariffs are lower than for 2G.