

Media Contact:

MediaRelations@fcc.gov

For Immediate Release

FCC LAUNCHES FIRST COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF SUBMARINE CABLE LICENSING RULES IN DECADES

***Agency Looks to Modernize Rules for Global Communications Backbone
to Ensure the Security of This Vital Infrastructure***

WASHINGTON, November 21, 2024—The Federal Communications Commission today voted to launch a major, comprehensive review and update of licensing rules for submarine cables that transmit information between continents and fuel economic activity. Since the agency’s last review in 2001, the technology, economics, and national security environments surrounding these systems have greatly changed.

Oversight of submarine cables traces back even before the existence of the Commission itself. The Cable Landing License Act of 1921, Executive Order 10530 of 1954, and even the Submarine Cable Act of 1888 highlighted the importance of such communications systems and the importance of securing them. Still today, this infrastructure is vital to global communications and economic activity. There are 84 FCC-licensed cable systems and, as of December 2022, cable landing licensees reported more than 5.3 million Gbps of available capacity and 6.8 million Gbps in planned capacity for 2024.

In the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking adopted today, the Commission seeks comment on how best to improve and streamline the submarine cable rules to facilitate efficient deployment of submarine cables while ensuring the security, resilience, and protection of this critical infrastructure. Security review of license applications often involves numerous federal partners through the Committee for the Assessment of Foreign Participation in the United States Telecommunications Services Sector (or Team Telecom) and with a critical role for the State Department.

This proceeding will look to streamline the agency’s review process. It proposes a three-year periodic reporting requirement for cable landing licenses and, in the alternative, seeks comment on shortening the current 25-year license term (or in combination with periodic reporting). The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking looks to update application requirements for national security purposes and ensure the Commission has targeted and granular information regarding the ownership, control, and use of a submarine cable system. The FCC is also looking to improve the quality of the circuit capacity data it collects from licensees, and facilitate the sharing of such information with federal partners.

Today’s action continues the FCC’s recent efforts to support national security. The Commission has proposed new rules that would require, for the first time, companies with international telecommunications authorizations to file renewal applications with the FCC. It has proposed steps applicable to broadband providers to improve the security of BGP routing, the internet’s global routing system. It has enacted rules to create and maintain the “Covered List” prohibiting communications equipment and services deemed to pose an unacceptable risk

to national security from being authorized for importation or sale in the United States, prohibit the use of public funds to purchase covered equipment or services, and launch the Secure and Trusted Communications Networks Reimbursement Program to reimburse providers for costs reasonably incurred to permanently remove, replace, and dispose of covered equipment and services that have already been installed in U.S. networks. The Commission also adopted rules to establish an IoT cybersecurity labeling program.

Action by the Commission November 21, 2024 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 24-119). Chairwoman Rosenworcel, Commissioners Carr, Starks, Simington, and Gomez approving. Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioner Starks issuing separate statements.

OI Docket No. 24-523; MD Docket No. 24-524

###

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).