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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Second Time Around: FCC Refines Broadband Map, NTIA Readies for BEAD

The FCC released version 2.0 of its broadband map, with the agency making huge strides from its first attempt at creating the resource. This time around, it used provider availability data as of Dec. 31 to determine more than 114 million total locations nationally where fixed broadband could be installed.

The FCC has received more than four million challenges thus far and sent them to the relevant providers, and over 75% of those challenges have already been resolved. More than three million total locations were added and about two million were removed from the map, meaning more than one million new serviceable locations are on the fabric compared to the November 2022 pre-production draft.

The removals have largely been noted as false positives where a location has been identified as not there or a vacated structure is not actually a broadband serviceable location. In order for a provider to say its service is available at a location, it has to be able to prove it by showing availability on its website or, if challenged, be able to make service available within 10 business days for a standard installation fee.

The agency has also reached out to more than 800 filers to ask additional questions about their filings. Those inquiries have included requests for more network infrastructure data and fact-based information that would back up reported availability, and those verification efforts have been successful thus far in forcing corrections to the map.

Associations, companies and other stakeholders raised a glass to the FCC staff Tuesday, thanking them for their dedication to creating resources more accurate than any released before. "The data contained in this version of the National Broadband Map will no doubt be an important tool to reach 100% connectivity and close the digital divide," **USTelecom** President/CEO *Jonathan Spalter* said in a statement. "We look forward to seeing how **NTIA** utilizes this most recent data in its historic efforts to achieve internet for all."

AT&T EVP, Federal Regulatory Relations *Rhonda Johnson* also applauded the FCC for its diligent work, and **INCOMPAS** CEO *Chip Pickering* said he looked forward to working with state and local broadband offices as well as federal agencies to ensure the maps continue to improve.

Moving forward, the FCC will collect availability data from providers twice a year and release updated versions of the location fabric. Broadband providers will then have a two-month period to report their availability against that list, and an updated version of the map will be subsequently released.

"These incremental updates reflect both challenge outcomes and any corrections providers make to their filings," FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* said in the blog post. "We will continue to accept challenges every day, every week and every month, and those challenges will continue to improve the map."

NTIA said in its own post Tuesday that it is confident that with this version of the map as a baseline, it can effectively allocate funding from the BEAD program by the end of June.

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Lawmakers expressed trepidation last week at an NTIA oversight hearing about the accuracy of the maps and the BEAD program's reliance on them at this point in time to distribute that funding, but Administrator *Alan Davidson* offered them reassurance that this isn't the end of the road.

"States are required under the statute to run their own challenge processes after allocations are given to make sure that they are being as accurate as possible in their process, so there will be further refinements based on the FCC map," Davidson said. "I agree that our hope is that the FCC map will be the main source of truth, but we do want to give states the flexibility to add their own data on top of it and make sure that they're also making that map better."

SINCLAIR SELLS MAJORITY STAKE OF STADIUM TO BULLS OWNER

Jerry Reinsdorf, the owner of the **Chicago White Sox** and the **Chicago Bulls**, is taking majority control of **Stadium** from **Sinclair Broadcast Group**. The news was first [reported](#) by *Front Office Sports*, which also noted that the regional rights contracts for the Bulls, White Sox and Chicago Blackhawks with **NBC Sports Chicago** expire in October 2024. Stadium has been jointly owned by **Silver Chalice**, an entity owned by Reinsdorf, and Sinclair and offers live and on-demand games as well as highlights, original programming and live studio programming in its lineup. It first launched in August 2017 and is now distributed by **YouTube TV**, **Fubo TV**, **Tubi**, **Freevee**, **The Roku Channel** and more. Sinclair told **CFX** the decision to sell the majority stake was unrelated to the bankruptcy of the Bally Sports RSNs. Instead, it was a decision that was tied to the property not generating enough audience interest to continue funding it.

DEBT CEILING WATCH

With *Biden* and House Speaker *Kevin McCarthy* reaching a deal on the debt ceiling, all eyes turn to the House. At press time, **House Rules Committee** members were considering whether to advance the proposal. If Congress passes it, there should be some market relief. What's more, there doesn't appear to be any big impact on the industry, with the \$42.45 billion in BEAD funding for broadband not part of any rescission. As expected, the compromise doesn't address re-funding the Affordability Connectivity Program, with uncertainty continuing over how long the program that provides \$30-\$75 per month for broadband to qualifying households. **New Street Research** noted the legislation could have a small impact on the Rural Utilities Fund, a small program aimed at rural areas with populations

of fewer than 20,000. "With awards ranging from \$50,000 to \$1 million, we doubt any publicly traded ISPs had a material stake in the program," the analysts said.

FCC TAKES STAND AGAINST PAYG FOR FAILURE TO MAKE PAYMENTS

The **FCC** proposed a fine of more than \$1.4 million Tuesday against **PayG** for failing to pay federal regulatory fees and others tied to the Universal Service Fund, Telecommunications Relay Service Fund and the North American Numbering Plan when they were due. PayG began offering interstate telecommunications services in 2011, and **USAC** referred it to the FCC's Enforcement Bureau in February 2021 for repeated failures to comply with USAC and provide it with annual worksheets used to determine the amount due in regulatory fees. It also, among other things, inaccurately reported revenues to USAC and the Telecommunications Relay Service, and when its USF payments were due, PayG either did not pay or underpaid its USF contributions for 2018-2021 by more than \$338,000.

RATINGS

"Succession" had its series finale Sunday night, and it reeled in 2.93 million viewers across **Max** and linear telecasts. That's up 68% compared to the Season 3 finale's mark of 1.7 million viewers. Currently, Season 4 averages 8.7 million viewers, which is a 1.5 million-viewer improvement from the previous season. Succession wasn't the only Max series finale Sunday night. "Barry" had a total final night viewing of 700,000 across Max and linear telecasts, up 13% from the show's Season 3 finale. – The 2023 **NBA** Playoffs continue to be a big boost to **Warner Bros. Discovery** networks' ratings. For the week of May 15, WBD nets had over a 50% share of viewing in the A18-49 category across ad-supported cable in primetime on May 17, 19 and 21. Each of those nights saw Games 1, 2 and 3, respectively, of the Heat-Celtics series on **TNT**. WBD held seven of the top 10 cable networks for May 21 as well as 13 of the top 20 spots among A25-54.

VERIZON 5G ULTRA WIDEBAND EXPANDS IN WISCONSIN

Verizon turned on its 5G Ultra Wideband network for residents across Wisconsin. Residents and businesses in Eau Claire, Appleton, Monticello, Gays Mills, Clayton, Hartford, Newburg, Fredonia, Oshkosh, Kenosha and Beloit have access to the faster speeds and greater capacity unlocked by the provider's recently-launched C-band spectrum.

CARRIAGE

Roku's Premium Subscription offering is adding **Fuse+** to its lineup. It's the first time that the **Fuse Media**-owned SVOD will be available on a third-party platform. Fuse+ comes with more than 500 hours of original scripted and unscripted programming, as well as documentaries and films tailored to culturally diverse viewers. Fuse+ is also available on **The Roku Channel** as well as **Amazon Fire TV**, **Apple TV**, **Google TV** and **Comcast's Xfinity** platform.

ONE MINISTRIES TRIES AGAIN

One Ministries has asked the **FCC Media Bureau** to reconsider its decision denying the broadcaster's request to have **Comcast** carry its religious TV station KQSL in Santa Rosa, CA. In April, the Bureau ruled against One Ministries' market modification petition that would have forced Comcast to add the station under must carry rules. In its petition filed last week, One Ministries argues the Media Bureau failed to give proper weight to the "significant" amount of programming on KQSL directed at Santa Rosa and that it discounted KQSL's historical carriage given the combination of carriage of the station in Santa Rosa by another MVPD and its carriage by Comcast itself in adjacent communities.

WGA ASKS COMCAST SHAREHOLDERS TO VOTE NO ON COMP

WGA West President *Meredith Stiehm* has sent a letter to **Comcast** shareholders asking them to vote against the company's proposal for approval of executive compensation. Its annual shareholder meeting is on June 7, and Stiehm argued that if the company could afford to spend \$130 million on executive compensation last year, it can afford to pay the estimated \$34 million that writers are asking for in contract improvements that would put an end to the ongoing strike. Since May 2, WGA's strike has disrupted production on several **NBCU** series, including "Law & Order," and the disruption to NBC's broadcast lineup could also put strain on **Peacock** due to the delay in the addition of new library content. "This disruption of content creation is of particular concern given Comcast's plans to start charging Xfinity users for Peacock next month," the letter read. "A delay in the writing, production, and release of new original content may impact Comcast's ability to maintain existing Peacock viewers, some of whom, for the first time, will have to decide whether the service's content is worth paying for." Stiehm has issued a similar letter and challenge to **Netflix** shareholders.

DOING GOOD

MACTA announced the winners of its 2023 Weary Scholarship: *Kai King* from Illinois, *Tanner Kohlrus* from Kansas and *Claire Summers* from Missouri. The three recipients

received a \$3,000 scholarship that's awarded annually to help academically oriented students pursue a college education. The scholarship is available to employees in the telecommunications industry, their spouses and children in the MACTA region.

PROGRAMMING

Bret Baier will have moderator duties for the third part of **Fox News'** "The Senate Project" series, which will feature Sens. *Joni Ernst* (R-IA) and *Jeanne Shaheen* (D-NH). The forum will stream commercial-free June 12 at 11am on **Fox Nation** and will air on Fox News on June 18 at 10pm. – **HGTV** greenlit another "Cheap Old Houses" series featuring *Ethan* and *Elizabeth Finkelstein*. It'll debut in spring 2024 with an initial eight-episode first season. The show will follow the Finkelsteins guiding New England area residents through the home buying process. – **MSG Networks** will air live coverage of the French Open from 8am-noon every day until Monday. All coverage will also be on **MSG GO**. – The NCAA Women's College World Series is coming down to the wire in Oklahoma City. The first part of the WCWS will be a five-day, double-elimination tournament with games aired across **ABC**, **ESPN**, **ESPN2** and **ESPN+**, starting with Alabama vs Tennessee on Thursday at noon on ESPN and ESPN+. Once the first round concludes, two teams will advance to a best-of-three title series that begins June 7 at 8pm. Each championship game will be on ESPN and ESPN+. – The stage is set for the Heat and Nuggets to battle for the **NBA** crown. **ABC** will have exclusive broadcast duties for the entire series, which begins Thursday at 8:30pm. "NBA Countdown" will precede games on ABC 30 minutes prior to tipoff. Coinciding with the games will be "NBA in Stephen A's World," which makes its NBA Finals debut on **ESPN2** and **ESPN+**.

AT THE COMMISSION

The **FCC** is seeking nominations for membership on the Communications Equity and Diversity Council. The committee is tasked with making recommendations to the FCC on advancing equity in the provision of and access to digital communication services and products for all people of the United States. Nominations should be submitted by email to CEDC@fcc.gov by 11:59 PM ET, June 30.

PEOPLE

NCTA hired *Rikin Thakker* as CTO and Sr. VP, Technology. He joins from the **Wireless Infrastructure Association** where he was also CTO, having been involved in 5G deployment, spectrum allocation, broadband workforce development and more. Thakker is also currently on the **FCC's** Technology Advisory Council and **NTIA's** Commerce Spectrum Management Advisory Committee.