

Media Contact:

Will Wiquist, (202) 418-0509
will.wiquist@fcc.gov

For Immediate Release

CHAIRMAN PAI PROPOSES MODERNIZING THE 5.9 GHz BAND

New Rules Would Supercharge Wi-Fi and Improve Automotive Safety

WASHINGTON, October 27, 2020—FCC Chairman Ajit Pai today shared with his colleagues draft new rules for the 5.9 GHz band (5.850-5.925 GHz) that, if adopted, would make new spectrum available for unlicensed services such as Wi-Fi and finally fulfill the band’s decades-old promise of improving automotive safety. The Commission will vote on these new rules at its November 18 meeting.

The new rules would make the lower 45 megahertz of the 5.9 GHz band (5.850-5.895 GHz) available for unlicensed uses like Wi-Fi. Americans increasingly rely on Wi-Fi for everything from doing their jobs to accessing healthcare and education, and this trend has only accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, making more spectrum available for Wi-Fi is critical to meeting America’s growing connectivity needs. In addition, unlicensed use of 5.9 GHz band spectrum would also help improve and expand broadband access in rural America. For example, during the pandemic, the FCC has granted temporary access to over 100 wireless Internet service providers, or WISPs, to use this spectrum, which has helped them increase speeds, decrease congestion, and extend coverage areas. The new rules would create a path for WISPs to use this spectrum permanently.

The new rules would also improve automotive safety by transitioning the upper 30 megahertz of the 5.9 GHz band (5.895 GHz-5.925 GHz) from the long-stalled Dedicated Short-Range Communications (DSRC) service to the modern Cellular Vehicle-to-Everything (C-V2X) technology. While 5.9 GHz band spectrum has been designated for DSRC for over twenty years, deployment has been painfully slow, and as a result, DSRC has done virtually nothing to improve automotive safety. By contrast, C-V2X, is a newer technology that shows great promise, which is why automakers here and around the globe are turning the page on DSRC and moving to implement C-V2X. C-V2X uses cellular protocols to provide direct communications between vehicles and, as the name suggests, everything—including other vehicles on the road, infrastructure like light poles and cell towers as well as cyclists, pedestrians, and road workers.

“5.9 GHz spectrum has lain fallow for far too long. For the last two decades, the American people have waited for this prime mid-band spectrum to be put to use, and the time for waiting is over,” said Chairman Pai. “We should move on from DSRC and unlock forward-looking automotive safety technology. Under my approach, the FCC would for the first time authorize C-V2X in the 5.9 GHz band. At the same time, we would make available the spectrum needed for a 160 megahertz-wide channel for Wi-Fi, which would enable a new level of gigabit connectivity for schools, hospitals, small businesses, and other consumers. I hope my colleagues will—once again—join me in offering the American people a new chance for automotive safety communications in the 5.9 GHz band that will actually be deployed while meeting the ever-growing demand for Wi-Fi capacity.”

The Chairman is also proposing rules to implement the new 5.9 GHz band plan. This includes a proposed timeline and technical parameters for transitioning the limited number of incumbent Intelligent Transportation Systems licensees to the upper 30 megahertz portion of the band (and then to C-V2X-based technology), as well as adopting technical rules to enable full-power outdoor unlicensed operations in the lower 45 megahertz portion of the band.

This item follows a lengthy public comment period after the Commission unanimously adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking last year. The draft new rules and further proposal will be released publicly tomorrow with the tentative agenda for the Open Commission meeting. This and all Open Meeting documents will be available at: <https://go.usa.gov/xGsK8>.

###

Media Relations: (202) 418-0500 / ASL: (844) 432-2275 / Twitter: @FCC / www.fcc.gov

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).