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For Immediate Release

FCC MAKES SPECTRUM AVAILABLE FOR COMMERCIAL SPACE LAUNCHES

WASHINGTON, April 22, 2021—The Federal Communications Commission today adopted new rules to bolster the U.S. commercial space industry’s access to spectrum needed for successful rocket launches. These rules lay the groundwork for giving private space travel and satellite launch companies ready access to spectrum in the 2200-2290 MHz band for transmissions from space launch vehicles during pre-launch testing and space launch operations.

The FCC is working to update its regulatory frameworks to meet today’s needs, leading the way in developing predictable and transparent rules to support the growing U.S. commercial space sector which is vital for American leadership in space. The American commercial space sector has grown tremendously from a handful of commercial satellites in the 1960s to an industry that today provides a variety of communications services to consumers, businesses, and governments around the world and which is poised to be a world leader in space exploration and commercialization.

Prior to this rule change, the frequencies used to support space launches were exclusively allocated for federal agency uses. Private space travel and satellite launch companies had to apply for and receive Special Temporary Authority from the FCC on an ad-hoc basis to share the federal spectrum during each launch. The Report and Order adopted today adds a non-federal, secondary allocation in the 2200-2290 MHz band. Until additional rules are adopted to implement a new coordination regime, the existing STA and NTIA coordination processes will still be required prior to each launch.

The FCC also adopted a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking today to take public comment on a licensing process for this band, including the necessary technical and service rules to enable shared use by both commercial and federal space launches. It also, among other things, seeks further comment on possible commercial space launch allocations and licensing rules for three other spectrum bands – specifically the 420-430 MHz, 2025-2110 MHz, and 5650-5925 MHz bands. Adopting a licensing framework for space launch activities will create a more predictable and streamlined process than the current framework, thereby facilitating future growth in the commercial space industry.

Action by the Commission April 22, 2021 by Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 21-44). Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving. Acting Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr and Starks issuing separate statements.

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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).