

LinkNYC 5G kiosks offer better Wi-Fi in underserved communities

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NEW YORK -- New York City is working to bridge the digital divide by making Wi-Fi more accessible in underserved communities.

CBS2's Jenna DeAngelis shows us how from the Morris Heights section of the Bronx.

The new towers are hard to miss.

"I didn't really know what it was, so I was just very confused," said Antonio Ortiz, a Washington Heights resident.

"It looks tall, but it's not bad," said Eddy Vargas.

Others said they didn't take notice.

"I just walked right past it. I had not see it at all," said Neveah Reyes, from Morris Heights.

A new LinkNYC 5G kiosk was unveiled on West Burnside Avenue in the Bronx.

It's similar to the smaller LinkNYC kiosks where you can make free phone calls, charge a device and connect to Wi-Fi around the city, but the bigger kiosks offer better 5G connectivity.

"It's all about faster internet," said NYC Chief Technology Officer Matthew Fraser. "Up to 750 feet away you could get access to the old versions of the free Wi-Fi kiosks. The new versions of it, up to a thousand feet and a little bit beyond depending on what's in the area."

According to Fraser, 90 percent of the 2,000 new kiosks will be placed in the outer boroughs and above 96th Street in Manhattan.

"What we want to make sure, as we bring this technology out, the people that have the greatest need are those that have first access to it," said Fraser.

"I'm 79 and I don't like to go out with my phone. So if I have to make a phone call I can do it," said Eugene Lareau, from Washington Heights.

"Kids, they have to use it for school, the computers. I think it's great," said Sonia Lacen, from Washington Heights.

So far, there are 20 kiosks in the ground. Two are active in the Bronx.

"I live right there, the building upstairs on the 5th floor and I didn't think they could reach that, but it did," said Anthony Cruz, from Morris Heights.

Cruz said his kids have been using the Wi-Fi and it's much faster than the internet they have at home.

"I think it's good because some people don't have money to pay for internet," Cruz said. "I just hope they keep it."

The city says dozens of 5G kiosks will be deployed by the end of 2022. It plans to have all 2,000 5G kiosks in the ground by 2026, bringing the LinkNYC network to 4,000 locations citywide.