



Direct Routing

**Your complete guide to the three
different options for adding PSTN
calling to Microsoft Teams**



What Are The Options?

Microsoft is aiming to streamline the process of adding external PSTN calling to Teams by providing options that suit a range of requirements.

Together with Direct Routing and Microsoft's own Calling Plans, Operator Connect presents users with a third option for migrating their telephony to Teams. One way to think about it is that these options represent three alternatives on a sliding scale, with Operator Connect positioned in the middle as an option that balances the convenience of ordering services through Microsoft, with the flexibility of Direct Routing.

With over 145 million daily users and rising, it is no surprise to see Microsoft continually announcing new ways to add calling to their unified communications platform, Teams. With the launch of Operator Connect, there are now three options for adding voice services to Teams.



Microsoft Calling Plans

Calling Plans provide bundles of domestic and international minutes directly from Microsoft with a Microsoft 365 Business Voice or Microsoft 365 E Calling Plan.



Operator Connect

Operator Connect allows you to add PSTN calling from directly within the 365 admin center by connecting carrier services from approved third-party providers.



Direct Routing

By far the most popular option, Direct Routing allows you to connect external carrier services from your chosen provider to Teams via a Session Border Controller (SBC) located either onpremises or in the cloud.



Calling Plans Vs. Operator Connect Vs. Direct Routing

Microsoft Calling Plans

These plans are ideal for organizations without complex requirements that are looking for a voice service they can activate quickly and easily on a per-user basis. It is especially convenient for businesses that might value the regular monthly price for budgeting reasons, and might like that they can manage their whole communications stack through the 365 admin center.

Direct Routing

Direct Routing sits at the other end of the scale, supporting organizations that need more flexibility and have more complex requirements. These could be anything from sophisticated configuration demands to the integration of other applications such as contact centers. There are also cost benefits available, particularly through providers offering more transparent “pay for what you use” pricing models. Any organization that is interested in consolidating their voice systems to a single network, achieving greater feature parity with their previous phone system, or adding regional offices in areas Microsoft doesn’t cover, has needed the flexibility of Direct Routing — which is why it is currently the most popular option.

Operator Connect

This fills the gap between the two, allowing organizations to add and manage standard voice services through the Microsoft 365 Admin Center, choose their own carrier, and access some of the cost savings of Direct Routing. It is important to note, however, that anything beyond standard voice requirements will need to be arranged directly with the provider, and could involve Direct Routing.



Comparison Table

	Microsoft Calling Plans	Operator Connect	Direct Routing (Pure Ip Services Provided As An Example)
Voice Connectivity	Provided by Microsoft	Provided by one of the carriers available on Operator Connect through trusted cross connects between their network and Microsoft	External carrier services are connected to Teams via a cloud-based or onpremises session border controller (SBC)
Voice Service Management	Managed in the 365 admin center	Managed through the 365 admin center and the carrier's portal	Number and service management through the carrier's online customer portal.
Integrations	Only supports applications designed for Teams using 365 API integrations	Only supports applications designed for Teams using 365 API integrations	Voice application integrations are fully supported
Pricing	Bundled calling plans, minutes, and licensing on a per-user, per- month basis	Pay carrier for the minutes used + monthly rental charge	Pay carrier for the minutes used + monthly rental charge
Supporting Hybrid Environments	Not supported	Not supported	Supported; different platforms, contact centers, legacy systems, and analog devices can all be connected using the same voice network
Voice Routing	Standard options only	Standard options only	Completely configurable
Global Coverage	Limited to the 26 countries where Microsoft offers service as of late May	Limited to the countries the Operator Connect carriers can provide PSTN replacement services in	Get the coverage you need around the world via hosted, fully managed SBCs



Benefits Of Direct Routing

Direct Routing is usually cheaper & more flexible than Calling Plans, and caters to more complex telephony requirements. It can also be delivered as a fully managed service, which can make it easier to consolidate services, port numbers & reduce your hardware footprint.

Agility & Flexibility

Direct Routing offers your organization much greater flexibility in how you choose to build your communications stack. It is completely configurable, and makes it much easier to achieve closer feature parity with a traditional telephone system.

Cost Reductions

Although bundled calling plans can be convenient for budgeting, they can prove expensive – particularly for enterprise users. Not only do external carriers typically charge lower rates, some also offer usage-based pricing plans that are up to 60% more cost-effective than fixed-price bundles.

Integrations

Direct Routing allows organizations to partner with carriers who can integrate Teams with their other voice applications, such as contact centers, third party platforms, legacy systems and analogue devices.

Smart Insights & Billing

Direct Routing can give you access to in-depth usage reports and advanced monitoring tools, which can help you identify, and overcome, traffic bottlenecks and call quality issues.

Invoicing can also be done on a regional basis, and includes full breakdowns of the voice services and which teams have been using them.

Coverage & Consolidation

Direct Routing is available globally, so you can select the carrier and plan that works best for you. It can also be offered alongside a fully managed SBC service, which can be used to connect hardto-reach regions, and integrate all your voice applications.

Did You Know?

External carriers, can also offer your business everything from migration support, PBX auditing, & proactive monitoring services that support you with issues such as security and network stability.