



<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/news/la-fi-fcc11jul11,1,4665881.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>

From the Los Angeles Times

FCC wants open access to spectrum

It proposes that any wireless device should be able to hook up to auctioned airwaves.

By Jim Puzzanghera

Times Staff Writer

July 11, 2007

WASHINGTON — Federal Communications Commission Chairman Kevin J. Martin is readying proposed guidelines for the upcoming auction of prime public airwaves that would require that the winning companies let consumers hook up any wireless device to the network.

The guidelines, which must be approved by the FCC in the coming weeks, are the subject of fierce lobbying in Washington because they could help determine the fate of a multibillion-dollar chunk of spectrum being abandoned by TV stations in their conversion to digital signals. Federal officials hope the airwaves will carry another nationwide high-speed Internet service to compete with those offered by phone and cable companies.

"I think it's important that consumers be able to gain access to all the innovation that's occurring," Martin said in an interview Tuesday.

Europe and Asia, for example, have been quick to introduce phones that surf the Internet with WiFi, but in the U.S. wireless companies lock their devices into their own networks.

"That's the kind of innovation that's too slow to roll out here and would be facilitated by a rule that the network operators would be required to allow you to bring your own handset," Martin said. Under the proposal, people who subscribed to a network would be able to hook up any device or any software application they chose.

Wireless phone companies, such as AT&T Inc. and Verizon Wireless, adamantly oppose any open-access requirements on the new spectrum, which they hope to add to their networks. Public interest groups and technology companies such as Google Inc. and Yahoo Inc. have been demanding broad open access that also would force wireless companies to lease the new airwaves at wholesale rates to third parties.

Martin isn't proposing to go that far. His plan also would apply only to about a third of the TV spectrum to be auctioned by January.

"We're not trying to benefit one sector over another," Martin said. "We're trying to benefit the consumers. This is a very moderate step."

But wireless providers strongly criticized the plan as "Silicon Valley welfare" for wealthy companies such as Google. They argue that these companies could bid for the spectrum themselves if they wanted access for their customers.

"Crafting special rules for a company with a market cap of \$170 billion to address problems that don't exist in our competitive market makes absolutely no sense whatsoever," said Steve Largent, president of CTIA-The Wireless Assn., which represents the major phone providers. The conditions could make the spectrum less attractive, costing taxpayers, he said.

Money from the auction goes to the U.S. Treasury, and the spectrum is expected to fetch at least \$10 billion. Martin said minimum bids would have to be met before the spectrum was sold.

Julie Ask, a wireless analyst with Jupiter Research, also said the open-access conditions could drive down the spectrum prices. "Certainly it's less attractive if you don't have control over who's going to be on your network and who uses your spectrum," she said.

Google and other technology companies, including Yahoo, Intel Corp., DirecTV Group Inc. and EchoStar Communications Corp., believe that proprietary networks are thwarting competition and formed a coalition to push for access to the new wireless airwaves.

Google has considered bidding, but the major wireless companies have an advantage because they need the spectrum more and don't have to build a network from scratch, Richard Whitt, Google's Washington telecom and media counsel, wrote on the company's blog Tuesday. Martin's proposal appeared to "represent a step forward for new, innovative entrants to the broadband market," he said.

But Harold Feld, senior vice president of the Media Access Project, a nonprofit public interest law firm, said Martin's proposal wouldn't go far enough.

"This is a baby step in the right direction, but it is not nearly enough," said Feld, whose firm is part of the Save Our Spectrum coalition of public interest and consumer groups.

--

jim.puzzanghera@latimes.com

TMSReprints

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2007 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

PARTNERS:

