

# US revising Internet rules after public backlash

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Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler is broadening the scope of his proposed open Internet rules and suggesting tougher standards for Internet providers who wish to create paid priority fast lanes on their networks.

According to an FCC official, Wheeler made revisions after the commission received 35,000 public comments —many of them expressing outrage. The FCC first briefed reporters on the proposed rules last month.

Wheeler, a Democrat, also tweaked his proposal after the five-member commission's two other Democrats expressed concern.

"The new draft clearly reflects public input the commission has received," the FCC official said in a statement. "The draft is explicit that the goal is to find the best approach to ensure the Internet remains open and prevent any practices that threaten it."

Among the additions is a provision that would "presume" it to be illegal for an Internet provider to prioritize the traffic of an affiliated service—for example, it would be considered illegal if Comcast Corp. tried to give faster treatment to video streams of its subsidiary network, NBC.

However, an Internet service provider would be allowed to challenge that "presumption," the official said.

In the revised proposal, Wheeler also seeks comment on the possibility of treating broadband providers as so-called "common carriers" like telephone companies, which are subject to greater regulation than Internet providers, under Title II of the Communications Act of 1934.

The FCC and Wheeler have so far avoided subjecting cable and telecoms companies to Title II treatment, although Wheeler has said the option remains on the table. In the new proposal, he entertains more discussion on it than his initial proposal did.

The proposal also asks whether all paid-priority fast lanes should be banned outright. The previous version only asks if some paid-priority services should be banned.

Wheeler has faced a torrent of criticism after the earlier proposal made it appear as if he was overhauling the principle of "network neutrality," which says Internet service providers should not be allowed to discriminate against Web traffic depending on its source.

Such discrimination could result if a phone company like AT&T slowed down traffic from phone services like Skype, or if Comcast slowed Netflix video speeds to favor its own online video service, Xfinity.

The FCC will hold a preliminary vote on the rules Thursday before submitting them for formal public input. Wheeler aims to have a set of rules in place by year's end. An earlier set of rules from 2010 was struck down by an appeals court in January after Verizon challenged them.

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