

March 26, 2020

AT&T Gets STA to Increase Capacity in Puerto Rico, USVI

The FCC's Wireless Telecommunications Bureau today granted special temporary authority (STA) to AT&T, Inc., to allow it to use for 60 days AWS-4 spectrum licensed to Dish Network Corp. to bolster its capacity to serve Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands during the coronavirus pandemic. It is the latest in a number of STAs granted by the bureau allowing wireless carriers to bolster their capacity during the national crisis.

"Staying connected while staying apart is the reality right now across America during this pandemic, and that is no less true for those living in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands," said FCC Chairman Ajit Pai. "We have put a special emphasis on helping those on the islands stay connected following the terrible storms that hit them in recent years. And we continue that work today in a new kind of emergency. I thank DISH for consenting to this use of its spectrum and to the U.S. Department of Justice for its cooperation. I'm grateful to AT&T for requesting this STA and I'm pleased we can grant it."

The FCC also released tips for consumers to maximize home Internet performance. "The consumer-friendly tips range from the simple – like checking your current Internet service plan – to the more advanced – like dedicating a Wi-Fi frequency to prioritize certain devices. In today's post, the FCC suggests plugging directly into your Internet connection when possible to reduce the burden on the Wi-Fi, considering a schedule for different high bandwidth-dependent tasks, and testing the speed you're receiving."

Also today, the Wireless Bureau announced that hand-delivered documents sent to the agency's Gettysburg location must now be sent to 9050 Junction Dr., Annapolis Junction, Md., 20701.

Meanwhile, the wireless industry continued to report that carriers have seen an increase in traffic, particularly voice usage, as more Americans work and learn from home.

CTIA said that the nation's five largest carriers reported voice traffic increases for Monday that ranged from 7% to 24.3% compared with the average on the previous four Mondays, while data traffic increases ranged from 0.7% to 9.2%. CTIA said that it plans to report weekly changes to voice and data traffic.

Meanwhile, AT&T, which said its network is still performing well, said that wireless voice minutes were up 30% yesterday compared to an average Wednesday, and Wi-Fi calling minutes were up 93%. The carrier also reported that consumer home voice calling minutes saw a 51% increase from an average Wednesday. Overall, "core network traffic ... was up 21% yesterday compared to the same day last month," it added.

AT&T also announced that starting tomorrow, its AT&T prepaid and Cricket Wireless brands will begin offering a new low cost plan and no-cost additional data on other plans. “The new low end \$15 2GB phone plan [will be available] on a temporary basis. Activation fees for this plan will be waived for both brands[,]” the carrier said. “Both brands are adding incremental 10GB’s of data to capped and unlimited plans automatically for a limited period of time. ... Customers with an Unlimited Plus plan with tethering will receive 10GB of additional tethering per month for 60 days[.]”

Verizon Communications, Inc., said that its “wireless and broadband networks handled more than 218,000 terabytes of data this past Monday alone. That equates to 106 million hours of streaming content, 190 billion photo uploads or 38 billion songs downloaded. The network continues to perform well.”

“We are seeing tremendous amounts of usage across our networks as our customers are finding new and important ways of staying connected,” said Verizon Chief Technology Officer Kyle Malady. “Our engineers are carefully watching changes and trends in network usage, which seems to be normalizing, and are adjusting capacity as needed. Our networks are meeting the shifting demands well and continue to show strong, consistent performance for our customers.”

Verizon also reported a sharp increase in the use of online collaboration tools such as conference calling.

“Week over week, there has been a 47% increase in the use of collaboration tools on Verizon’s networks. The use of these applications drops sharply during weekends, indicating they are being used primarily for remote work and online learning,” the carrier said. “Traffic using Virtual Private Networks (VPN), which allow people to create a secure connection over a public network (like the internet) to reach a private network, also continues to increase. It is up another 9% week over week and up 52% over a typical day.”

Meanwhile, Verizon announced that its wireless and FiOS customers next month “will be able to experience up to 60 days of free access to valued education resources, tools and games[.]” The offerings include: (1) “Quizlet: Students and teachers can get a Quizlet Plus account to study languages, science, math, history and more with engaging learning tools and flashcards”; (2) “Bookful: Children can bring books to life with hundreds of augmented reality and 3D interactive education books and games to improve comprehension”; (3) “Chegg: Students will have access to the new Chegg Study Pack with step-by-step textbook solutions, expert Q&A, practice tests, grammar and plagiarism checkers, and a step-by-step math solver”; and (4) “Epic!: Parents and children will get access to Epic’s 40,000-book digital library, trusted by more than one million teachers, and built for safety, discoverability and fun.”

Elsewhere, WHRO Public Media, which is owned by 21 southeastern Virginia school divisions, announced that it is offering nationwide free access to 25 high school online courses.

“Our online courses engage a variety of learning methods and can be instructor-led, self-taught, or used in blended learning environments. They are aligned to the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), media rich, and fully customizable to meet school districts’ needs across the country,” said Bert Schmidt, president and chief executive officer of WHRO Public Media.

Wireless Infrastructure Association President and Chief Executive Officer Jonathan Adelstein cited “the concern that many jurisdictions rely on paper filings or in-person permitting processes, which could be

impacted by furloughed workers or fewer office hours,” adding that the group was “working with federal, state, and local policymakers to address these issues. We are bringing that directly to the attention of the FCC and the White House as we speak.”

Also today, the Satellite Industry Association released a statement urging “America’s lawmakers and regulators to recognize the essential role satellites are playing during the coronavirus outbreak and to assist the satellite industry should issues arise that might impair its ability to provide vital services to government, defense, enterprise and consumer customers. If required, such actions would also assist in protecting industry jobs, the critical supply chains for satellite and aerospace components, the scheduled launches of new satellites plus the continuation of the recent leaps in innovation that have helped drive America’s role as the world’s commercial space leader.” —Paul Kirby, paul.kirby@wolterskluwer.com

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