

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Open The Band: Congress OKs 2.5 GHz Licenses for T-Mobile

T-Mobile had something to cheer about late Monday when the House passed a bill instructing the **FCC** to award the mobile operator the 2.5 GHz spectrum licenses it won in an auction last year. The Senate has already passed an identical version of the bill, so T-Mobile shouldn't have to wait long for the President's signature.

The saga around the 2.5 GHz spectrum has been ongoing since T-Mobile spent \$304 million on more than 7,000 licenses to support its 5G network deployment in an FCC auction that wrapped in August 2022. It was still waiting to gain access to the spectrum when the FCC lost its spectrum auction authority in March 2023. There were some that believed that the Commission still had the authority to either grant the licenses or issue T-Mobile special temporary authority to access the spectrum, but FCC Chair *Jessica Rosenworcel* was reluctant as the agency did not have express permission to do so without that spectrum auction authority.

"While she might have hoped that taking that position might have resulted in Congress reauthorizing the FCC auction authority, instead it resulted in T-Mobile convincing Congress to pass a short law requiring the FCC to grant the licenses," **New Street Research** wrote in a note.

The firm believes the spectrum opens more in-home broadband opportunities for T-Mobile, making the news a negative not only for **AT&T** and **Verizon**, but likely for **Charter** and **Comcast** as well. It also noted that T-Mobile has already built out the towers and radios it needs to put the spectrum to work,

so the releasing of the licenses should have an immediate impact on the company's operational performance.

T-Mobile CEO *Mike Sievert* stopped by UBS' Global Media & Communications Conference last week to talk about, among other things, the carrier's spectrum strategy and where the 2.5 GHz licenses fit into its network plans.

"Virtually, everywhere you go, we're able to offer multiple carrier aggregation. Your phone is simultaneously attaching to the 600 MHz, the 2.5 GHz, the rest of our midband spectrum, and this is incredibly powerful. It's a standalone 5G capability because what it does is it essentially increases the ring from each one of our towers, and that's really important for our overall competitiveness," he said. "In general, with that carrier aggregation, the uplink is provided by the lowband and the downlink is provided by the midband. So it's really important that we have adequate supply of both to be able to continue this incredible advantage that we have on the network side."

Analysts have long seen T-Mobile as the prize horse among the traditional wireless players for its network advantage and its value pricing, and **MoffettNathanson** believes it can achieve significant share gains in the near future.

"T-Mobile enjoys both a time-to-market advantage in 5G—with what are currently deeper mid-band spectrum holdings than either Verizon or AT&T—and a lasting coverage advantage that stems from the lower frequency of T-Mobile's core mid-band spectrum holdings (at 2.5 GHz versus Verizon's and AT&T's 3.7 GHz C-Band)," it said in a note last month in response to T-Mobile's 3Q23 earnings call.



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## XUMO STREAM BOX AVAILABLE TO XFINITY CUSTOMERS

Charter's Spectrum customers started exploring the world of Xumo in October, and now Comcast's subscribers will get their turn. Starting Tuesday, Xfinity internet customers will be able to request a Xumo Stream Box at no additional monthly cost. Mediacom is still expected to be the next to launch the box.

## FCC REAFFIRMS REJECTION OF STARLINK'S RDOF BID

The FCC voted 3-2 to reaffirm a Wireline Competition Bureau decision to deny Starlink's long-form application for more than \$885 million in RDOF subsidies. The bureau made its decision against the satellite provider in August 2022, arguing that Starlink had not shown that it would be able to deploy a network of the scope, scale and size required to serve the locations across the 35 states for which it was a winning bidder. In the Order on Review released Tuesday, the Commission said Starlink had failed to respond to the bureau on multiple occasions when it reached out in regard to specific questions and concerns with its long-form application and that the satellite provider offered no evidence that it would be able to meet RDOF's 2025 buildout obligations. "In addition, there were no other relevant LEO networks offering widespread service in the United States to verify Starlink's claims that it would be able to meet the Commission's requirements," the order said. Commissioners *Brendan Carr* and *Nathan Simington* released separate statements with Carr arguing that the agency is holding Starlink up to a standard it has made up on the fly. "I am not aware of any other circumstance in which the FCC has looked at current speed benchmarks to determine whether an awardee is reasonably capable of meeting a speed benchmark that kicks in years down the road," Carr said. "Indeed, if the FCC were to apply this novel Starlink speed test standard to any of the other 2020 awardees, it would show that those entities are not reasonably capable of meeting their 2025 obligations either because they have not built out to those areas yet."

## GOOGLE FIBER GOES 20 GIG

Google Fiber is pushing speed limits once again, announcing plans to make available 20 Gig + WiFi 7 plans. Head of Product *Nick Saporito* revealed the news in a Tuesday blog post, setting the price for the new plan at \$250/month plus applicable taxes and fees. "At \$250, it's a lot of speed for that price, and we know that it will enable innovators who want to be able to push what's possible to truly get to work," he wrote. Residents of Kansas City, North Carolina's Triangle

Region, Arizona and Iowa will be the first to gain access to the new speeds. As Google Fiber continues to roll out Nokia's 25G PON across its network, it expects to open invitations in other areas. Installations are expected to begin in 1Q24.

## SPARKLIGHT'S NEW ACP EFFORT

Despite the fate of the Affordable Connectivity Program hanging in the balance, Sparklight is rolling out a new free internet plan for ACP-qualifying households. Eligible customers can sign up for the plan that entails 100 Mbps download speeds, unlimited data and a modem—all for free when an ACP credit is applied. The ACP's future remains foggy, though, with funding projected to run out in April. The Biden administration submitted a request for supplemental funds in October, but Congress has yet to make any concrete moves to preserve the program's outlook.

## NETFLIX INTRODUCES BIENNIAL VIEWERSHIP REPORT

Netflix is starting to peel back the curtain on some of its viewership data. The streamer announced a new "What We Watched: A Netflix Engagement Report," which displays certain details on 99% of all viewing on Netflix (more than 18,000 titles). The self-published report will be released twice a year and show hours viewed for every title that's watched for over 50,000 hours, the premiere date for any Netflix TV series or film and whether the title was available globally. While different from Netflix's weekly Top 10 and Most Popular lists—which include account run times and premiere dates—the streamer believes the report will provide creators and the industry "deeper insights into our audiences, and what resonates with them." In the report's first edition, which accounts for hours viewed between January and June 2023, Season 1 of "The Night Agent" led with 812.1 million hours viewed. The second season of "Ginny & Georgia" followed with 665.1 million and Season 1 of "The Glory" at 622.8 million. The report also found that 30% of all viewing came from non-English programming.

## RATINGS

It was another week where Fox News swept the primetime and total-day ratings among cable networks. It led the prime category with 1.83 million viewers as ESPN loomed in second with 1.6 million. MSNBC followed with 1.21 million and Hallmark Channel at 1.16 million thanks to continued holiday programming. TNT checked in at No. 5 at 816,000 after the NBA In-Season Tournament wrapped up Saturday. Fox News' total-day mark came in at 1.19 million. MSNBC had 779,000

while ESPN and Hallmark Channel recorded 666,000 and 664,000, respectively. **CNN** came in at 427,000 viewers. – **NBC Sports** had its largest streaming audience ever for a regular-season **NFL** game Sunday. The Cowboys' 33-13 win over the Eagles scored an average minute audience of 2.3 million viewers across **Peacock**, NBC Sports Digital platforms and NFL Digital platforms. The broadcast on **NBC** combined with Peacock recorded 26.3 million viewers, peaking at 29.9 million in the 9:15-9:30pm window. That's good for the most-watched December Sunday Night Football game since 2016.

## CARRIAGE

The ad-free tier of **Max** is now available on **YouTube's** Primetime Channels in the U.S. Customers can access programming from **Warner Bros. Discovery** networks including **HBO**, **TLC**, **Food Network** and **Cartoon Network** in addition to Warner Bros. Pictures films. Max subscribers will also be able to view **CNN Max** as well as live video and on-demand content from the **Bleacher Report Sports Add-On** for a limited time. – **Tubi** is launching 10 new **Warner Bros. Discovery**-branded FAST channels as the two expand their partnership. The move includes bringing DC Super Hero films to the streamer, including "Wonder Woman," "Aquaman," "The Batman" and "Black Adam." New WBD FAST channels include **Warner Bros. TV Chasing Criminals**, **Warner Bros. TV In the Garage** and **Warner Bros. TV The FBI**. – **Philo** is also adding 10 channels to its platform. **EarthxTV** and **Military History** will be added to its base package. The remaining eight—**Mythical 24/7**, **Moviesphere**, **Outersphere**, **Hersphere**, **Ebony TV**, **Nashville**, **Are We There Yet** and **Anger Management**—will join **Philo's** lineup as FAST channels.

## FCC ADOPTS LPTV ITEM

The **FCC** will have one less item to tackle during tomorrow's Open Meeting, with the agency going ahead and adopting rules to implement the Low Power Protection Act. Congress enacted it on Jan 5. The law gives certain low power broadcast stations a limited window of opportunity to apply for primary spectrum use status as Class A television stations. In the order published Tuesday, the FCC largely adopted proposals from its NPRM, including that stations have a one-year period to apply for Class A status, translator stations are unlikely to satisfy the eligibility requirements and that LPTV stations that had not completed their digital transitions prior to the beginning of the eligibility period are not eligible to apply for Class A designation. One change-up from the NPRM is that the FCC concluded stations will not be required to continue to comply with the 95,000 TV household threshold if the population in a station's DMA later exceeds that amount for reasons beyond its control. Such reasons include population growth or a change in DMA boundaries or a merger of DMAs. Items still on tomorrow's meeting agenda include an NPRM that proposes eliminating cable and satellite fees for early termination of a contract.

## MACHINEQ, SPOTTA COLLAB TO COMBAT BEDBUGS

**Comcast's** IoT connectivity and solutions company **MachineQ** and the insect monitoring service **Spotta** are joining forces to make sure the bedbugs don't bite. The two created a solution designed for hoteliers to detect bedbugs before they reach a problematic level. Spotta's Bed Pod sensors will be placed underneath mattresses before using odorless pheromones to lure in bugs. If one is detected, Spotty's AI detection system uses a camera to analyze a photo before sending an image with the time and location to the cloud using MachineQ's network. That information is then sent to hotel employees who can act accordingly before the bugs become widespread.

## FCC'S STARKS WANTS TO COLLECT BROADCAST WORKFORCE DATA

**FCC** Commissioner *Geoffrey Starks* wants the agency to once again start collecting annual employment reports from broadcasters to better understand the media workforce. In remarks released Monday, he argued that without a reliable window into the workplace, the Commission will never be able to reliably say that broadcasters are providing programming that reflects their stations' local communities. "In 2021, we resurrected the docket, beginning the long-overdue work of assessing and addressing comments regarding our statutory duty to collect workforce diversity data. The comments are in. The record is complete," he said. "It has been more than 20 years since the Commission paused its collection of this data, but it is time, in fact past time, for us to resume our responsibility."

## PEOPLE

**BritBox International** made a pair of appointments to its senior leadership in addition to the creation of a Global Editorial team. It's making *Nimesh Kataria* its CFO starting in April. He arrives from **Warner Bros. Discovery**, where he served as GVP, Finance, International Sport. *Alana McGaughey* is joining as VP, Global PR & Communications. McGaughey was most recently at **Netflix**. The new Global Editorial team will be based in London, New York and Sydney. **BritBox GM**, North America *Robert Schildhouse* will add editorial and programming strategy to his purview as Global Group Editorial. *Kerry Ball* will enter a new position of Chief Commercial & Strategy Officer. Her previous responsibilities in the company's acquisitions will move to Schildhouse and the editorial team. – **Google Fiber** tapped *John Keib* to the newly created position of Chief Technology & Product Officer. He'll oversee product, engineering and supply chain efforts as well as GFiber Labs projects. Keib has been with Google Fiber since 2019 where he was originally VP, Product. He also spent time as EVP/COO, Residential Services for **Time Warner** and had stints at **DirecTV** and **Thompson Media**.