

US launches effort to ease 'spectrum crunch'

September 29 2012, by Rob Lever



Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Julius Genachowski speaks at a news conference in April 2012. US regulators voted Friday to begin a process to reallocate some of the broadcast spectrum to meet surging demand from smartphones, tablets and other devices that use the wireless Internet.

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The [Federal Communications Commission](#) formally approved the plan to launch so-called incentive auctions, which will allow broadcasters to sell off some of their spectrum rights to mobile broadband operators starting in 2014.

"This is a big deal," [FCC chairman](#) Julius Genachowski said.

"Today, the US becomes the first nation in the world to launch incentive auctions" for mobile broadband, he said, adding that this would make available portions of prime "beachfront spectrum" for these uses.

The move comes with the United States and other nations bracing for a data crunch from the surging use of smartphones, tablets and other [mobile devices](#), clogging the [radio spectrum](#) allocated for mobile broadband.

Officials say that as mobile broadband is surging, [broadcasters](#) need less spectrum because fewer viewers watch over-the-air television.

The concept is part of the National Broadband Plan to spur [wireless Internet](#), and the ideas are embraced in legislation that was signed into law in February 2012, the [FCC](#) noted.

The FCC said action is needed to avert a crunch that will slow down or disconnect mobile devices.

"Today's smartphones use 35 times more spectrum than traditional cell phones, and tablets use 121 times as much spectrum," the FCC statement said.

"This consumer demand puts a tremendous strain on the nation's invisible infrastructure in ways that require innovative new approaches to spectrum policy in order to spur continued [economic growth](#), and help maintain America's global leadership in mobile."

The statement said the auctions would "unleash a wave of economic innovation opportunities" for the United States while relying on market forces to determine the use of spectrum.

"This incentive auction is expected to deliver enormous benefits for the

American people and the US economy," the statement said.

"The mobile apps economy barely existed in 2009 but today, it supports nearly 500,000 jobs. The wireless industry contributes about \$150 billion annually to US GDP and that number is growing."

A statement from the CTIA-The Wireless Association, which represents mobile carriers, hailed the FCC move.

The action is "an important step toward alleviating the looming spectrum crisis that we've been warning policymakers about for the last three years," said CTIA president and chief executive Steve Largent.

"Since spectrum is a finite resource, we're pleased the Commission has begun the process of establishing the rules that will fulfill the goals of the recently adopted, bipartisan spectrum legislation," he said.

But Largent added it is crucial not to allow the process to get bogged down.

"In order to maintain our global leadership in the mobile ecosystem, we must ensure that this spectrum is brought to market more quickly than the almost 10 years it took to bring the last two spectrum blocks to market," he said.

The European Union is mulling a similar effort to reallocate spectrum.

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