

FCC seeks input on rules for online services

(AP) -- Federal regulators are seeking public input on what rules should apply to wireless Internet connections and specialized services that aren't part of the Internet but are delivered over broadband connections.

The move by the Federal Communications Commission marks the next step in the agency's effort to adopt so-called "network neutrality" rules requiring broadband providers to give equal treatment to all traffic flowing over their lines.

The commission faces fierce resistance from the big phone and cable companies, which insist they should be allowed to operate their systems the way they want. Phone companies are particularly opposed to applying net neutrality rules to wireless networks, which have more capacity constraints than wired systems.

They also fear that strict net neutrality rules would prevent them from charging a premium for specialized services - often called "managed services" - a category that includes AT&T Inc.'s U-Verse video service and could expand to include online gaming, remote medical monitoring and even power grid controls. After spending billions of dollars on their systems, broadband providers say they should be able to earn a healthy return on their massive investments.

The FCC's latest move comes several weeks after Verizon Communications Inc. and Google Inc. offered their own policy proposal to try to find a middle ground on net neutrality. Their plan would prohibit phone and cable companies from slowing down, blocking or charging to prioritize Internet traffic traveling over their regular broadband lines. But it would allow broadband providers to charge extra for services like U-Verse that are separate from the public Internet.

The Verizon-Google plan also would exempt wireless services from net neutrality rules.

Several public interest groups have denounced the plan, saying it does not do nearly enough to protect an open Internet. They say strong net neutrality rules are needed to prevent phone and cable companies from abusing their control over high-speed Internet access to become online gatekeepers.

Source URL (retrieved on 03/09/2014 - 12:28am):

<http://www.ecnmag.com/news/2010/09/fcc-seeks-input-rules-online-services>