

WiMax Coming to Chicago Next Month

Clearwire, Sprint and Comcast will start selling WiMax service in Chicago next month.

Stephen Lawson, IDG News Service

Thursday, October 22, 2009 06:00 PM PDT

WiMax will finally go on sale next month in Chicago, a city that was to have been one of the first places where the high-speed wireless service was offered in the U.S.

Chicago was on the cutting edge of Sprint Nextel's original push for WiMax in 2007, along with the Baltimore-Washington, D.C., area. A network in the city had undergone trials by mid-2008. But upheaval in the company and some technical issues, such as providing enough [backhaul](#) to wired networks, intervened. A new WiMax strategy brought Sprint together with wireless broadband provider Clearwire, several cable operators and other companies, a group that could provide the billions of dollars needed to build a national network. But Sprint announced only on Thursday that it would begin selling services on a WiMax network in Chicago next month, alongside its Clearwire joint venture and Comcast.

All three service providers also will launch services in Philadelphia over the next several weeks and in the Seattle/Tacoma area in early December. In addition, there will be Clearwire and Sprint services on sale in three North Carolina cities and three Texas cities in November, and in Hawaii in early December.

WiMax is a 4G (fourth-generation) wireless service designed to surpass 3G performance by delivering 3M bps (bits per second) or more to subscribers. It hit the market before the LTE (Long-Term Evolution) 4G technology and first went on sale in the U.S. in Baltimore about a year ago. But WiMax has been somewhat overshadowed as larger carriers such as AT&T and Verizon announced they would use LTE. Clearwire's planned WiMax deployment is expected to be the world's largest.

Clearwire this year has steadily introduced WiMax in a few cities at a time, in both new markets and areas where the company's predecessor has offered pre-standard wireless broadband. Service is commercially available in Portland, Oregon; Las Vegas; Atlanta and other markets today. Comcast and other cable-operator partners have announced rollouts of their own rebranded services along the way. Sprint offers a service plan and a USB modem that give access to WiMax in the markets where it's available and to Sprint's current 3G network in other areas.

Regular prices for Clearwire's service start at US\$20 per month for home service and \$50 for combined home and mobile access, and there are special limited-time and introductory offers. Sprint's 3G/4G service is available now in areas with WiMax at a special price of \$69.99 per month.

In November, Clearwire and Sprint plan to launch WiMax services in Charlotte, Greensboro and Raleigh, North Carolina, and in Austin, Dallas-Fort Worth and San Antonio, Texas. They will offer services in Honolulu and Maui, Hawaii, in early December.

New York, San Francisco, Houston and Washington, D.C. are among the cities lined up for WiMax availability next year. Clearwire has said it will reach [120 million](#) potential customers in 80 markets by the end of 2010.

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