

# High-Speed Internet Alternatives May Be Coming Soon

## FCC Auction of Public Airwaves Expected to Fetch Billions of Dollars

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June 14, 2007 Originally appeared as [High Speed Alternatives May Be Coming Soon](#) [2] in ABC News

Later this year, federal regulators will have the rare opportunity to foster the creation of new, competitive alternatives for high-speed Internet service.

Public interest advocates and technologists are urging the government to choose a course that gives Americans a robust new choice in an increasingly consolidated market and helps preserve the essential openness and neutrality of the Internet.

No later than January 2008, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) will begin auctioning off the portion of the public airwaves that is being returned by broadcasters as part of their mandatory transition from analog to digital broadcasts. On the block will be 60 megahertz (MHz) of airwave "spectrum" that is expected to fetch tens of billions of dollars from bidders.

Airwaves are a unique public resource. Finite and extremely valuable, they are irreplaceable cornerstones of many day-to-day activities. Spectrum is fundamental to the operation of garage-door openers, microwaves, radios, cell phones, Wi-Fi hotspots and a range of other devices from the mundane to the cutting edge.

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Making the spectrum up for auction even more valuable are characteristics -- not present in other bands -- that allow these airwaves to easily pass through walls and reach locations with no direct "line of sight" between transmitter and receiver. Intense interest from a broad range of bidders is guaranteed when the FCC auction gets under way.

Amid this crush of commercial interest, a variety of Internet and public interest advocates are asking that the FCC set aside a substantial portion of these airwaves for bidders who are seeking to create new, open alternatives for broadband Internet service

(<http://www.cdt.org/speech/net-neutrality/20070523fcc-spectrum.pdf> [3]). At least one potential commercial bidder -- Frontline Wireless -- has already offered a proposal to do just that.

This auction comes at a critical time for the Internet. In a consolidating telecommunications market, many Americans have only one option for broadband Internet access, while others are lucky to have two.

Compounding matters further is the looming debate over "Internet neutrality" in which major broadband providers have indicated that they may seek to charge content providers a premium for priority transmission over their networks.

Critics of this approach say that such a move would damage the fundamental openness and neutrality of the Internet, creating a two-tiered system in which deep-pocketed content providers enjoy fast, reliable service to the detriment of small and noncommercial online speakers.

Some lawmakers support legislation that would force broadband operators to continue offering neutral access to all content providers, but such legislation faces serious challenges, and it is fair to

say that the future of the open, neutral Internet remains uncertain.

Which is what makes creating a new broadband Internet alternative so compelling. Because the airwaves are not privately owned, and are provided under terms established by the FCC, the FCC could demand that any broadband Internet service created in the 700 MHz band offer truly neutral access to all content providers. Not only would this provide many Americans with a neutral alternative for Internet access -- in the event that wire-line and cable broadband operators move to discriminatory systems -- it would also put increased competitive pressure on those traditional operators to avoid the creation of any network that limits consumer choice.

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Technology companies, wireless entrepreneurs, and public interest advocates have also asked the FCC to ensure that some portion of the spectrum be reserved for use by broadband operators seeking to create a wholesale model. A single, wholesale provider of broadband spectrum could spawn scores of competing retail broadband operators around the country, further diversifying a broadband market badly in need of competition.

We have arrived at a unique moment in the history of the Internet. With a single stroke, the FCC has the opportunity to bolster the competition that spurs innovation in the digital age, and to ensure that Americans continue to have access to the neutral, open Internet on which we've all come to rely.

-- Read the full text of as [High Speed Alternatives May Be Coming Soon](#) [2] in ABC News

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