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December 21, 2017

Regarding Docket No. 17-258:

I am writing on behalf of MetaLINK Technologies, Inc. (MetaLINK) in response to the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) which seeks comments on the Commission's proposed changes to the established Priority Access License (PAL) Rules adopted in 2015.

MetaLINK is a rural regional fixed broadband provider with service offerings in Northwest Ohio, Northeast Indiana, and Southern Michigan. Founded in 1996 as a dial-up Internet service provider (ISP), over the years we have transitioned our network to provide broadband Internet via fixed wireless and today serve over 9,000 customers. What we need today is dedicated, affordable, renewable spectrum for small rural provider's and the offering of CBRS is a step in the right direction.

The problem that we have been facing in the unlicensed bands is coverage limitations and increased congestion which hinders the ability to serve everyone with the faster speeds that they are requesting. We had been using the existing 3.650-3.700 MHz band to little success until the beginning of 2016 when we made a conscious decision on our future based on industry news. Since then we have heavily invested in LTE with both time and money. We are excited with the CBRS band for what it will bring to our coverage which includes better coverage area, faster Internet speeds, and an enhanced quality of service. For our 2018 budget, we have plans to quadruple our LTE investments given that the decisions made to the PAL rules still permits CBRS to be a viable solution which is within our means.

While we have anxiously been awaiting the formal roll-out of the CBRS band and our future, it is shocking to know that the Commission is considering changes which may exclude us from utilizing the CBRS band. Though we knew that we were taking a risk by investing in and learning more about LTE until the CBRS band was officially approved, we were doing such for the consumers of our rural coverage area in order to quickly deploy the newest technology upon its final approval. Below are the comments which are of upmost importance to our ability to provide Internet services using CBRS.

Extending the PAL license terms from three to ten years

Our belief is that increasing the license terms will consequently increase the bid price. A higher bid price will exclude those providers that service rural community. Is this in the best interest of the American citizens or would more competition lead to better Internet service offerings? While a ten-year term seems to be extreme for a company of our size, we would be willing to a concession of **five years**.

Include an expectation of renewal in the term

From a competitive aspect, we would **not favor a renewal expectation, but** would be **in favor** of the bid holder having a **renewal credit** which would enable the incumbent to buy back the license at a fraction of the winning bid.



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Increasing the PAL geographic licensing area to stimulate additional investment, promote innovation, and encourage efficient use of spectrum resources

We are **highly opposed to increasing the rural PAL geographic area beyond the census tract**. Larger geographic licensing areas such as counties or PEA's will significantly increase the bid price which will exclude providers from bidding. Further, typically the winning bid of a geographic area will first service the area where they perceive to obtain or retain the greatest number of consumers. Thus, the "haves" will have more Internet available to them and the "have nots" will have a greater chance of still being unserved or underserved.

To make the point clear, while we are one of the largest fixed rural wireless broadband providers and have customers that reside in 5 PEA's, we do not service those urban areas where the majority of the consumers reside. I would venture to say that those focused on servicing urban areas may do the same by limiting their rural service offerings. Even more the reason why the geographic license area should remain at the census tract size so more consumers have a greater probability for more access to higher speeds.

Package bidding of the geographic licensing area

While we do not have a concern either way in the rural areas given that the geographic licensing area is the census block, this may be a **good approach for densely populated areas**.

Allow portioning and disaggregation of PALs on the secondary market

From our perspective, **this has not worked** well in the past. Typically, there is little interest to lease space unless the secondary market bidder is willing to pay an exorbitant amount. In this case, the primary bid holder is profitable and everyone else including the consumers have to live with higher cost.

Should the current rule limiting PAL holders to 40 megahertz in a given geographic area be changed or deleted

**No**, it is the right size to stimulate market competition while allowing providers to provide sufficient bandwidth to their customers. By leaving the rule as is guarantees that at least two PAL holders can reside in any one geographic area.

Again, to reiterate, we are opposed to several of the proposed changes and I feel comfortable in saying that the rural residence in our coverage area would agree. Customers need to have the choice of providers and the providers need to have the ability to affordably offer competitive services to enhance the broadband Internet experience in rural America. Please allow us the opportunity to provide these services by leaving the rules as is or tweaking with the recommendations above quickly and expeditiously. Then and only then will we be able to fully deploy CBRS to bridge the digital divide and bring the benefits of the Internet age to all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Todd Harpest".

Todd Harpest  
Regulatory Manager