



PUBLIC NOTICE

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RURAL BROADBAND AUCTIONS TASK FORCE RELEASES MOBILITY FUND PHASE II 4G LTE COVERAGE MAPS

GN Docket No. 19-367

The Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force (Task Force), in conjunction with the Office of Economics and Analytics, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, and the Wireline Competition Bureau, today releases carrier-specific 4G LTE coverage maps derived from coverage data submitted pursuant to the *Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process Order*.¹ Because AT&T objected to the release of its coverage maps, we do not release AT&T's maps at this time. In addition, the Task Force today releases a version of the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* with unredacted maps.² The coverage maps and the report with unredacted maps are now publicly available on the Commission's website.³ The steps we take today will allow the public to better understand the issues that the Commission faced in the Mobility Fund Phase II proceeding, which should allow for a more robust discussion and analysis of how best to improve the Commission's collection of mobile broadband data going forward.

The *Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process Order* required mobile wireless carriers to submit 4G LTE coverage data in a one-time data collection pursuant to specifications adopted for Mobility Fund Phase II.⁴ The data specifications required carriers to report, among other things, the propagation modeling software, spectrum band or bands, bandwidth, clutter factor categories, and signal strength used to generate their coverage maps.⁵ In total, 48 mobile wireless carriers filed the required data.⁶ Commission staff generated and released an initial map of areas presumptively eligible for Mobility Fund

¹ *Connect America Fund; Universal Service Reform – Mobility Fund*, Order on Reconsideration and Second Report and Order, 32 FCC Rcd 6282, 6296, para. 28 (2017) (*MF-II Challenge Process Order*).

² Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force, *Mobility Fund Phase II Coverage Maps Investigation Staff Report* (2019), <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-361165A1.pdf> (*Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report*).

³ The carrier-specific coverage maps are available as GIS data in ESRI FileGDB format at <https://www.fcc.gov/mobility-fund-phase-2#data>, alongside the file specifications for these data files. The less-redacted version of the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* that discloses information and figures derived from these coverage maps, including certain information from AT&T which it expressly consents to release, is available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/mf-ii-coverage-maps-investigation-staff-report>.

⁴ *Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process Order*, 32 FCC Rcd at 6296, para. 28. Carriers were required to submit these coverage data by January 4, 2018. See *Responses to the Mobility Fund Phase II 4G LTE Data Collection Are Due by January 4, 2018*, Public Notice, 32 FCC Rcd 7431, 7431 (WCB/WTB 2017).

⁵ *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* at 5-6, paras. 15-16.

⁶ *Id.* at 6, para. 17.

Phase II support based upon an aggregation of these coverage data.⁷ During the Mobility Fund Phase II challenge process, challengers had access to carriers' coverage data so that they could conduct speed tests of the networks of individual carriers and submit data based upon those tests. Challengers were required to keep confidential the carrier-specific mobile coverage data.⁸

After the window to file challenges opened, several challengers raised concerns about the accuracy of carriers' coverage data.⁹ Staff reviewed the challenger data and conducted inquiries with carriers about these discrepancies. The Commission thereafter launched an investigation of the Mobility Fund Phase II coverage data submitted by certain carriers.¹⁰

On December 4, 2019, the Task Force released the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report*.¹¹ The report recommended, among other things, terminating the challenge process due to significant inaccuracies in the submitted coverage data.¹² Because challengers had been required to keep the coverage data confidential during the challenge process, these data were redacted from the publicly available report.

On February 12, 2020, the Task Force released a public notice proposing to release maps based upon these data and providing filers with an opportunity to object to the release of their data.¹³ As indicated in the public notice, the maps to be released show coverage aggregated across spectrum bands and show only 4G LTE coverage as reported for the Mobility Fund Phase II collection.¹⁴ The coverage maps neither show a carrier's complete and current mobile broadband coverage nor do they reveal information about the spectrum bands over which a carrier reports to have deployed service meeting the Mobility Fund Phase II specifications.¹⁵ The data also do not include link budget or clutter information.¹⁶

Only one carrier, AT&T, objects to public release of its data. AT&T argues that releasing its Mobility Fund Phase II maps would be competitively harmful both due to the granularity of its data and because, according to AT&T, the maps it submitted comply with the Mobility Fund Phase II specification for 4G LTE coverage and thus show less coverage than its public-facing maps which reflect other areas

⁷ *Mobility Fund Phase II Initial Eligible Areas Map Available; Challenge Window Will Open March 29, 2018*, Public Notice, 33 FCC Rcd 2041, 2041 (WCB/WTB 2018).

⁸ *Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process Order*, 32 FCC Rcd at 6296-97, para. 29 & nn.82, 84; *Procedures for the Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process*, Public Notice, 33 FCC Rcd 1985, 1993, para. 16 (WCB/WTB 2018) (*Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process Procedures Public Notice*). The Commission neither discussed nor made findings regarding the competitive sensitivity of these data.

⁹ See *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* at 9-10, paras. 24-26.

¹⁰ See *id.* at 11-14, para. 30-36.

¹¹ See generally *id.*

¹² *Id.* at 52, para. 75.

¹³ See *Rural Broadband Auctions Task Force Proposes to Release Mobility Fund Phase II 4G LTE Coverage Maps*, GN Docket No. 19-367, Public Notice, DA 20-150, at 2, 3 (OEA/WTB/WCB Feb. 12, 2020).

¹⁴ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.* Similarly, in the version of the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* released today, carrier-specific link budget information remains redacted.

where 4G LTE service is provided.¹⁷ In sum, AT&T argues that the coverage data it submitted are unlike the data submitted by AT&T's competitors.¹⁸ As the only carrier objecting to release of its maps, AT&T's objection is best addressed separately and, consequently, the Task Force will not release AT&T's Mobility Fund Phase II coverage maps at this time. T-Mobile and Verizon each filed comments stating that they do not object to the release of their data but argue that action by the full Commission is required to release the maps because they assert that the Commission designated the information as confidential.¹⁹

The Commission made no determination that the data were confidential. Although Commission staff set up a process by which challengers could access Mobility Fund Phase II coverage data only after agreeing to keep such data confidential during the challenge process,²⁰ the Commission itself never made any findings regarding the confidentiality or competitive sensitivity of the data. In any event, the limited coverage data we release are now more than two years old and only one provider—whose objections we do not address here—asserts there is any competitive harm resulting from the release of these data. Moreover there are significant public interest benefits in providing the public with a better understanding of the issues that the Commission faced in the Mobility Fund Phase II proceeding.²¹ Allowing the public to access and analyze these maps will enable parties to make more informed and substantive comments in proceedings in which the Commission proposes to collect mapping data, thereby advancing the Commission's understanding of how to improve the future collection of mobile broadband coverage data. Indeed, all of the filers that submitted Mobility Fund Phase II coverage data, save AT&T, do not object to release of their data. Therefore, with release of this Public Notice, we have made 47 of the 48 Mobility Fund Phase II 4G LTE coverage maps and a version of the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* with unredacted maps publicly available on the Commission's Mobility Fund Phase II website.

¹⁷ See AT&T Services, Inc. Objection to Public Disclosure of AT&T Mobility's Confidential Data at 2 (Feb. 27, 2020) (AT&T Objection). In its attached request for confidential treatment, AT&T additionally claims that the Commission has found the "general types of information" at issue here to be competitively sensitive. AT&T Objection, Attach. at 3. AT&T subsequently revised its objection to consent to the release of a particular subset of information derived from its coverage maps that was redacted from the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report*. See Letter from Cathy Carpino, Assistant Vice President, Senior Legal Counsel, AT&T Services, Inc., to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, FCC, GN Docket No. 19-367 (May 1, 2020). These data are now publicly available in the version of the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* we release today.

¹⁸ AT&T Objection at 2 (arguing that several of AT&T's competitors "appear to have simply submitted data used for their public-facing 4G LTE coverage maps as their [Mobility Fund Phase II] Coverage Data").

¹⁹ T-Mobile USA, Inc., Comments at 2-4 (Feb. 27, 2020) (T-Mobile Comments); Verizon Communications Inc., Comments at 1 & n.3 (Feb. 27, 2020) (Verizon Comments). Verizon also states that the Commission should make clear these maps are not used by carriers in the normal course of business and were created for purpose of identifying areas eligible for Mobility Fund Phase II support. Verizon Comments at 1. As staff explained in the *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report*, "[t]he data specifications adopted for the one-time [Mobility Fund Phase II] data collection were the most granular and standardized that the Commission had ever adopted" for mobile coverage, and broadly aligned with an industry consensus proposal to address concerns about the accuracy and suitability of using the Commission's existing FCC Form 477 mobile broadband coverage data for Mobility Fund Phase II. *Mobility Fund Phase II Investigation Staff Report* at 3-4, 5, paras. 12-13, 15. The particular data parameters were designed specifically for the Mobility Fund Phase II program and the data should be construed in that context. In its comments, T-Mobile also states that the public interest in releasing the maps would be small. T-Mobile Comments at 1-2. For the reasons explained herein, we disagree, and conclude that the public interest would be served by releasing these maps.

²⁰ *Mobility Fund Phase II Challenge Process Procedures Public Notice*, 32 FCC Rcd at 1992-93, paras. 14-16.

²¹ See *American Broadband & Telecommunications Company*, Order on Reconsideration, FCC 20-47 (Apr. 13, 2020) (Commission may release otherwise confidential data authority when, after balancing the factors favoring disclosure and non-disclosure, it finds it in the public interest to do so).

This action is taken pursuant to sections 4(i), 4(j), 5, 201-205, 211, 215, 218, 219, 303(r), and 332 of the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, 47 U.S.C. §§ 154(i), 154(j), 155, 201-205, 211, 215, 218, 219, 303(r), and 332.

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