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From Theory to Reality: 6G Technologies Powering Next-Gen Smart Cities

Lee Chen
Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Hanyang University, ERICA, Ansan 15588, Republic of Korea
leechen@hanyang.ac.kr

Abstract:

While 5G networks deliver impressive speeds of 20 Gbps, 6G technologies are set to achieve an astounding data rate of up to 1 TBPS, revolutionizing our urban landscapes. This thousand-fold increase in speed will enable unprecedented applications such as holographic communication, remote surgery, and immersive augmented reality experiences. The impact of these 6G applications extends far beyond speed alone. As we move toward a future where 99.4% of objects will connect to the Internet of Everything, 6G enabling technologies will form the backbone of next-generation smart cities. The integration of artificial intelligence with 6G networks will enhance resource management and optimize network performance, particularly in critical areas like autonomous vehicles and smart healthcare systems. However, this technological leap brings significant challenges, including managing increased energy demands and ensuring robust cybersecurity across the vast network of connected devices. In this article, we will explore how 6G key technologies are shaping the future of urban environments, examining their applications, implementation challenges, and the roadmap toward their widespread adoption.

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1. Core 6G Enabling Technologies Transforming Urban Infrastructure

The technological foundations of 6G networks rely on groundbreaking innovations that push beyond current capabilities. These enabling technologies not only enhance communication speed and reliability but also fundamentally transform how urban infrastructure functions, creating unprecedented opportunities for intelligent city management [1]-[3].

1.1 Terahertz Communication: Breaking the Sub-mmWave Barrier

6G networks are set to operate across a wide spectrum of frequency bands, ultimately incorporating the terahertz (THz) range—frequencies between 100 GHz and 10 THz—which substantially exceeds the 71 GHz limit of 5G. This dramatic shift enables data rates reaching terabits per second (Tbps), microsecond-level latency, and ultra-high network reliability. The immense bandwidth available at terahertz frequencies effectively addresses the spectrum scarcity problem plaguing current wireless networks, opening pathways to wireless Tbps links.

Terahertz communication brings exceptional advantages to smart city applications through its extreme data rates and minimal latency. Traffic management systems, for instance, can process massive amounts of real-time data from urban sensors, enabling immediate responses to changing conditions. Additionally, the technology supports professional high-resolution holographic communication in specialized environments like factories and hospitals, enhancing collaboration capabilities without physical presence [4]-[7].

Nevertheless, implementing terahertz communication faces substantial challenges. Terahertz signals are easily absorbed by atmospheric conditions, resulting in rapid signal decay, and face significant interference from physical barriers like buildings and trees. Furthermore, higher frequencies inherently limit transmission distance, requiring innovative approaches to maintain signal integrity.

One promising solution involves enhancing the link budget by increasing both antenna gain and power amplifier gain to improve signal strength and range. Another approach involves pre-distortion techniques that deliberately "uglify" signals before transmission through the source, resulting in cleaner transmission and eliminating the need for traditional mixers—which become impractical at terahertz frequencies due to higher power demands [8]-[11].

1.2 Quantum Computing Integration for Ultra-Secure Networks

As quantum computing advances, it brings both opportunities and challenges for 6G network security. At some point in quantum computer development, many cryptographic algorithms currently protecting telecommunications networks will likely be broken, compromising existing security systems. Consequently, the implementation of standardized quantum-resistant cryptography and protocols becomes essential to protect 6G networks.

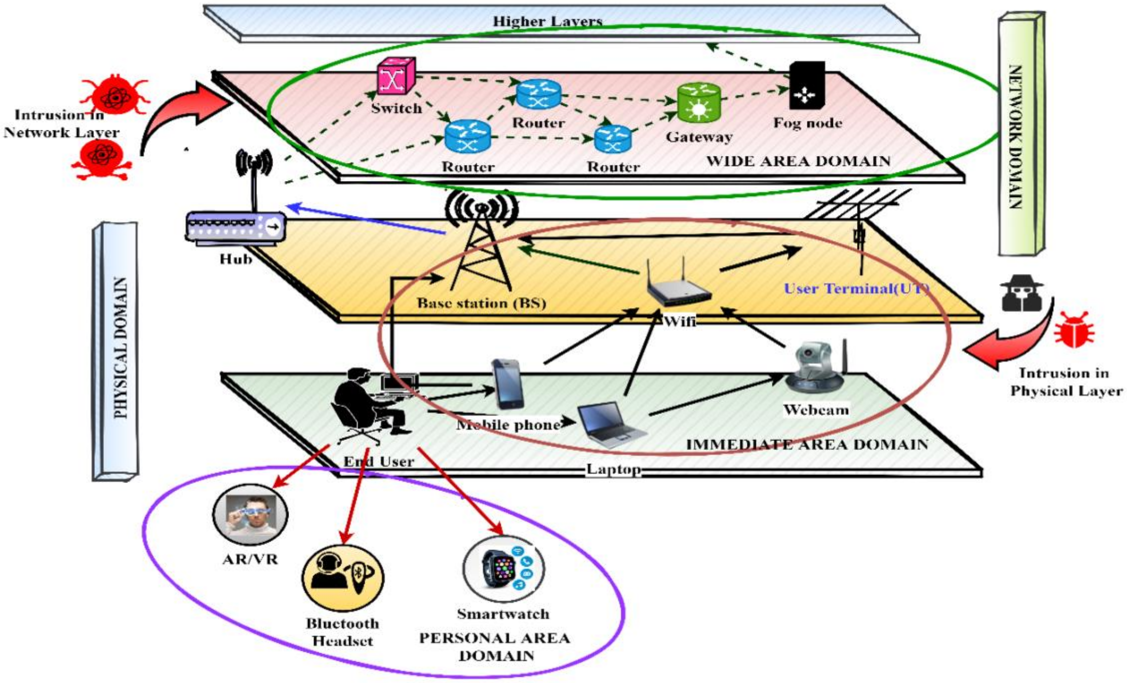

Figure 1. Terahertz Communication: Breaking the Sub-mmWave Barrier

Quantum technologies offer remarkable capabilities beyond security alone. Quantum computing can potentially store higher volumes of data while preventing data-sieving errors. Moreover, quantum computing's ability to simulate complex systems proves valuable in designing and testing advanced communication protocols and network architectures for 6G, streamlining development processes and reducing the need for extensive physical testing.

Quantum communication likewise enhances 6G networks through several mechanisms. First, it increases channel capacity and enables the transmission of unknown quantum states. Second, quantum sensing outperforms classical sensing by detecting minute environmental changes with fewer physical qubits—particularly valuable for smart city monitoring systems. Finally, quantum key distribution creates virtually unbreakable encryption based on the uncertainty principle and quantum no-cloning principle, providing unprecedented protection against cyberattacks.

For optimal implementation, intergovernmental and international policy coordination work must ensure global harmonization and interoperability of quantum-resistant protocols. Furthermore, energy efficiency considerations remain crucial, as quantum technologies must balance their computational benefits against power consumption to align with 6G's sustainability goals.

1.3 Intelligent Reflecting Surfaces: Reshaping Signal Propagation

Intelligent Reflecting Surfaces (IRS) represent a transformative approach to wireless communication challenges. Unlike traditional solutions that attempt to overcome environmental obstacles, IRS technology turns the environment itself into an adaptable entity capable of enhancing signal propagation. This capability becomes especially critical for 6G networks operating at high frequencies, where signal blockage and propagation losses pose significant challenges [12]-[14].

Table 1. Key Enabling Technologies of 6G for Smart City Applications

6G Enabling Technology	Technical Description	Role in Smart Cities	Representative Use Cases
Terahertz (THz) Communication	Ultra-high-frequency spectrum (0.1–10 THz) enabling Tbps data rates	Supports ultra-high-speed data transfer	Holographic communication, ultra-HD streaming
Artificial Intelligence-Native Networks	AI embedded at physical, network, and application layers	Intelligent resource allocation and self-optimization	Traffic control, smart energy grids
Massive Internet of Everything (IoE)	Connectivity for humans, machines, sensors, and digital twins	Enables ubiquitous sensing and automation	Smart infrastructure monitoring
Edge Intelligence	Distributed AI processing at network edges	Low latency and real-time decision-making	Autonomous vehicles, remote surgery
Reconfigurable Intelligent Surfaces (RIS)	Programmable surfaces to control radio propagation	Enhances coverage and energy efficiency	Indoor smart buildings, urban canyons

An IRS consists of a large surface embedded with numerous small, programmable reflecting elements called meta-atoms. These elements adjust the phase, amplitude, and direction of signals, creating optimized communication pathways between transmitters and receivers. When strategically deployed, an IRS redirects signals around obstacles, effectively eliminating coverage gaps and enhancing signal penetration through buildings in a cost-effective manner.

The value of IRS technology becomes particularly evident in urban settings. For instance, IRS panels mounted on walls can dynamically reflect Wi-Fi signals to optimize coverage for all devices, addressing signal-dead zones like basements. In outdoor urban environments, IRS deployed on streetlights can reflect 5G signals to ensure uninterrupted connectivity for autonomous vehicles and IoT sensors. Furthermore, IRS enhances coverage especially in environments with high obstacle density—a common characteristic of urban settings.

From a deployment perspective, IRS offers notable advantages over alternatives like Network-Controlled Repeaters (NCRs). The cost model for an IRS includes both a fixed deployment cost and a variable cost that scales linearly with the number of meta-atoms. Additionally, IRS operates passively, reflecting and reshaping wireless signals without requiring additional power for amplification or transmission. This passive nature makes IRS particularly attractive for energy-efficient 6G networks, especially when compared to active alternatives that consume continuous power.

Ongoing research continues to optimize IRS deployment strategies for both terrestrial and non-terrestrial networks. Researchers are exploring various techniques, from optimization-based approaches to model-free reinforcement learning methods, to address the challenges of achieving higher capacity in complex and mobile wireless environments. As these technologies mature, they will enhance network reliability and mitigate blockage in urban settings without excessive infrastructure investment.

These three pivotal technologies—terahertz communication, quantum computing integration, and intelligent reflecting surfaces—form the foundation upon which 6G networks will transform urban infrastructure, enabling a new generation of smart city applications with unprecedented capabilities.

2. 6G Network Architecture for Smart City Deployment

Successful implementation of 6G technologies requires a fundamental re-engineering of network architecture to support the demands of increasingly complex smart city ecosystems. Network architecture serves as the structural blueprint that determines how various 6G enabling technologies are organized, connected, and managed within urban environments.

2.1 Multi-Tier Heterogeneous Network Design

The multi-tier heterogeneous network design fundamentally departs from traditional cellular architectures by simultaneously integrating terrestrial and non-terrestrial components. This integration creates a comprehensive coverage solution that addresses the unique challenges of dense urban environments. Airborne base stations represent a crucial component of this design, providing line-of-sight (LoS) high-quality air-to-ground 6G coverage in areas where terrestrial infrastructure proves insufficient. These aerial platforms deliver additional high-capacity connectivity at dense urban hotspots that would otherwise remain underserved by conventional terrestrial base stations.

For remote or rural areas lacking adequate telecommunications infrastructure, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Base Stations (UAV-BS) offer a cost-effective solution to extend network coverage. This capability proves particularly valuable for smart city applications that extend beyond densely populated urban centers, ensuring consistent connectivity across the entire metropolitan region. Nonetheless, achieving smooth interoperability between terrestrial and non-terrestrial networks presents significant challenges, potentially requiring new or improved protocols to facilitate seamless handovers and consistent quality of service.

The strategic deployment of Intelligent Reflecting Surfaces (RIS) within this multi-tier framework further enhances network performance. Yet, optimal positioning and placement of RIS elements significantly impact overall system performance, requiring careful analysis to prevent unintended interference between multiple RIS deployments. Initially, determining the maximum number of RIS units that can be effectively deployed in a given area without causing mutual interference becomes essential for maintaining signal integrity throughout the heterogeneous network [15]-[17].

2.2 Edge-Cloud Continuum Processing Framework

The edge-cloud computing continuum represents a central concept for enabling highly reliable, delay-sensitive, and resource-efficient services in 6G communication networks. This framework transcends traditional cloud computing by distributing processing capabilities across a spectrum—from centralized cloud data centers to edge servers and local devices near users and data sources. Throughout the 6G ecosystem, edge computing moves computation and data storage closer to the network edge, dramatically reducing latency and enabling real-time processing for critical applications including traffic management, video surveillance, and emergency response systems.

Given that sensor-driven IoT systems in smart cities accelerate massive amounts of data in relatively short timeframes, the edge-cloud continuum provides essential computational resources to process this information effectively. Mobile Edge Computing (MEC) in intelligent transport systems, for instance, ensures that transportation networks remain safe, sustainable, and efficient by positioning computational devices with necessary processing power closer to end-users—often at roadside units or edge-based stations. This strategic positioning affords a significant decrease in end-to-end latency compared to centralized cloud processing alone.

The edge-cloud continuum framework additionally enhances security by enabling data to be processed and stored locally rather than being transmitted to distant data centers, thereby reducing risk of breaches and other security threats. In reality, this framework improves system reliability by allowing smart city applications to function even during network failures or disruptions—a critical capability for public safety and emergency response operations. Altogether, the continuum approach offers greater scalability through distributed computing and storage resources across multiple edge devices, enabling more efficient resource utilization and improving overall performance of IoT systems and smart city services.

Network Slicing for Critical Urban Services

Inside the realm of 6G, network slicing emerges as a transformative concept that fundamentally alters how networks are deployed and utilized in smart urban environments. This technology facilitates the development of personalized, virtualized networks designed to meet the unique requirements of various applications across smart cities. The effective allocation of resources and appropriate configurations for dividing tasks become crucial for satisfying the ever-changing communication requirements of diverse Internet of Things (IoT) applications.

Network slicing enables network operators to create several virtual networks—the so-called slices—over the same physical infrastructure and manage them dynamically according to operator and user-defined requirements. This capability proves particularly valuable for critical urban services with stringent performance demands. For example, emergency response communications can operate on dedicated network slices with guaranteed resources, irrespective of overall network congestion levels. Studies have shown network slicing increases efficiency and reliability, primarily for critical data transmission, since it reduces packet loss and jitter in communication channels.

Artificial intelligence plays an increasingly important role in optimizing network slices. Deep learning integration into resource orchestration enables analysis of trade-offs between capacity over-dimensioning and unserviced demands in adaptive, sliced networks. Furthermore, machine learning combined with edge-enabled network slicing can realize scalable, flexible networks satisfying quality of service requirements of emerging applications. One notable implementation uses intelligent systems to allocate and load-balance resources across existing network slices while optimizing slice selection even during network failures.

The implementation of network slicing technologies in 6G presents several key challenges that researchers are actively addressing. These include identifying efficient configurations for network slices to meet diverse communication requirements, addressing resource allocation challenges across slices, implementing robust security measures to protect sensitive data, and developing scalable implementation strategies that accommodate the anticipated expansion of smart city applications. Solutions being explored range from comprehensive setup examination techniques to dynamic resource allocation strategies and enhanced data security protocols [18]-[20].

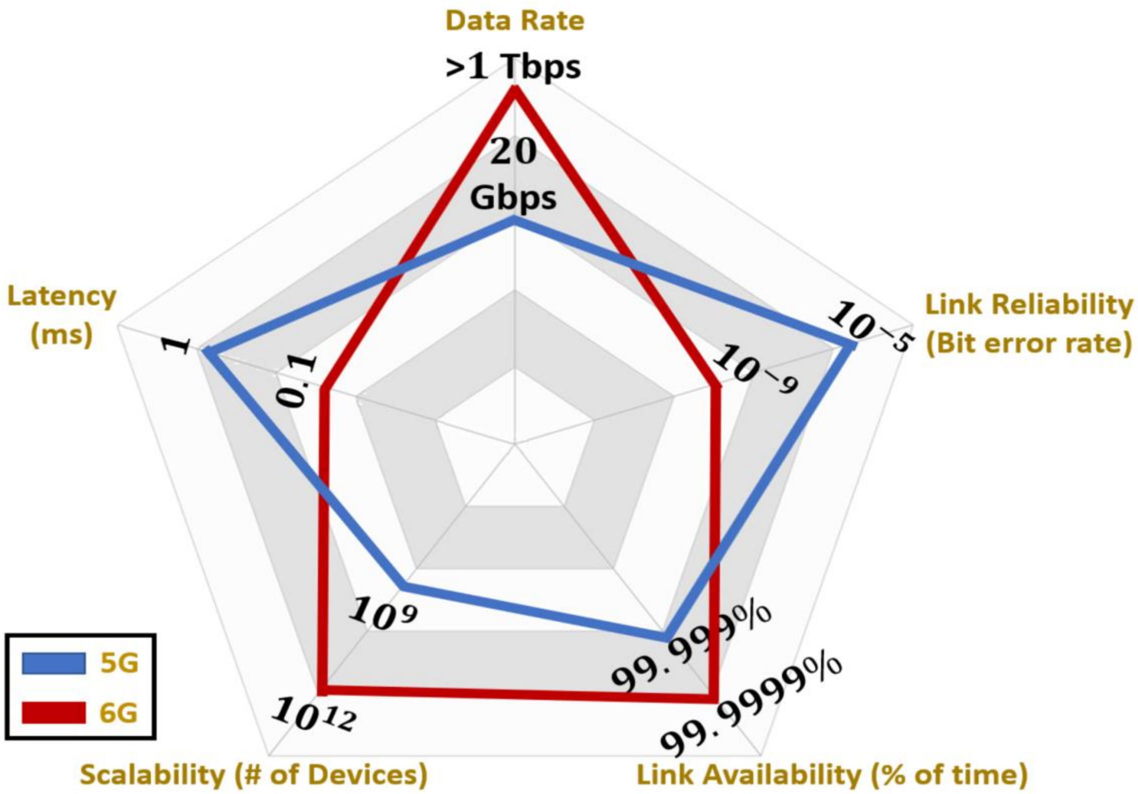

Figure 2. Intelligent Reflecting Surfaces: Reshaping Signal Propagation

3. Artificial Intelligence as the Backbone of 6G Applications

Artificial intelligence stands as the central nervous system of 6G networks, providing the intelligence needed to manage increasingly complex urban systems. Unlike previous generations that treated AI as an add-on component, 6G technology integrates AI models directly into the core network architecture, creating truly intelligent and self-optimizing networks. This fundamental shift enables 6G technologies to handle the unprecedented scale and complexity of next-generation smart cities through sophisticated decision-making capabilities.

3.1 AI-Driven Network Optimization and Self-Healing

The 6G era introduces networks that continuously monitor, adapt, and repair themselves without human intervention. These AI-native networks embed intelligence at every layer of infrastructure, enabling real-time decision-making and automation that fundamentally changes how urban communications operate. Through sophisticated machine learning algorithms, 6G networks dynamically allocate resources, mitigate interference, and enhance security measures to ensure efficient and secure communication.

One of the most substantial advantages of AI-driven optimization is the ability to predict and prevent network failures before they impact services. Instead of reactive maintenance approaches, 6G networks employ advanced AI systems to analyze patterns in network usage and identify potential issues before they affect service quality. This predictive capability significantly reduces network downtime—by up to 50% according to recent industry analyzes—while concurrently improving bandwidth utilization by approximately 40%.

Self-healing capabilities represent yet another critical advancement in 6G networks. Through continuous learning from network data, AI systems detect, diagnose, and recover from failures without human intervention. When network anomalies occur, AI algorithms automatically reconfigure network parameters to prevent downtime, ensuring continuous connectivity for critical smart city infrastructure. Obviously, this capability proves especially valuable in mission-critical applications like autonomous transportation systems and emergency services where network reliability directly impacts public safety.

The sophistication of these systems extends to dynamic traffic optimization as well. With terahertz communication, non-terrestrial networks, and billions of IoT devices generating massive data volumes, AI algorithms automatically optimize traffic routing and bandwidth allocation. This optimization ensures that high-priority communications receive necessary resources even during peak usage periods, maintaining quality of service across the urban environment.

3.2 Deep Learning for Predictive Urban Resource Management

Deep learning models in 6G networks enable unprecedented capabilities for urban resource management through real-time analysis and predictive modeling. These systems process vast amounts of data collected from sensors and Internet of Things devices to reveal patterns that humans might miss, leading to more efficient city operations. Subsequently, this data intelligence allows city administrators to make informed decisions about resource allocation, infrastructure development, and emergency response.

In smart city implementations, deep learning algorithms analyze data from millions of sensors throughout the urban environment, creating what effectively functions as a digital nervous system. This system enables real-time analysis of city dynamics, from traffic patterns to resource utilization, allowing for immediate adjustment of services based on current conditions. Correspondingly, urban planners can access detailed simulations and predictive models that account for countless variables simultaneously, enabling more informed decision-making for future development.

The practical applications of deep learning in urban environments span numerous domains. Smart grid innovations optimize energy distribution with remarkable efficiency, while intelligent transportation systems enhance commuter safety through predictive analytics. Researchers note that traffic prediction, environmental monitoring, and disaster management applications particularly benefit from these capabilities, as they require real-time decisions and pattern recognition across complex datasets.

A prime example of deep learning's impact appears in waste management systems, where AI-controlled sensors optimize collection routes and schedules based on fill levels and historical patterns. Analogous to this, AI-enhanced predictive maintenance for factory automation reduces downtime and resource waste by identifying potential equipment failures before they occur. These applications collectively create more sustainable and efficient urban environments while improving quality of life for residents.

3.3 Federated Learning for Privacy-Preserving City Analytics

Privacy concerns present significant challenges for smart city implementations that collect sensitive data about citizens and infrastructure. Federated Learning (FL) addresses these concerns through a revolutionary approach that keeps data localized while still enabling powerful machine learning capabilities across the network. This technique trains shared statistical models using decentralized devices or servers, creating a global model without exchanging raw data between locations.

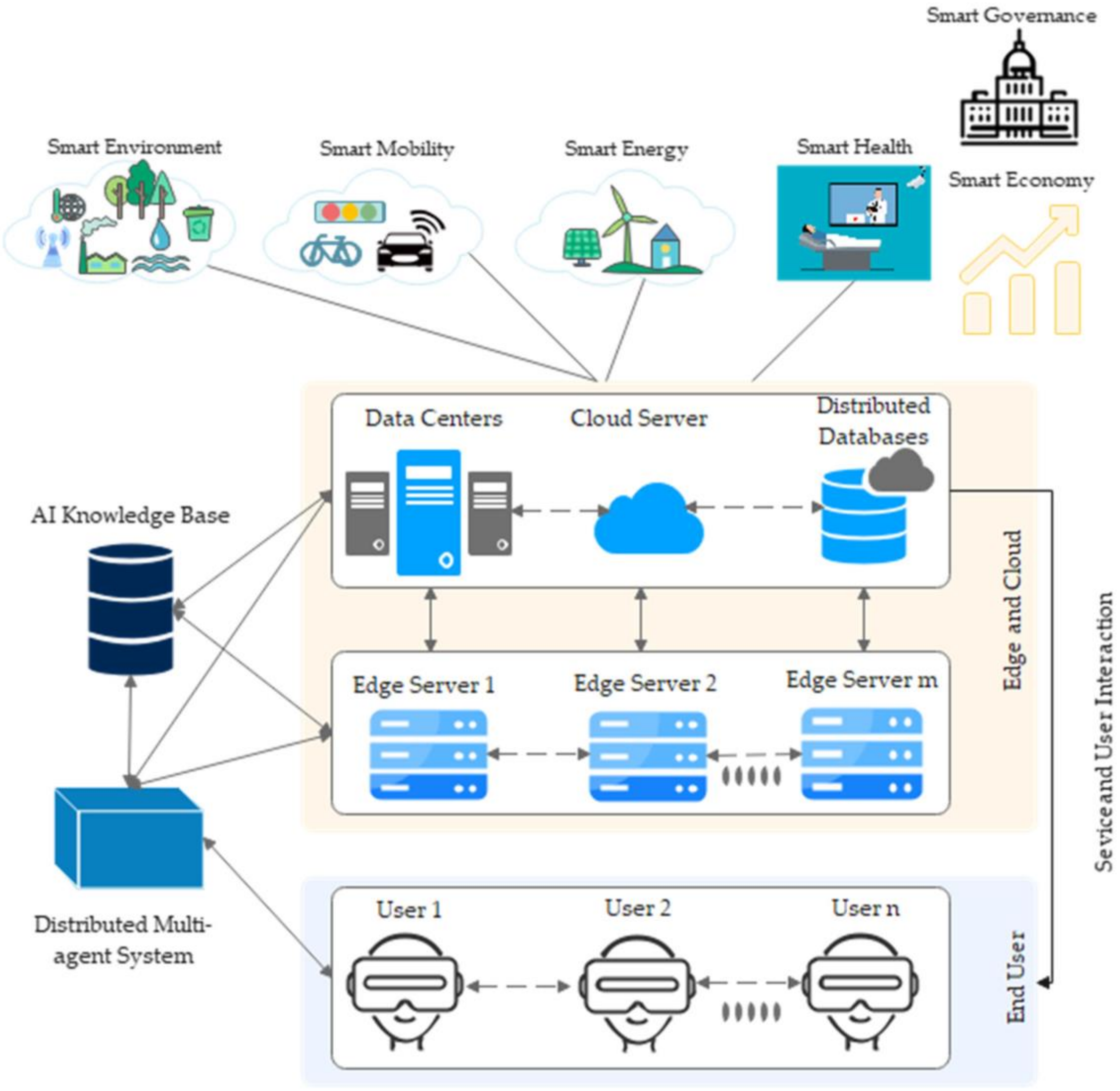

Figure 3. Federated Learning for Privacy-Preserving City Analytics

The decentralized nature of FL aligns perfectly with 6G's distributed architecture. Rather than transmitting raw data to central servers for processing, FL distributes the machine learning algorithms themselves to edge devices. Thereafter, only the model parameters are shared after local training and processing with user data, significantly enhancing data security and privacy. In essence, FL exploits both the decentralization of data and computing power without compromising sensitive information.

For smart cities, federated learning offers compelling advantages, primarily in handling big data while preserving privacy. FL techniques comply with data protection regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), making them vital for applications involving sensitive citizen data. This approach proves exceptionally valuable in domains like healthcare, finance, and traffic flow systems, which require sophisticated analytics without compromising personal information.

The security benefits extend beyond privacy alone. Federated learning frameworks defend against common privacy and security attacks, including inference and poisoning attacks that target sensitive urban data. The approach has demonstrated particular effectiveness in enhancing privacy and security in communication systems and healthcare networks. Furthermore, TensorFlow Federated and similar tools provide open-source implementations that facilitate adoption across smart city platforms.

Despite these advantages, federated learning still faces challenges in the 6G context. The technique introduces communication overhead due to the distributed nature of training. Additionally, without proper protection, federated learning frameworks may be vulnerable to new threats where attackers exploit gaps to access private information or manipulate the machine learning model. Ongoing research focuses on improving the FL architecture to strengthen user privacy and data security protections for smart city implementations.

The intrinsic relationship between 6G technologies and artificial intelligence continues to evolve rapidly, with each enhancement in network capabilities enabling more sophisticated AI applications. As we move toward 2030—the target for first 6G commercial deployments—we can expect even deeper integration between wireless networks and AI technologies, creating increasingly intelligent and responsive urban environments.

4. Internet of Everything: Connecting the Urban Ecosystem

The Internet of Everything (IoE) represents a fundamental expansion of connectivity that 6G technologies will enable across urban landscapes. This shift expands far beyond simply connecting more devices to creating vast interconnected ecosystems where data flows seamlessly between objects, people, processes, and data. With 6G enabling technologies as the foundation, IoE will redefine how we interact with and manage our cities through unprecedented levels of integration and intelligence.

4.1 From IoT to IoE: Scaling to Trillions of Devices

The evolution from the Internet of Things (IoT) to the Internet of Everything marks a substantial leap in both scale and capability. Forecasts indicate that approximately 99.4% of objects will be covered by the IoE concept in the coming years. This massive expansion creates both opportunities and challenges for urban infrastructure. Firstly, 6G networks must support an extraordinary density of connected devices—from environmental sensors and autonomous vehicles to personal devices and industrial equipment.

The characteristics of IoE in 6G environments extend well beyond the capabilities of current 5G networks. Although 5G shows great potential to support numerous IoE-based services, it falls short of meeting the complete requirements of new smart applications. In contrast, 6G-powered IoE systems will feature several distinctive qualities. These include extremely massive numbers of devices, with billions or even trillions of connected endpoints operating simultaneously across urban environments. In addition to traditional communication and computing functions, 6G-IoE will handle sensing and localization tasks—mapping surrounding objects precisely for applications like autonomous vehicles.

Real-time communication represents another critical advancement, as applications in remote surgery, autonomous vehicles, and industrial automation demand ultra-low latency. To achieve these capabilities, 6G researchers are investigating new technologies such as terahertz communications, quantum computing, and artificial intelligence-enabled networks specifically designed to serve smart communities.

Table 2. Comparison of 5G and 6G Capabilities in Smart City Context

Performance Metric	**5G Networks**	**6G Networks (Projected)**	**Impact on Smart Cities**
Peak Data Rate	Up to 20 Gbps	Up to 1 Tbps	Enables holographic and immersive services
Latency	~1 ms	<0.1 ms	Supports real-time critical

			applications
Device Density	$\sim 10^6$ devices/km^2	$>10^7$ devices/km^2	Massive IoE connectivity
AI Integration	AI-assisted	AI-native by design	Autonomous network management
Energy Efficiency	Improved over 4G	Ultra-energy-efficient architectures	Sustainable urban infrastructure

4.2 Digital Twin Implementation for Real-Time City Modeling

Digital twins serve as comprehensive virtual replicas of physical environments, enabling unprecedented levels of monitoring and analysis across urban landscapes. Through the integration of database construction and IoT technology, these systems achieve organic integration of various types of urban spatial holographic information. As a result, cities can build full-factor, high-precision, fine-grained digital representations that support real-time quantitative analysis, prediction, early warning, and holographic dynamic display of comprehensive urban operations.

The implementation of digital twins within 6G networks provides several fundamental advantages for urban planning. Through continuous data collection from multi-source and multi-dimensional inputs such as traffic systems and public safety installations, these models enable intelligent real-time monitoring and analysis. At the same time, they facilitate efficient deployment of urban resources and early warning of abnormal conditions through AI-powered analytics.

The 6G digital twin framework excels at handling what-if scenarios—something traditional simulations cannot achieve. By incorporating generative AI capabilities, these systems can create scenario twins that simulate potential outcomes under various conditions. This capability allows city planners to view insights even from multidimensional data, monitoring situations more closely and noticing abnormalities quickly. These systems effectively function as multidimensional maps that provide early warnings to mitigate risks and utilize city resources more efficiently.

4.3 Holographic Communication for Remote Urban Management

Holographic communication emerges as one of the most anticipated applications of 6G technologies. This capability refers to real-time capturing, encoding, transporting, and rendering of 3D representations anchored in space. Once limited to science fiction, holographic communication now ranks among the most wanted 5G and 6G-enabled applications by both consumers and enterprise users.

The technical requirements for holographic communication are substantial, demanding data rates that range from tens of Mbps to an astounding 4.3 Tbps even after compression. Latency requirements are equally demanding—less than sub-millisecond for seamless 3D holographic experiences. To create near-real holograms, the technology requires multiple cameras and sensors to capture images that are then compressed, transmitted, decompressed, and projected using laser beams.

In urban management contexts, holographic capabilities enable remote expertise and presence across critical infrastructure. By collecting multi-source data such as urban traffic and public safety information, holographic systems enable intelligent real-time monitoring, analysis, and deployment of urban resources. In practical terms, this allows experts to appear virtually at any location requiring attention—whether for infrastructure maintenance, emergency response, or public events management. The holographic city will provide multidimensional mapping of obstacles and traffic movements in real-time, potentially facilitating safer deployment of autonomous vehicles.

As 6G technologies continue to mature, IoE will increasingly serve as the connective tissue binding together all aspects of smart city operations—creating urban environments that are more responsive, efficient, and capable than ever before.

5. Energy Efficiency and Sustainability in 6G Smart Cities

Sustainability emerges as a critical dimension of 6G technologies as the world's digital infrastructure expands at an unprecedented rate. With network energy consumption becoming a major challenge amid rapidly growing connected devices and increasing network traffic, the development of eco-friendly solutions is now imperative for realizing the full potential of 6G networks. This section explores innovative approaches to achieve energy-efficient and sustainable 6G smart cities.

5.1 Zero-Energy Network Operations Through Harvesting

Zero-energy devices (ZEDs) have emerged as a prominent solution for next-generation green communication architecture in 6G networks. These devices eliminate the need for recharging plugins and battery replacements by integrating disruptive technologies such as radio frequency energy harvesting, backscatter communications, low-power computing, and ultra-low power receivers. Essentially, ZEDs harvest energy from their surroundings—from vibrations, light, temperature gradients, or even from radio-frequency waves themselves. This capability opens extraordinary possibilities for applications ranging from warehouse package tracking to environmental monitoring without the conventional energy constraints of traditional devices.

The implementation of ZEDs faces substantial challenges, primarily related to power constraints. The harvested power from miniature sources is typically very low—often just a few microwatts (μW) in the case of radio-frequency energy harvesting. Additionally, electronic circuits in ZEDs require a minimum input voltage substantially higher than what antennas typically produce, necessitating efficient voltage up-conversion mechanisms. Hence, energy-aware task offloading, efficient resource management, and energy-aware architecture must be implemented to enable energy efficiency.

5.2 Carbon-Neutral Data Processing Strategies

From an environmental perspective, reducing the negative impact across the entire lifecycle of goods, networks, and services represents the primary responsibility of the 6G industry. As communication service providers switch to low-carbon electricity, the focus of environmental targets is shifting toward material use and pre-use lifecycle stages. This transition demands carbon-neutral data processing strategies that minimize resource consumption while maintaining high performance.

Artificial intelligence plays a crucial role in enhancing energy efficiency in smart cities. AI-based modules contribute significantly to increasing energy efficiency and sustainability. Throughout 6G systems, techniques like dynamic power allocation, intelligent sleep modes, and adaptive modulation help optimize energy consumption based on network load and device requirements. Beyond this, integrating renewable energy sources into network infrastructure further contributes to sustainable scalability.

5.3 Sustainable Materials for 6G Infrastructure

The exploration of novel, eco-friendly materials for manufacturing 6G components leads to reduced environmental impact. Researchers are investigating materials with lower energy requirements for extraction and production, alongside biodegradable or recyclable alternatives. Nanocellulose, for instance, offers multiple benefits as a natural substitute material—it is light, mechanically strong, has a low-loss structure for electricity, and is easily available. Being water-soluble, nanocellulose also simplifies recycling processes.

Material selection for 6G infrastructure must optimize for specific intended uses: sustainability, recyclability, availability, environmental friendliness, and cost considerations including procurement, transport, and processing. Through strategic material choices and thoughtful design, the telecommunications industry can advance toward its Net Zero emissions goals while enabling the decarbonization of key urban systems.

Table 3. Challenges and Mitigation Strategies for Deploying 6G in Smart Cities

Challenge	Description	Potential Impact	Mitigation Strategy
High Energy Consumption	Dense networks and THz hardware increase power usage	Higher operational costs, sustainability issues	Green AI, energy-harvesting technologies
Cybersecurity Risks	Massive connectivity expands attack surface	Threats to critical infrastructure	AI-driven security, zero-trust architectures
Infrastructure Cost	Deployment of new spectrum and hardware	High initial investment	Public–private partnerships
Data Privacy Concerns	Extensive data collection across city systems	Regulatory and social challenges	Privacy-by-design frameworks
Standardization Gaps	Early-stage technology definitions	Interoperability issues	Global 6G standardization efforts

6. Technical Challenges and Implementation Roadmap

The path toward implementing 6G technologies faces formidable obstacles that extend beyond technical innovation alone. The transformation from scientific theory to practical deployment requires coordinated global efforts across multiple domains to overcome existing barriers.

6.1 Spectrum Allocation and Regulatory Frameworks

Securing adequate spectrum represents a fundamental prerequisite for 6G deployment. The International Mobile Telecommunications (IMT-2030) will require spectrum in various ranges including mid-band (7-15 GHz), particularly in bands like 7.125-8.5 GHz, 10.7-13.25 GHz, and 14-15.35 GHz. Alongside this, higher frequency bands in the sub-terahertz range must be explored for ultra-high-capacity applications. Regulatory frameworks must evolve to support dynamic spectrum sharing techniques that maximize efficiency across all available bands. Currently, nationwide mobile licenses work well for sub-1 GHz spectrum, yet the appropriate authorization regimes for higher frequency bands remain under debate. Regulatory uncertainty potentially discourages investment, whereas delays in spectrum allocation directly impact deployment timelines.

6.2 Infrastructure Transition from 5G to 6G

The evolution from 5G to 6G requires substantial infrastructure modifications beyond simple upgrades. The transition demands fundamental changes to communication frameworks. Network cloudification in 5G will evolve toward cloud-native open networks in 6G, incorporating virtualized or containerized network functions. Practically speaking, 6G infrastructure demands massive investment, particularly in underdeveloped regions. Streamlined regulatory processes for site locations become crucial considering 6G will require significantly higher numbers of sites. Permitting processes must be harmonized nationwide through simplified zoning laws and standardized contracts for antenna placements.

6.3 Security and Privacy Protection Mechanisms

Security requirements for 6G significantly exceed those of previous generations. The zero trust (ZT) paradigm emerges as the foundational security concept for 6G architecture, emphasizing resource protection above all else. This approach addresses the increasingly blurred line between inside and outside networks. Post-quantum cryptography becomes imperative as quantum computers threaten existing encryption techniques. Furthermore, automated security management systems must handle vulnerabilities from open-source components. Federated AI security approaches can protect against adversarial machine learning without compromising privacy. Yet, addressing data security amid massive IoT traffic remains challenging, potentially requiring decentralized security systems for dynamic local handling.

6.4 Timeline for Global 6G Deployment in Urban Centers

The roadmap toward 6G deployment follows a well-defined timeline starting with ITU's development of technical performance requirements for IMT-2030 through 2026. Technology submissions will occur from 2027 until early 2029, with 3GPP submitting self-evaluations by early 2029. The first 6G specifications should be completed by late 2028 in Release 21. Commercial 6G deployments are expected by 2030, initially focusing on industries requiring ultra-low latency and high reliability. Prior to mainstream adoption, early deployments will identify challenges and optimize network infrastructure. Implementation will progress from urban centers toward suburban and rural areas, gradually achieving the ubiquitous connectivity that 6G envisions.

7. Conclusion

6G technologies stand ready to redefine urban connectivity through unprecedented data speeds, quantum-secure networks, and intelligent infrastructure management. These advancements will enable smart cities to process massive amounts of data in real-time, supporting applications from holographic communication to autonomous vehicles. Though technical challenges persist, particularly in spectrum allocation and infrastructure deployment, research continues to advance solutions for these hurdles. Quantum computing integration strengthens network security while intelligent reflecting surfaces optimize signal propagation. Additionally, artificial intelligence serves as the cornerstone of 6G networks, enabling self-optimization and predictive maintenance capabilities that ensure reliable urban services. The transition toward sustainable, energy-efficient networks remains crucial for successful 6G implementation. Zero-energy devices and carbon-neutral processing strategies demonstrate promising pathways toward environmentally conscious urban development. Consequently, these innovations will shape how cities manage resources, handle emergencies, and deliver services to citizens. The roadmap toward 2030 deployment presents both opportunities and obstacles. Success depends on coordinated efforts across regulatory bodies, technology providers, and urban planners. Finally, as we progress toward this next generation of wireless technology, 6G networks will establish the foundation for truly intelligent cities that enhance quality of life while preserving environmental resources for future generations.

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