The UK gets its first official 5G launch date

Vodafone has announced that its 5G network will go live on July 3rd, making it the first UK carrier to set a hard date for the launch of its next-gen mobile network. The service will be available in seven cities at first, and Vodafone plans to release four handsets and one home router on its network in the coming months. The operator says that prices for its 5G plans will be the same as their 4G equivalents, and will announce the new price plans next week.

Vodafone is the first of the UK's four major operators to announce a specific date, but its 5G network might not be the first to actually arrive. EE has said that it plans to launch its 5G network this summer, without a firm date. That could change soon, however, as the operator has said it will make a 5G announcement at the OnePlus 7 launch later today. Meanwhile, Three will launch its network in the second half of this year, while O2's network will be available before the end of the year.

5G roaming across Germany, Italy, and Spain will launch this summer

At launch, Vodafone's 5G network will be available in seven cities; Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester, Liverpool and London. By the end of the year, the operator plans to add 12 more cities – Birkenhead, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Guildford, Newbury, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Reading, Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Warrington and Wolverhampton – for a total of 19 cities. Outside of the UK, Vodafone will offer 5G roaming across Germany, Italy, and Spain.

Four 5G phones will be available for the new network soon. The first of these, the Xiaomi Mi Mix 3 5G, will go on sale starting next week, while the Huawei Mate 20 X (5G) and Samsung S10 5G will be available to preorder later this month. Vodafone also says that Huawei's 5G foldable handset, the Huawei Mate X, will be available this summer, and that a 5G home router called the 5G Gigacube will also be available. Pricing of these handsets and router is due to be announced next week, and they will initially be available to use on 4G networks before the July 3rd switch on date.

A July launch for Vodafone's network means the UK's first next-gen mobile network could arrive months after the US. Verizon's 5G network was switched on in the beginning of April in parts of Chicago and Minneapolis, but at the time we found that coverage was very limited when we tried it for ourselves. There was also only one 5G device available at the time. Verizon also chose to charge $10 extra for 5G over 4G, while Vodafone customers will get access to the new network at no extra charge. So while the UK has had to wait longer than the US for its first 5G network, at launch it will be available in more cities, with more devices, and at no extra cost over 4G.

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