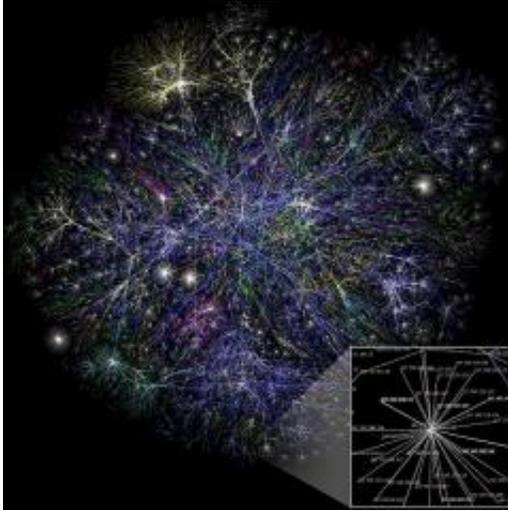


Six net neutrality principles proposed

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Partial map of the Internet based on the January 15, 2005 data found on opte.org. Each line is drawn between two nodes, representing two IP addresses. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the U.S. voted last week to start a process to formulate rules that could force Internet Service Providers (ISPs) to uphold six principles that would preserve net neutrality, or what the FCC terms "open Internet".

FCC Chairman, Julius Genachowski, said rules on net neutrality are necessary to protect innovations on the Internet and to preserve the kind of openness that has allowed the Internet to flourish. He said there have been situations in which ISPs have degraded data streams or even blocked access to lawful applications, and fair rules are necessary to

avoid the potentially damaging consequences of having the openness of the Internet diminished.

Opponents, on the other hand, say the Internet has grown so rapidly *because of* the lack of rules and regulations, and that rules are not needed. Some opponents have also suggested that introducing rules could set a precedent for other countries to introduce regulations covering Internet use.

The principles suggested are that ISPs should allow users to:

1. send and receive all lawful content
2. use all lawful services and applications
3. use all lawful devices that do not damage the network
4. access all network, service, content and application providers

The principles will also ensure ISPs:

5. do not discriminate against lawful content, services, applications, or devices
6. reveal any practices that could limit the previous five principles

The rules have been sought by many large Internet companies such as [Google](#), [Facebook](#) and Amazon.com, many consumer advocacy groups such as Free Press and Public Knowledge, many members of the FCC, and Internet pioneers like David Reed and Vint Cerf. Supporters say that without rules ISPs will change their price structures to tiered systems with the highest level services out of the financial reach of many entrepreneurs wishing to start their own Internet businesses. Those in favor of rules are also worried that without them some applications, such as VoIP, could become unaffordable or could even be banned for many people, thus reducing their voice call options.

Opponents to proposed net neutrality rules include Internet providers such as Verizon and AT & T, who say the rules would prevent them charging more for premium services, and the higher charges provide the incentive for the investment in network upgrades to boost performance. The result could be either more expensive rates across the board, or paying for Internet traffic by the byte.

The proposed FCC rules would also have effects on businesses, especially those with a well-developed Internet presence. Higher flat rates would push up Internet access costs for business and customers alike, and could result in a decrease in demand for online services because of their increased expense. This could have especially serious effects on businesses such as websites selling high definition video downloads.

If the FCC's six principles are adopted the effects on home users could be higher monthly charges or higher costs for downloads, but they would still be able to make phone calls using Internet services such as Skype, which would not be blocked. If the rules are not adopted, ISPs are likely to limit bandwidth and VoIP (especially as some large ISPs are also voice carriers, which are threatened by online phone services).

Republican Senator John McCain (Ariz), is opposed to the rules, and has introduced a bill to block them, while President Barack Obama has placed [net neutrality](#) rules as among his top priorities. A vote on the proposed rules will take place in 2010.

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