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WISPs Urge FCC to Extend STAs, Adopt 5.9 GHz Band Proposal

Executives of wireless Internet service providers (WISPs) urged the FCC today to extend grants of special temporary authority (STA) to allow them to continue to use 45 megahertz of the 5.9 gigahertz band during the COVID-19 pandemic and said the Commission should adopt its proposal to divide the 5850-5925 MHz band between unlicensed and auto-safety applications.

The FCC's Wireless Telecommunications Bureau has granted STAs to more than 150 WISPs to use for 60 days the lower 45 MHz of the 5.9 GHz band to boost their capacity to respond to increased traffic as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Meanwhile, last December, the FCC adopted a notice of proposed rulemaking proposing to make the lower 45 MHz of the band available for unlicensed use and to allocate the upper 20 MHz for cellular vehicle-to-everything (C-V2X) technology (TR Daily, Dec. 12, 2019). The NPRM sought comment on whether to allocate the remaining 10 MHz to C-V2X or dedicated short-range communications (DSRC) technology.

During a webinar today organized by WifiForward, presidents of three WISPs praised the FCC for issuing the STAs, explaining that they helped their companies address a hike in capacity demand once customers began working and learning from home.

"The value of this spectrum became dramatically apparent during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Louis Peraertz, vice president-policy for the Wireless Internet Service Providers Association.

A survey of 155 WISPA members found an average traffic increase of 36% due to people staying home as a result of the pandemic, he said, and 83% of respondents said they were adding subscribers. He said that members want their STAs extended because losing spectrum would disrupt customers.

"It was an overnight fix," said Mike Kennedy, president of Intermax Networks, which operates in Idaho.

"We saw tremendous improvement," said Donald Dawson, president of TCC Networks, which operates in New Hampshire. He said that the STA provided "cleaner spectrum" to customers who needed more bandwidth, noting that backhaul links had been "getting overwhelmed."

Mark Radabaugh, president of Amplex Internet, which operates in Ohio, said that his company saw peak traffic, which occurs around 9 p.m., increase 24% when the state issued a stay-at-home order, while

daytime traffic increased about 50%. As a result, the carrier's extra capacity "was gone overnight," he said.

"Fortunately, the STA gave us a lot of breathing room," Mr. Radabaugh added.

Meanwhile, the New America Foundation's Open Technology Institute released a paper today that argues that the FCC should move ahead with its 5.9 GHz band proposal while considering relocating auto-safety applications to the 4.9 GHz band. The paper was written by Michael Calabrese, director of OTI's Wireless Future Project, and Amir Nasr, an OTI policy analyst.

"The FCC should adopt its pending proposal to reallocate at least 45 megahertz of the 5.9 GHz band for unlicensed use. This increment of unlicensed spectrum is particularly critical for consumers and the economy to the extent that it creates the first unencumbered 160 megahertz channel to support the next generation of Wi-Fi technology that will help Americans everywhere to access gigabit-fast and affordable 5G-capable applications and services. The commission's proposal to reallocate 45 megahertz for unlicensed use, creating the first and only unencumbered 160 megahertz Wi-Fi channel at full Part 15 power levels, while designating 30 megahertz exclusively for V2X, strikes an appropriate balance between adding necessary spectrum for Wi-Fi and improving vehicle safety," the paper said.

"The commission should also consider moving V2X services to another band, particularly the 4.9 GHz band, to better harmonize V2X services with 5G networks and to ideally remove the current allocation of ITS as a roadblock to a contiguous and gigabit-fast Wi-Fi superhighway across the upper 5 GHz and 6 GHz bands," the paper added. "There is no need for a zero-sum trade-off between next generation Wi-Fi and auto safety. Consumers need both 5G-capable, next generation Wi-Fi and reliable auto safety communication. Reallocating 5.9 GHz and authorizing C-V2X in a new public safety band can achieve the optimal win-win for consumers and the U.S. economy."

But advocates of auto-safety use of the 5.9 GHz band criticized the paper's recommendations.

"The auto industry has already begun to deploy V2X and recently committed to deploy at least 5 million V2X radios on vehicles and roadway infrastructure within the next five years," said Alliance for Automotive Innovation President and Chief Executive Officer John Bozzella. "This commitment depends on the FCC maintaining the entire 75 MHz of Safety Spectrum for transportation safety purposes. It is undeniable that vehicle connectivity will play a crucial role in saving lives, optimizing road safety, bolstering our global competitiveness, and providing economic and societal benefits to the motoring public. A decision to take this spectrum and its potential safety benefits away from the transportation community would be shortsighted and contrary to the best interests of Americans on the nation's roadways. V2X technologies operating in the Safety Spectrum can help reduce 90 percent of vehicle accidents attributed to human error."

"This is speculative and not based on data. There is no evidence that life-saving connected vehicle communication technologies would work effectively in another spectrum band. The FCC's proposal to give away a majority of the 5.9GHz safety band will put pedestrians, drivers and others on U.S. roadways at greater risk," said ITS America President and CEO Shailen Bhatt. —Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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