

FCC opens up unused TV signals for broadband

September 23 2010, By JOELLE TESSLER , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- The Federal Communications Commission is opening up unused airwaves between television channels for wireless broadband networks that will be more powerful and can reach farther than today's Wi-Fi hotspots.

The five-member FCC voted unanimously Thursday to allow the use of so-called "white spaces" in the broadcast TV spectrum to deliver broadband connections that can function like Wi-Fi networks on steroids. The agency is calling the new technology "super Wi-Fi" and hopes to see devices with the technology start to appear within a year.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski said white spaces networks will serve as "a powerful platform for innovation," driving billions in industry investment.

Leading technology companies, including Google Inc., Microsoft Corp. and Dell Inc., are eager to develop the market. They say television white spaces are ideally suited for broadband because they are able to penetrate walls, have plenty of capacity and can travel several miles.

Just like the spectrum used by Wi-Fi, white spaces will be available to all users for free, with no license required. The FCC hopes they will help ease strain on the nation's increasingly crowded airwaves as more consumers go online using laptops and data-hungry smart phones.

Computer maker Dell, for one, envisions white spaces networks that will

be able to send streaming video and other multimedia content to electronic devices around the home, deliver broadband to rural areas that currently lack high-speed Internet access and create "large-scale hot spots."

"By opening this broadcast spectrum for Internet use, the commission is helping to unleash a whole new class of mobile wireless broadband services with applications that are nearly limitless," Dell Chairman and Chief Executive Michael Dell said in a statement.

Although the FCC first voted to allow the use of white spaces for broadband nearly two years ago, the plan ran into serious opposition from television broadcasters worried about interference with their over-the-air signals. Wireless microphone manufacturers and users - including churches, theatres, karaoke bars and all types of performers - raised similar concerns.

Thursday's vote mandates the creation of a database with a map of TV channels across the country as well as big wireless microphone users, such as Broadway theaters and sports leagues. White spaces networks and devices would be required to determine their own location and then consult the database to find vacant frequencies to use. The FCC is also setting aside at least two channels for minor users of wireless microphones.

David Donovan, president of the Association for Maximum Service Television, said the group will work with the FCC to develop the technical protections to safeguard television signals.

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