

ANALYST UPDATE

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MARCH 16, 2010 - FCC Releases Its National Plan for Broadband

Today, the Federal Communications Commission delivered to Congress a National Broadband Plan setting an ambitious agenda for connecting all corners of the nation while transforming the economy and society with the communications network of the future -- robust, affordable Internet.

"The National Broadband Plan is a 21st century roadmap to spur economic growth and investment, create jobs, educate our children, protect our citizens, and engage in our democracy," said Chairman Julius Genachowski. "It's an action plan, and action is necessary to meet the challenges of global competitiveness, and harness the power of broadband to help address so many vital national issues."

"In every era, America must confront the challenge of connecting the nation anew," said Blair Levin, Executive Director of the Omnibus Broadband Initiative at the FCC. "Above all else, the plan is a call to action to meet that challenge for our era. If we meet it, we will have networks, devices, and applications that create new solutions to seemingly intractable problems."

Closing Broadband Gaps

Titled "Connecting America: The National Broadband Plan," the Plan found that while broadband access and use have increased over the past decade, the nation must do much more to connect all individuals and the economy to broadband's transformative benefits. Nearly 100 million Americans lack broadband at home today, and 14 million Americans do not have access to broadband even if they want it. Only 42 percent of people with disabilities use broadband at home, while as few as 5 percent of people living on Tribal lands have access. Meanwhile, the cost of digital exclusion for the student unable to access the Internet to complete a homework assignment, or for the unemployed worker who can't search for a job online, continues to grow.

Other gaps threaten America's global competitiveness. A looming shortage of wireless spectrum could impede U.S. innovation and leadership in popular wireless mobile broadband services. More useful applications, devices, and content are needed to create value for consumers. And the nation has failed to harness broadband's power to transform delivery of government services, health care, education, public safety, energy conservation, economic development, and other national priorities.

America's 2020 Broadband Vision

The Plan's call for action over the next decade includes the following goals and recommendations:

- Connect 100 million households to affordable 100-megabits-per-second service, building the world's largest market of high-speed broadband users and ensuring that new jobs and businesses are created in America.
- Affordable access in every American community to ultra-high-speed broadband of at least 1 gigabit per second at anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals, and military installations so that America is hosting the experiments that produce tomorrow's ideas and industries.
- Ensure that the United States is leading the world in mobile innovation by making 500 megahertz of spectrum newly available for licensed and unlicensed use.

- Move our adoption rates from roughly 65 percent to more than 90 percent and make sure that every child in America is digitally literate by the time he or she leaves high school.
- Bring affordable broadband to rural communities, schools, libraries, and vulnerable populations by transitioning existing Universal Service Fund support from yesterday's analog technologies to tomorrow's digital infrastructure.

- Promote competition across the broadband ecosystem by ensuring greater transparency, removing barriers to entry, and conducting market-based analysis with quality data on price, speed, and availability.
- Enhance the safety of the American people by providing every first responder with access to a nationwide, wireless, interoperable public safety network.

The Plan was mandated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in February 2009 and produced by an FCC task force that set new precedents for government openness, transparency, and rigor. Information for the plan was gathered in 36 public workshops, 9 field hearing, and 31 public notices that produced 75,000 pages of public comments. The debate went online with 131 blogposts that triggered 1,489 comments; 181 ideas on IdeaScale garnering 6,100 votes; 69,500 views on YouTube; and 335,000 Twitter followers. The task force augmented this voluminous record with independent research and data-gathering.