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For Immediate Release

FCC PROPOSES SATELLITE DOWNLINKS IN THE 17 GHz BAND

Reform Would Make More Efficient Use of Spectrum While Supporting Deployment of Advanced Satellite-Based Broadband Services

WASHINGTON, November 18, 2020—The Federal Communications Commission today adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking proposing to make 17 GHz band spectrum available for geostationary orbit fixed-satellite downlink operations. With advanced, high-throughput satellite systems’ reliance on downlink (transmissions in the space-to-Earth direction) capacity for delivering satellite-based services like broadband, the Commission is initiating this rulemaking to empower next-generation satellites to help bridge the digital divide.

Today’s action seeks comment on proposed changes to the U.S. Table of Frequency Allocations and the Commission’s rules aimed at encouraging more efficient use of spectrum from 17.3-17.8 GHz. The Commission proposes to permit geostationary orbit, fixed-satellite services to use this spectrum for downlink operations, subject to technical rules that would prevent harmful interference between stations or services in this spectrum.

In addition, the Commission is seeking comment on defining frequency bands to be included in an “extended Ka-band” and establishing uplink off-axis power limits to facilitate more streamlined licensing in these bands. Specifically, the proposal seeks comment on including the 17.3-18.3 GHz, 18.8-19.4 GHz, 19.6-19.7 GHz, 27.5-28.35 GHz, and 28.6-29.1 GHz frequency bands in the extended Ka-band.

These proposals aim to achieve greater spectrum capacity and operational flexibility for satellite communications while at the same time protecting existing services sharing the band from harmful interference.

Today’s Notice responds in part to a petition for rulemaking submitted by SES Americom, Inc. The petition asked the agency to initiate a rulemaking proceeding to amend the Commission’s rules to authorize geostationary orbit fixed-satellite service operations in the downlink direction within the United States using 17.3-17.7 GHz frequencies on a protected basis.

Action by the Commission November 18, 2020 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 20-158). Chairman Pai, Commissioners O’Rielly, Carr, Rosenworcel, and Starks approving. Chairman Pai issuing a separate statement.

IB Docket No. 20-330

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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).