

# 3G phaseout could speed up transition to 5G

## Article

**The news:** As most carriers have transitioned to **4G LTE** networks and more recently **5G** connectivity, 3G networks are shutting down in the US to make it easier to roll out newer standards.

3G networks, which were introduced in 2001, took cellphones beyond voice calls and text messages and into an era of wireless data, GPS, mobile apps, and mobile messaging, [per](#) Tech Xplore.

**Zero dark 3G:** The transition will affect some devices and services and could diminish connectivity in areas with less coverage. Carriers have reportedly reached out to subscribers of older devices to inform them of the change and offer transition options for supported devices.

- In the US, **AT&T** shuttered its 3G service in February, **T-Mobile** followed suit at the end of March, and **Verizon** is slated to unplug 3G at the end of the year.
- Prepaid brands like **Cricket, Boost, Straight Talk, US Mobile** will largely adhere to the schedule of whoever of the big three is providing their network bandwidth.
- Most carriers have a list of devices they expect to continue to operate, and most devices released in 2015 and onward should work fine.
- Once networks go offline, older devices will lose connectivity. This applies to **smartphones, tablets, laptops, GPS navigation, and IoT** and **smart home** devices.
- Some 4G smartphones will lose voice connectivity but will retain their data connectivity features.

**Some background:** In 2019, there were as many as **80 million 3G devices in use in North America**, according to RCR Wireless. Most of these devices, however, were IoT devices such as cameras and alarm systems.

Many companies worked to replace IoT systems to upgrade them to 4G, and **Roger Entner**, an analyst at **Recon Analytics** said that there are around **5 million 3G devices** left, per CNET.

**What's next?** Leaving 3G behind will likely lead customers to choose 5G as the most future-proof option, which could result in an uptick in 5G subscriptions and new smartphone sales. As for security and IoT services, upgrading from 3G is likely to be a more complex and expensive undertaking.

## 3G and Earlier Device Service Subscriptions, by Company US, 2022

Millions

AT&T Mobility

0.2

T-Mobile US

0.2

Verizon Wireless

3.5

Other

2.1

Total

6.0

Source: eMarketer, August 2021

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