

FCC Chairman Warns of 'Looming Spectrum Crisis'

ELLIOT SPAGAT, AP Business Writer
SAN DIEGO (AP) - The chairman of the Federal Communications Commission warned Wednesday of "a looming spectrum crisis" if the government fails to find ways to come up with more bandwidth for mobile devices.

Julius Genachowski said the government is tripling the amount of spectrum available for commercial uses. The problem is that many industry experts predict wireless traffic will increase 30 times because of online video and other bandwidth-heavy applications.

Genachowski promised "a full-throated, strategic look" at how to close that gap between demand and supply, declaring it one of the FCC's highest priorities. The review will consider reallocating existing spectrum now used for other purposes, and encouraging development of new technologies that use spectrum more efficiently. He said the FCC is open to ideas.

The chairman asked industry executives to imagine a scenario when the number of computers with mobile broadband quadruples, or when every mobile phone user upgrades to an iPhone, Palm Pre, BlackBerry Tour or other bandwidth-hungry device.

"I believe that the biggest threat to the future of mobile in America is the looming spectrum crisis," he said in a speech to industry trade group CTIA-The Wireless Association.

The FCC has raised tens of billions of dollars by auctioning off airwaves to the nation's big wireless carriers to provide mobile broadband access and wireless

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applications, which often require large amounts of bandwidth.

The agency has also opened up some of the nation's airwaves for unlicensed uses such as Wi-Fi connections. Last year, it voted to allow the use of fallow portions of television airwaves known as "white spaces" to deliver wireless broadband services.

Still, Genachowski said lots more spectrum is needed. He said there were "no easy pickings" to strip spectrum used for other purposes for use in mobile devices but that there was no choice.

CTIA has called on the agency to move quickly to make more wireless spectrum available. The public safety community is also hungry for additional spectrum to build wireless networks that can allow police officers, fire fighters, medical workers and other first responders to talk with each other in emergencies.

Genachowski also renewed praise for AT&T Inc.'s decision announced Tuesday to let iPhone owners to use Internet calling services on its wireless network. The phone giant, the exclusive wireless provider for Apple Inc.'s iPhone, had until now allowed Internet calling services to work on the popular device only over Wi-Fi connections.

Genachowski, one of three Democrats on the five-member FCC, gave no indication that AT&T's move would soften his desire for rules to prohibit broadband providers from favoring or discriminating against certain types of Internet traffic flowing over their lines. The FCC is scheduled to vote on regulations this month.

"The goal of the proceeding will be to develop sensible rules of the road — rules clear enough to provide predictability and certainty and flexible enough to

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anticipate and welcome ongoing technological evolution," he said.

A spokeswoman for Genachowski, Jen Howard, said the FCC chairman wants the rules to apply to the entire industry. AT&T's decision is "one provider and one service," she said.

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