

MANTA set to ride wave of digital change in the Americas

The MANTA cable, due to launch by early 2028, will bring a unique low-latency route to the region

Like other regions around the world, Latin America and the Caribbean has been undergoing a significant digital transformation in recent years. Over the past decade, internet penetration has soared in the region from around 50% to more than 80% of the population now, while artificial intelligence (AI) was already estimated to have reached over 1% of GDP alone across much of it by 2023.

Despite the surge, the time is still ripe for further growth in territories across the region as it catches up on broadband penetration with the likes of North America and Europe, while leapfrogging some of the legacy technologies straight to technologies such as high-speed fibre. This is happening as the demands of hyperscalers and OTT players are ramping up to capture the accelerating data use in Latin America and the Caribbean.

A factor that will have a major impact on growth is the presence of a robust network of subsea cables able to provide resilience, redundancy and low latency for the rapidly growing real-time processing requirements of AI, the cloud and the internet of things (IoT). That will also help raise digital funding in the region, which is estimated to receive only just over 1% of global AI investment at present, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean.

SWIMMING INTO VIEW

As a result, the region still has huge potential, and has thus seen an influx of new cables being planned and rolled out over the past few years.

“The market for new submarine cables is experiencing incredible



growth both in Latin America and worldwide, driven by the increasing demand for high-speed internet, cloud computing, AI and 5G deployment,” says Mauricio Traverso, vice president for the Americas at Sparkle. “This will deliver more resilience and route diversity, as well as faster and more reliable connections.”

One of the major moves will be the launch of the MANTA subsea cable in the imminent future. Sparkle announced in October 2024 that it was joining Liberty Networks and Gold Data in deploying the network, after its partners had announced the previous year that they were combining their GD-1 and LN-1 subsea systems in the region.

MANTA, which is estimated to be around 5,400km long and will support a minimum of 20Tbps per fibre pair when

it comes into expected operation by early 2028, will have new landing points in Veracruz in south-eastern Mexico and San Blas in north-western Florida.

It will also connect up to Cancún across the water east of Veracruz in Mexico, as well as North Miami in south-eastern Florida, María Chiquita in northern Panama and Cartagena in northern Colombia. In addition, the cable will include a branching unit for future expansion to other islands or regions.

Landing at these points, the network will enable onward access to major and growing data hubs in Mexico City and Querétaro in Mexico, Colombian capital Bogotá and Panama City. That will enable players to take advantage of significant cloud and edge-computing opportunities at lower latencies.

THRIVING HUBS

Such sites represent key digital locations that are set to thrive over the coming years. The region of Querétaro in central Mexico, for example, is today recognised as the country's data centre capital and is showing no signs of slowing as a point of attraction as internet giants like Amazon, Microsoft and Google pump capital into the sector. Forecasts suggest that the region will attract more than US\$10 billion in data centre investment over the coming decade.

In addition, Sparkle opened a new point of presence in Querétaro early last year, showing its optimism in the region as a fast-evolving ecosystem, and enabling network operators, ISPs, OTTs, content delivery networks, and content and application providers to connect up to low-latency IP transit services with throughput of up to 8Tbps.

Colombia and Panama are growing as markets as well, providing a gateway into the wider region, including the huge countries to the south – and with a variety of cables landing in both nations.

“The cable will represent a major improvement not only for the Caribbean and Central America, but for the whole Americas region,” says Carmine Sorrentino, vice president and chief commercial and operating officer for the Wholesale Networks business at Liberty Networks. “It will provide extra resilience and route diversity compared with other cables.”

The companies deploying the cable believe that focusing on the particular connectivity pathways where it runs gives MANTA a unique proposition in relation to other planned networks in the region, claiming that it will be the first international subsea cable in the Gulf of Mexico connecting Mexico and the US with Central and South America.

“The significance is enormous given that the new cloud regions located in places like Querétaro and Mexico City will have direct submarine access to the US east coast,” says Traverso. “Traditional routes between Mexico and the US today arrive via terrestrial links. Considering the distance covered, it requires several of them to guarantee the high performance required by OTT players,

while a submarine network can provide such resiliency along a single path.”

ONWARD CONNECTIONS

The cable also provides a connection between the two big markets of Mexico and Colombia, with a joint population numbering nearly 200 million – while linking up Querétaro with the rest of Latin America.

On top of that, the presence of two landing points in each of Mexico and the US improves diversity and resilience between the countries, while providing a closer pathway up into the growing data centre market of Atlanta in Georgia, and into North and South Carolina.

“MANTA creates a redundant subsea path in Florida, which also makes it good for domestic connectivity in the US because it's really reliable,” says Renato Tradardi, CEO at Gold Data.

“MANTA will deliver more resilience and route diversity, as well as faster connections”

“This new path, with its new diversity, should represent a big boost for Atlanta and its data centres too.”

As Sorrentino points out, the cable is also beneficial for Florida because, thanks to the two landing points, it creates an important national route. In addition, he highlights that there was no interruption in communications from the submarine infrastructure when Jamaica was hit by the Category 5 Hurricane Melissa late last October.

“Submarine cables have proven to be the most reliable assets for providing resilience in these cases,” says Carmine.

IDEAL UNION

Meanwhile, the partners on MANTA believe they have ideal complementary qualities to maximise the benefits of the

cable in working together, being able to combine their strengths in different parts of the region to the best effect.

“We've found a great mix of partners for the cable,” says Tradardi. “Sparkle is really strong in the Southern Cone to the south of the region, Liberty Networks is more concentrated in the Caribbean, and Gold Data has been rolling out infrastructure in Mexico. Between the three companies, we're bringing a lot of experience in submarine cables from all over the world.”

Sparkle, for example, has a fibre network spanning more than 600,000km worldwide, with proprietary terrestrial and subsea backbones from Europe to Africa and the Middle East, the Americas and Asia. “It creates huge value and possibilities for everyone that MANTA will be integrated with the networks of major players with multinational links coming from Asia, Europe and other parts of the world,” says Traverso.

TRACKING DEMAND

As well as creating value from the start, Sparkle, Liberty Networks and Gold Data are looking to the long-term future to anticipate the upcoming capacity that will be needed over the coming years, fulfilling growing demands that will be seen with the fresh wave of AI data centres.

“We're tracking demand, especially from players like big OTT and AI companies that are looking for alternative routes to guarantee the quality of their services,” says Tradardi. “We expect the cable to provide an innovative solution and route for such players.”

The companies are also ensuring that they focus on quality while providing the low latencies essential in today's market, believing they are bringing something both different and complementary to other networks in the region.

“Customers can rest assured that the end-to-end solution complies with the highest level of resilience they require,” says Traverso. “From our perspective, MANTA is a cable with a unique path that's different from that of other cables in the region.”