

Reference: 02015361

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

10 July 2025

Dear,

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information concerning Copper Telecoms Cable Estimates.

We received this request on 17 June 2025 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

Your request & our response

I would like to request the following information relating to the legacy copper telecoms infrastructure in the UK;

1. Copper Cable Estimates

Does Ofcom hold any estimates, assessments, or datasets regarding the total amount of copper telecommunications cable currently in the ground across the UK? This may include data such as total length (e.g. in kilometres) or weight (e.g. in tonnes) of copper cable infrastructure deployed or still in situ.

We do not hold estimates, assessments or datasets regarding the amount of copper cable telecommunication companies currently have in the ground across the UK. During 2018 Market Review - [Annex 22](#) we did some analysis of BT's potential copper recovery income. At that time, we disclosed that BT had estimated c230k tonnes of copper in its network (see para A22.30). We did not update or publish any analysis in the 2021 Market Review ([2021 WFTMA para A14.153](#)) or in the current market review. We note that BT set out in the [2024 BT Annual Report](#) it recycled 4,300 tonnes of copper in 2023 (page 60) and recovered 3,300 tonnes in 2024 (page 39).

2. Cost of Removal or Recovery

Has Ofcom conducted, commissioned, or received any studies, modelling, or estimates on the potential cost of extracting or decommissioning this copper cable infrastructure? If so, please provide any relevant documents, assessments, or summary figures.

Other than information provided by BT as part of the market reviews, we have not conducted, commissioned, or received any studies, modelling, or estimates on the potential cost of extracting or decommissioning copper cable infrastructure. In the 2018 Market Review, the information we received from BT was used to inform our estimated cost of copper extraction of c £2,800 per tonne (para A22.38). As part of the current market review, we received updated information in relation to extraction costs for 2020/21 to 2023/24. Whilst cost of extraction has increased in recent years, we

are unable to provide further details as we do consider any relevant information exempt from disclosure under Section 44 of the FOI Act. Section 44(1) of the FOI Act provides that information is exempt from disclosure if its disclosure is prohibited by or under any enactment. The enactment that prohibits the disclosure of this information is section 393(1) of the Communications Act 2003 ("the Communications Act"). Under this section, we are prohibited from disclosing information with respect to a particular business (such as individual telecoms companies) that has been obtained in the exercise of our regulatory functions, unless that business consents or one of the statutory gateways under section 393(2) of the Communications Act is met, neither of which apply here. Section 44 of the FOI Act is an absolute exemption and therefore is not subject to the public interest test.

3. Communications with Network Operators

If Ofcom holds any correspondence or regulatory filings from network operators (such as Openreach) that contain estimates or statements regarding the scale or material value of the copper network and its potential removal, I would be grateful if those could be included.

Other than responses to our formal information requests that we have issued during our market reviews we have not received any additional information. Those responses would fall under the section 44 exemption as above.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).