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For Immediate Release

FCC PROPOSES FRAMEWORK TO FACILITATE SATELLITE-TO-SMARTPHONE SUPPLEMENTAL COVERAGE FROM SPACE

Harnessing the Power of Satellites to Enhance Mobile Phone Operations and Connect Consumers to Fill Wireless Coverage Gaps

WASHINGTON, March 16, 2023—The Federal Communications Commission today proposed a new regulatory framework to facilitate innovative collaborations between satellite operators and wireless companies. These partnerships leverage the growth in space-based services to connect smartphone users in remote, unserved, and underserved areas.

Numerous such collaborations have launched recently, and the FCC seeks to establish clear and transparent processes to support supplemental coverage from space. Connecting consumers to essential wireless services where no terrestrial mobile service is available can be life-saving in remote locations and can open up innovative opportunities for consumers and businesses.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking adopted today proposes a framework through which satellite operators collaborating with terrestrial service providers would be able to obtain FCC authorization to operate space stations on certain currently licensed, flexible-use spectrum allocated to terrestrial services. The Commission is proposing to add a mobile-satellite service allocation on some terrestrial flexible-use bands.

The FCC proposes allowing authorized non-geostationary orbit satellite operators to apply to access terrestrial spectrum if certain prerequisites are met, including a lease from the terrestrial licensee within a specified geographic area. A satellite operator could then serve a wireless provider's customers should they need connectivity in remote areas, for example in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert, Lake Michigan, the 100-Mile Wilderness, or the Uinta Mountains.

The FCC will also seek comment on how this framework might best support access to emergency response systems like 911 and Wireless Emergency Alerts when a consumer is connected via supplemental coverage from space. The new proceeding will also seek to build a record on whether the framework can be extended to other bands, locations, and applications that might be supported by such collaborations.

Action by the Commission March 16, 2023 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 23-22). Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, and Simington approving and issuing separate statements.

GN Docket No. 23-65; IB Docket 22-271

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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).