

Key facts on US 'open Internet' regulation

February 26 2015

A landmark ruling by the US Federal Communications Commission seeks to enshrine the notion of an "open Internet," or "net neutrality." Here are key points:

What is net neutrality and why is it needed?

Backers of the plan say powerful [broadband providers](#) such as AT&T and Verizon have the ability to block or favor one online service over another for commercial reasons. Yelp or Netflix, for example, could be slowed or blocked if the carrier is supporting a rival service.

The FCC plan thus bars the practice of blocking, throttling or "paid prioritization" that is putting favored services in a faster lane. All Internet traffic must be treated as equal.

How will the FCC enforce the plan?

The FCC's 2010 rules were struck down last year by a federal court that said it lacked the authority to regulate [broadband](#) carriers because they were not "common carriers" under telecommunications law.

The new plan instead reclassifies broadband Internet—both fixed and mobile—as a telecom service under a 1934 law, but stops short of using provisions on taxes and rate regulation.

What does the plan have to do with freedom of online

speech?

According to [net neutrality](#) proponents, a lack of clear regulations could allow Internet firms to censor or block sites or apps for any reason. Critics however say these practices are rare, and that the FCC is creating a new regulatory morass that puts the government in charge.

What does this mean for investment?

Cable and telecom industry groups say the move will stifle investment, making it harder for carriers to recoup their costs by charging some services for premium access. Others point out that the rules could encourage investment in new online services and apps.

Is this the final word on the plan?

No. the FCC needs to respond to dissenting commissioners and then publish the plan in the federal register, which could take several months. Broadband firms are likely to file fresh court challenges, and Congress could override or nullify the plan.

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Citation: Key facts on US 'open Internet' regulation (2015, February 26) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-key-facts-internet.html>

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