LTE Just the Beginning of the Network Evolution

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There's no question that LTE is where it's at if you're an operator. According to a recent report from 4G Americas, more than 150 operators globally have now launched LTE services in 67 countries, 50 of which were launched in the past five months.

That's not just a trend it's a technological paradigm shift, and it’s just the beginning. To date, all four of the major operators here in the United States have moved on their LTE plans, and each are in different stages.

Verizon Wireless was the first U.S. carrier out of the gate with LTE and has led the way ever since. Verizon currently reports it has LTE turned on in 480 markets, covering 273.5 million people across the country, or nearly 89 percent of the U.S. population.

Next in line was AT&T, which opted to deploy HSPA+ as an interim step before moving to LTE. While still significantly behind Verizon Wireless, AT&T has managed to deploy LTE in 149 markets covering 170 million people. The carrier says it will have covered 300 million people with LTE by the end of 2014.

Sprint meanwhile sits at a distant third, its LTE network now live in a total of 67 markets and the company has already announced 100 other cities in which work on LTE is underway.

T-Mobile is last to market with LTE but isn't sitting on the sidelines by any means and has leaned heavily on the strength of its high-speed HSPA+ network, which currently covers 225 million people. On the LTE side, T-Mobile is aiming to cover 100 million people by the middle of 2013 and more than 200 million by the end of the year. The company reports finishing

LTE upgrades in Las Vegas, NV and Kansas City, MO.

As impressive as these new LTE networks are and the financial investments that are making them possible, today’s capacity and increased speeds do not signal an end game.

Chris Pearson, President of 4G Americas, says there’s something even more impressive than forecasts that more than 100 LTE networks will launch in 2013.

"What is even more staggering, based on analyst prediction, is the number of anticipated LTE-Advanced launches this year, by operators investing further in the evolution of their LTE networks,” Pearson said in a statement.

In case you haven’t heard, LTE Advanced and carrier aggregation are the next big

steps for the networks.

Carrier Aggregation will allow for spectrum to be combined into wider channels, as well as for more efficient use of disparate and underutilized spectrum.

4G Americas notes that while the majority of LTE connections today are in three spectrum bands worldwide-700 MHz, 1800 MHz and 2.6 GHz-LTE has been deployed in 20 separate bands to date. Other bands such as AWS 1700-2100 MHz are beginning to gain traction and will be widely deployed in the Americas region, making LTE Advanced and the features it supports all the more important as the carriers prepare to meet the coming data crunch head on.

To learn more about the evolution of LTE networks, please join Wireless Week tomorrow for an editorial webinar -LTE Advanced: Release 10 and the Importance of Carrier Aggregation-Wednesday, March 13, 2013, 2:00 p.m. ET.

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