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## **FCC SPECTRUM ACTION MAY HELP WI-FI, BUT IT WON'T HELP LAST-MILE COMPETITION OR RURAL BROADBAND**

### ***MORE LOW-FREQUENCY SPECTRUM NEEDED FOR REAL LAST-MILE COMPETITION AND RURAL BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT.***

WASHINGTON, DC – Media Access Project (MAP) and the New America Foundation (NAF) praised the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) today for opening government spectrum above 5 GHz to limited unlicensed access, shared with the military, but warned that today's action will not solve the problems plaguing unlicensed access as a "last mile" or rural broadband solution.

"This works great for short range, low power Wi-Fi connections that don't need to go through walls or trees. It does nothing to help wireless Internet service providers (WISPs) and community networks offer broadband in rural and low-income areas," said Harold Feld, Associate Director, Media Access Project.

"The FCC needs to think beyond hot spots at Starbucks if it wants to see unlicensed spectrum emerge as a genuine facilities-based competitor," said Jim Snider, Senior Research Fellow at the New America Foundation. "If the government wants to facilitate affordable wireless broadband, it will need to expand unlicensed access to lower frequency bands, ideally in the grossly underutilized broadcast bands."

Patrick Leary, of equipment manufacturer Alvarion agreed, "As the rules now stand, it will seriously limit us or others to make use of this band to connect more homes and business with unlicensed wireless broadband over the last mile."

At an FCC conference on November 4, many WISP operators complained that they could not become effective competitors to DSL and cable broadband without greater access to lower frequency bandwidths (below 5 GHz) and higher power levels than currently allowed.

Said Snider: "Signals above 5 GHz, especially with these power limits, can't penetrate through objects like leaves or walls and can't travel far enough without degrading. This is like opening real estate for development in Siberia and claiming it's the same as opening up beach front property in California."

The FCC allows the greatest flexibility and power levels for unlicensed access in the 2.4 GHz band. With the explosion of unlicensed devices, the 2.4 GHz band has become congested, creating interference even for WISPs in rural areas and limiting the potential for higher-bandwidth applications.

Joined by a coalition of consumer groups, WISPs, and groups using unlicensed spectrum for community networking, New America and MAP recently asked the FCC to set aside 90 MHz of spectrum from 2.5-2.59 GHz for exclusive unlicensed use. As a less preferable alternative, the groups suggested that, at the very least, that the FCC allow unlicensed devices to share 2.5-2.69 GHz on a secondary basis.

"Chairman Powell says WISPs are the future," said Feld. "But will the FCC give them room to grow, or just pat itself on the back for what they've done so far? If the FCC stops here, unlicensed access will have trouble growing into more than just a convenient way to surf the web from your easy chair."

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