

MOBILE NETWORKS

Vodacom's rollout of 5G is unlikely to raise capital spending

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The rollout of fifth-generation (5G) mobile networks will probably not raise Vodacom's capital expenditure requirements as the infrastructure will be deployed in selected areas, says the operator's chief technology officer, Andries Delport.

Mobile operators globally are preparing to launch 5G, which promises to deliver ultra-fast download speeds with minimal delays in transmitting data – a prerequisite for technologies such as driverless cars, automated manufacturing and robot-assisted remote surgery.

Vodacom, which spent R4bn on expanding and improving its

SA network in the six months to end-September, launched Africa's first 5G service in Lesotho in August. It said it would only be able to do the same in SA when regulators made the appropriate bands of spectrum available.

Delport said on Tuesday it was unlikely there would be large-scale rollouts of 5G in SA

in the near term, and these networks would most likely be deployed in areas where there are specific use cases.

Among other potential use cases, Vodacom is considering using 5G to provide fixed-wireless connectivity services, given that access to fibre remains low in SA.

William Mzimba, head of

Vodacom's business unit, said 5G will facilitate the rollout of internet of things (IoT) applications. IoT refers to the network of devices and sensors connected to the internet.

Vodacom is running an IoT pilot project with the department of public works to better manage lifts in the state's buildings, among other applications.

It also launched a pilot project with a farming consortium to track cattle and prevent livestock theft.

Rain – the new data-only network operator – said this week it plans to launch 5G services in SA in the first quarter of 2019. Vodacom has a network roaming agreement with Rain.

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