



February 9, 2016

EX PARTE PRESENTATION

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Ex Parte Presentation in MB Docket No. 15-149, *Applications of Charter Communications, Inc., Time Warner Cable Inc., and Advance/Newhouse Partnership for Consent to Transfer Control of Licenses and Authorizations*

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Pursuant to Section 1.1206 of the Commission's rules, 47 C.F.R. § 1.1206, the Stop Mega Cable Coalition submits this letter summarizing the following meetings on February 5, 2016:

- A meeting with Philip Verveer, Senior Counselor to Chairman Wheeler; Gigi Sohn, Counselor to Chairman Wheeler; and Jessica Almond, Legal Advisor, Media, Public Safety, and Enforcement for Chairman Wheeler. The following members of the Stop Mega Cable Coalition were present: Todd O'Boyle, Common Cause; George Slover, Consumers Union; Jeff Blum, DISH; Alison Minea, DISH; Hadass Kogan, DISH; Casey Rae, Future of Music Coalition; Michael Calabrese, Open Technology Institute; Jill Canfield, NTCA; Josh Stager, Open Technology Institute; Meredith Rose, Public Knowledge; and Andy Schwartzman, Zoom Telephonics.¹
- A meeting with the following members of the Transaction Team: Bill Lake; Owen Kendler; Elizabeth McIntyre; Matt DelNero; Brendan Holland; Jim Bird; Emily Talaga; Susan Singer; Adam Copeland; Jessica Campbell; Joel Rabinovitz; Kiley Naas; Elizabeth Cuttner; Ali Zayas; Julie Saulnier; Ty Bream; Chris Clark; Mitali Shah; Mike Ray; Bakari Middleton (by telephone); and Peter Shroyer (by telephone). The following members of the Stop Mega Cable Coalition were present: Todd O'Boyle, Common Cause; George Slover, Consumers Union; Jeff Blum, DISH; Alison Minea, DISH; Hadass Kogan, DISH; Michael Calabrese, Open Technology Institute; Scott Lively, NTCA; Josh Stager, Open Technology Institute; John Bergmayer, Public Knowledge; and Andy Schwartzman, Zoom Telephonics.

¹ Daniel Schuman attended on behalf of Demand Progress; Kevin Rupy attended on behalf of USTelecom.



The Stop Mega Cable Coalition is a diverse group of public interest groups, media and telecommunications businesses, programmers, labor and other concerned parties² united in the belief that the merger of Charter Communications, Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks presents significant harms for consumers, competition and innovation. This transaction will produce a new cable and broadband giant – Mega Cable – that threatens the future of video distribution services provided by over-the-top (“OTT”) distributors, and smaller and new entrant MVPDs. During the meetings, members of the Coalition discussed the many harms that would result from this merger, including in the following key market segments:

Broadband. Mega Cable would be the dominant broadband provider in many of the country’s largest and most important geographic markets, including New York City, Los Angeles and Dallas-Ft Worth, among many others. In addition, Mega Cable and Comcast would control broadband access to the vast majority of American homes at speeds of 25 Mbps and above – at *least* 70% and possibly as high as 90%. Mega Cable and Comcast’s massive control of the high-speed broadband market would allow the companies to coordinate efforts to reduce competition from other streaming services, while raising prices for consumers. This concentration of the broadband market will allow two companies to control the fate of OTT services that rely on a robust high-speed broadband connection. Mega Cable and Comcast could coordinate their actions by simply responding to the other’s behavior. This could take the form of parallel action or even express agreements. These harms would be particularly acute for Mega Cable subscribers, given that approximately two-thirds of customers in the Mega Cable footprint will not have access to a competing broadband alternative at 25 Mbps and above.

Streaming Services. Mega Cable would have the means and incentive to harm established and emerging streaming services, to the benefit of its own service offerings. Mega Cable could limit consumer access to a stand-alone broadband service, or raise the price of stand-alone broadband in a way that favors its own bundle of services. Mega Cable could also discriminate against competing streaming services while treating its own content favorably.

Programming. Mega Cable will have the incentive and ability to coordinate efforts to starve out independent programmers. This could allow the entity to force independent, local and diverse voices to accept below-market terms, thus jeopardizing their viability. Or, Mega Cable could restrict the ability of third-party programmers to distribute their content on competing OTT platforms.

Mega Cable would also be able to leverage its dominance to prevent streaming or MVPD competitors from acquiring affiliated and unaffiliated must have programming, including RSNs, or ensure it acquires programming on more favorable rates and terms than competitors. Due to

² Current Coalition members include: Alliance for Community Media, beIN Sports, Cincinnati Bell, Common Cause, Consumers Union, DISH, FairPoint Communications, Future of Music Coalition, Greenlining Institute, ITTA, Media Alliance, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association, Open Technology Institute at New America, OpenMedia, Public Knowledge, The Rural Broadband Alliance, Sports Fans Coalition, Writers Guild of America, East, Writers Guild of America, West, and Zoom Telephonics.



its enlarged size post-transaction, Mega Cable would be able to enjoy discounts for programming and ensure that rivals get less favorable rates, terms and conditions for programming.

Broadband Modem Marketplace. Mega Cable would have the power to severely damage competing modem manufacturers and dramatically limit the equipment options available to consumers. Charter is one of the only cable providers that does not give customers the option of saving money by purchasing their own modem. Charter addresses this anticompetitive approach by claiming that it charges no “modem fees” when, in fact, the cost of the modem is bundled into a consumer’s bill. This practice inhibits Charter consumers from purchasing their own equipment. Charter has promised to extend this same anticompetitive practice from its own relatively small subscriber base to millions of Time Warner Cable and Bright House customers, potentially crippling the market for retail modem manufacturers and along with it, consumer choice.

Consumers. Mega Cable would compound ongoing price hikes, poor customer service and the lack of choice in the cable and broadband marketplaces. Charter, Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks boast some of the lowest customer satisfaction scores – not just in the cable industry, but *any* industry. In order to merge, Mega Cable would take on \$27 billion in new debt – about \$1,142 in debt for each customer – which could be reconciled by passing along these costs to consumers. Mega Cable will have every incentive to cut costs by further degrading customer service, limiting investment in new innovations and raising prices.

Members explained that all of the harms enumerated above would be exacerbated by coordinated action by Mega Cable and Comcast. The Coalition also provided the attached documents, which illustrate some of the many ways that Mega Cable could threaten competing OVD and MVPD services.

* * *

Charter’s proposed acquisition of Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks threatens serious harms for consumers, competition and innovation. The Stop Mega Cable Coalition urges the Commission to solve or prevent the harms presented by this transaction.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/
Stop Mega Cable Coalition

Enclosure

Cc: Philip Verveer



Gigi Sohn
Jessica Almond
Bill Lake
Owen Kendler
Elizabeth McIntyre
Matt DelNero
Brendan Holland
Jim Bird
Emily Talaga
Susan Singer
Adam Copeland
Jessica Campbell
Joel Rabinovitz
Kiley Naas
Elizabeth Cuttner
Ali Zayas
Julie Saulnier
Ty Bream
Chris Clark
Mitali Shah
Mike Ray
Bakari Middleton
Peter Shroyer



STOP MEGA CABLE COALITION MEMBER LIST

- Alliance for Community Media
- beIN Sports
- Cincinnati Bell
- Common Cause
- Consumers Union
- DISH
- FairPoint Communications
- Future of Music Coalition
- Greenlining Institute
- ITTA
- Media Alliance
- NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association
- Open Technology Institute at New America
- OpenMedia
- Public Knowledge
- The Rural Broadband Alliance
- Sports Fans Coalition
- USTelecom – The Broadband Association
- Writers Guild of America, East
- Writers Guild of America, West
- Zoom Telephonics



STOP MEGA CABLE COALITION FACT SHEET

The proposed merger of Charter Communications, Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks would create a new vertically integrated, cable-and-broadband giant – Mega Cable.

- Mega Cable would control more than one-third of the markets for cable pay TV (35%) and cable broadband (36%), and be the dominant cable/broadband provider in the country's largest and most important geographic markets including New York City, Los Angeles, Dallas-Ft. Worth, among many others.
- Mega Cable would pass 40% of the country where broadband is currently available.
- Approximately two-thirds of Mega Cable subscribers would have *no other option* for high-speed broadband.¹

Mega Cable, together with Comcast, would create a dangerous duopoly in the broadband market that would control the future of broadband in America.

Broadband: Mega Cable and Comcast's massive control of the high-speed broadband market would allow the companies to coordinate efforts to reduce competition from other streaming services, while raising prices for consumers.

- Mega Cable and Comcast would control high-speed broadband access to the vast majority of American homes – at *least* 70% and possibly as high as 90%.
- This concentration of the broadband market will allow two companies to control the fate of new and emerging over-the-top ("OTT") services that rely on a robust high-speed broadband connection.
- Mega Cable and Comcast could coordinate their actions by simply responding to the others' behavior. This could take the form of parallel action or even express agreements.

Streaming Services: Mega Cable and Comcast would have the means and incentive to harm established and emerging streaming services, to the benefit of their own service offerings. Their coordinated efforts could:

- Limit consumer access to stand-alone broadband service, or raise the price of stand-alone broadband in a way that favors their own bundle of services.
- Discriminate against competing streaming services while treating their own content favorably.
- Leverage their dominance to prevent streaming competitors from acquiring must-have or popular content.
- Ensure their streaming services acquire programming on much more favorable terms than competitors.

Programming: Mega Cable and Comcast will have the incentive and ability to coordinate efforts to starve out independent programmers, allowing the entities to:

- Force independent and diverse voices to accept below-market terms, thus jeopardizing their viability.
- Restrict the ability of third-party programmers to distribute their content on competing OTT platforms.

¹ Based on the FCC's 2015 Broadband Progress Report, defining high-speed broadband as 25 megabits per second (Mbps) for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads. (Released February 4, 2015). <https://www.fcc.gov/reports-research/reports/broadband-progress-reports/2015-broadband-progress-report>.



Broadband Modem Marketplace: Mega Cable will have the power to severely damage competing modem manufacturers and dramatically limit the equipment options available to consumers.

- Charter is one of the only cable providers that does not give customers the option of saving money by purchasing their own modem.
- Charter addresses this anticompetitive approach by claiming that it charges no “modem fees” when, in fact, the cost of the modem is bundled into a consumer’s bill. This practice inhibits Charter consumers from purchasing their own equipment.
- Charter has promised to extend this same anticompetitive practice from its own relatively small subscriber base to millions of Time Warner Cable and Bright House customers, potentially crippling the market for retail modem manufacturers and along with it, consumer choice.

Consumers: Mega Cable will compound ongoing price hikes, poor customer service and the lack of choice in the cable and broadband marketplaces.

- Charter, Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks boast some of the lowest customer satisfaction scores – not just in the cable industry, but *any* industry.
- In order to merge, Mega Cable would take on \$27 billion in new debt – about \$1,142 in debt for each customer – which could be reconciled by passing along these costs to consumers.
- Mega Cable will have every incentive to cut costs by further degrading customer service, limiting investment in new innovations and raising prices.

The FCC and DOJ must solve for the harms presented by Mega Cable.

ABOUT THE STOP MEGA CABLE COALITION

The Stop Mega Cable Coalition brings together public interest groups, media and telecommunications businesses, labor and other concerned parties united in our belief that the FCC and DOJ must solve the harms that would result from the merger of Charter Communications, Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks.

For more information, please visit stopmegacable.com.



51 Ways Mega Cable Could Sabotage Competition

The proposed merger of Charter, Time Warner Cable, and Bright House Networks threatens the pay-TV and broadband marketplaces. If approved, Mega Cable could sabotage competing OVDs and MVPDs in innumerable ways. Most of the tactics Mega Cable could deploy are subtle, complex and difficult to detect. All of these harms would be exacerbated by coordinated action by Mega Cable and Comcast. Among other things, Mega Cable would have the incentive and ability to:

1. Increase specialized services lanes to curtail the speed of the public Internet;
2. Create fast lanes for Mega Cable services;
3. Artificially route OVD content through congested middle-mile facilities;
4. Refuse to open sufficient ports for OVD content at the point of interconnection;
5. Close ports to slow down OVD content at the point of interconnection;
6. Impose onerous terms for CDN providers to have sufficient access to Mega Cable's network;
7. Demand money for CDN providers to have sufficient access to Mega Cable's network;
8. Require OVDs to directly connect to Mega Cable's network;
9. Impose data caps on OVD content;
10. Impose usage-based pricing scenarios on OVD content;
11. Create content-agnostic data caps at a sufficiently low level to discourage OVD content usage by consumers;
12. Create content-agnostic usage-based pricing tiers at sufficiently low levels to discourage OVD content usage by consumers;
13. Charge unreasonably high rates for customers who exceed data caps;
14. Exclude Mega Cable content from data caps, while subjecting competing services to the caps;
15. Exclude Mega Cable content from usage-based pricing scenarios, while subjecting competing services to these usage-based pricing scenarios;



51 Ways Mega Cable Could Sabotage Competition

16. Exclude from the data caps OVDs who pay Mega Cable;
17. Exclude from usage-based pricing scenarios OVDs who pay Mega Cable;
18. Restrict the ability of OVD applications/services to work on Mega Cable's set-top-boxes;
19. Demand unreasonably high rates for the ability of OVD applications/services to work on Mega Cable's set-top-boxes;
20. Outright exclude an OVD from Mega Cable's Spectrum Guide;
21. Demand payment from OVDs for inclusion on Mega Cable's Spectrum Guide;
22. Include an OVD in its Spectrum Guide, but position that OVD unfavorably;
23. Favor content providers who agree to Mega Cable's terms for carriage on its Spectrum Guide, to the detriment of competing applications/services;
24. Exclude OVD services that do not agree to Mega Cable's terms for placement on its Spectrum Guide;
25. Treat unfavorably OVD services that do not agree to Mega Cable's terms for placement on its Spectrum Guide;
26. Demand money from OVDs for favorable placement on the Spectrum Guide;
27. Require competing OVD programming to be distributed through Mega Cable's MVPD service at below-market rates;
28. Refuse to provide third-party consumer devices access to linear content through a CableCard or non-CableCard security solution;
29. Refuse to allow third-party consumer devices to access the Spectrum Guide platform through a CableCard or non-CableCard security solution;
30. Use their dominance in broadband to subsidize linear video through bundled discounts to discourage customers from buying OVD services;
31. Use their dominance in broadband to subsidize video through bundled discounts to discourage customers from buying other competing video services;
32. Refuse to offer a stand-alone broadband service to customers who do not want to purchase a bundle of broadband and video service;



51 Ways Mega Cable Could Sabotage Competition

33. Price a stand-alone broadband service so high that customers are forced to purchase a bundled video and broadband service;
34. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party content providers to limit OVD access to content;
35. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party content providers to limit the ability of OVDs to gain preferential/equal "windowing" of content;
36. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party content providers to limit OVD access to "must-have" or marquee RSN programming;
37. Impose contractual channel/bundling restrictions on third-party content providers to require OVDs to carry more channels than they otherwise would be required to;
38. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party content providers to require MVPDs seeking to provide OVD content to negotiate OVD and linear content simultaneously;
39. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party content providers to require MVPDs seeking to provide OVD content to re-open existing linear contractual arrangements to negotiate for OVD content rights;
40. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party content providers to limit their ability to offer long-term programming contracts to OVDs, so that OVDs will face uncertainty and be subject to the changing whims of Mega Cable;
41. Threaten third-party content providers that granting rights to OVDs will impact their relationship with Mega Cable;
42. Impose contractual restrictions on third-party hardware providers to limit their ability to include OVD applications/services on their devices;
43. Threaten third-party hardware providers that relationships with OVDs will impact their relationship with Mega Cable;
44. Refuse to allow Mega Cable video customers to authenticate on programmer video applications (for example, HBO Go);
45. Refuse to allow Mega Cable video customers to authenticate on programmer video applications (for example, Watch ESPN) on devices (for example, Roku) that also offer OVD applications/services;



51 Ways Mega Cable Could Sabotage Competition

46. Require the transit providers of major OVDs to “reserve” (and pay for) excess capacity on Mega Cable’s network;
47. Discriminate against online advertisers by either favoring certain online advertisers or blocking other online advertisers;
48. Target OVD subscribers using Mega Cable’s network and make predatory offers to them;
49. Create an OVD with a most-favored-nation programming cost advantage and use its dominance in broadband to further subsidize Mega Cable’s OVD to the disadvantage of competing OVDs;
50. Unfairly attract advertisers to its affiliated OVD service away from competing OVDs because of Mega Cable’s ability to target consumers using deep packet inspection; and
51. Unfairly calibrate the speed and streaming quality of Mega Cable’s own OVD service based on real-time information about competing OVD services traveling on Mega Cable’s network.

****These tactics do not include all the ways in which Mega Cable could thwart competition if the FCC’s Net Neutrality Rules are overturned in court.****



POLITICO

Cable critics seek to repeat role as deal-killer in Charter merger

By Alex Byers | January 20, 2016

Some of the same voices that helped kill Comcast's deal to acquire Time Warner Cable are now taking aim at Charter Communications' bid for it.

The deal's biggest detractors, including DISH Network and USTelecom, are launching a new coalition, Stop Mega Cable, on Thursday to fight the merger at the FCC and Department of Justice. They argue Charter's bid to become the nation's second-largest broadband provider would give it and Comcast too much control over the high-speed Internet marketplace. It would also give Charter the power to help crowd out burgeoning online video providers, they say.

The groups are using a familiar name and blueprint. As the FCC's review nears what's likely to be its final stage - the agency's informal shot clock for considering mergers is almost two-thirds complete - the coalition's members are hoping to scuttle, or at least extract more concessions, from Charter.

"Comcast-Time Warner Cable was a Category 5 hurricane. Charter-Time Warner Cable is a Category 4. It's still really bad," said Jeff Blum, deputy general counsel to DISH, a leading member of the coalition that also includes Consumers Union and Public Knowledge.

If approved, Charter's \$67 billion bid for Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks would give the combined firm a customer base of 19.4 million broadband subscribers, according to data provided by the company. That would make it the nation's second-largest provider behind Comcast, which has 22.9 million broadband customers.

Critics contend the two companies could control as much as 90 percent of the consumer high-speed broadband market, which includes connections of 25 megabits per second or faster. Charter argues its share of that market - around 23 percent - puts it far behind Comcast and isn't a problem. But the coalition claims that having two companies control so much of the consumer broadband market is unacceptable, even if they aren't actively colluding.

"'Mega Cable' and Comcast could coordinate their actions by simply responding to the others' behavior. This could take the form of parallel action or even express agreements," the 16-member coalition argues in its launch announcement.

Charter has tried to prevent concerns by promising some noteworthy concessions. It promised not to impose data caps or charge content providers for Internet traffic, or interconnection, agreements for three years. That move was designed to attract support from online video providers and it did help convince Netflix to endorse the deal.

But the coalition's members, which includes Common Cause, cable trade group ITTA, and the Writers Guild of America, West, sound unconvinced Charter's deal is in the public interest.

STOP MEGA CABLE

"They offered three years. So what happens at three years and one day?" Blum asked. "They impose data caps that destroy Sony, Sling TV, HBO Go, and their merger is approved. There's no going back from that."

The new group, which includes 80 percent of the founding members of the anti-Comcast merger coalition, have successfully convinced regulators of the perils of big cable mergers. Many of the same public interest groups, as well as DISH, also opposed AT&T's failed bid for T-Mobile in 2011. Both the Comcast and Charter deal-buster coalitions were organized by Glover Park Group, the D.C. communications and policy firm.

But scuttling Charter's merger could be harder than killing Comcast's since Charter's current customer base alone isn't gargantuan and the combined company would own very little video programming.

The coalition's members also don't agree on whether the transaction should be banned outright, or could be approved with some conditions. That's a significant change from their opposition to Comcast's deal, which they said no conditions could salvage.

Charter has dismissed the idea that its merger isn't in the public interest. The company says it is a broadband-oriented cable firm that wants to focus on offering premium Internet service, not prop up its pay-TV business by trying to stifle online competitors. Charter points to its minimum speed tier of 60 megabits per second, commitment to net neutrality and lack of data caps.

Charter is "committed to creating American jobs, offering the most innovative products, fast internet speeds, an open internet and [online video] friendly policies including no data caps and no modem fees," said Charter spokeswoman Tamara Smith said in a statement, adding that the deal "will only build on what we've already accomplished."

Charter's efforts to sweeten the pot for regulators and opponents has drawn praise from some. Public Knowledge, which is part of the new coalition, previously praised the company's practice of forgoing data caps and its plan to offer discounted 30 megabit per second broadband to low-income customers. But the proposals have not been enough to win the group's support.

"We call them exactly as we see them," said Public Knowledge CEO Gene Kimmelman. "We will praise any meaningful concessions that actually are in the public interest, that eliminate competitive harms, and we think Charter has made a few on the front end. But not nearly enough."



The New York Times

Cable Acquisitions by Charter Communications Face Rising Opposition

Emily Steel and Cecilia Kang | January 20, 2016

Comcast's failed \$45 billion merger with Time Warner Cable collapsed last year under pressure from regulators, who found that the combined company would have had both the power and incentive to inhibit the future of streaming video.

Now, as rival Charter Communications seeks approval for its \$67.1 billion takeover of Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks, critics point to the same potential for harm.

"If Comcast's deal for Time Warner Cable was a Category 5 hurricane, Charter-Time Warner is a Category 4," said Jeff Blum, deputy general counsel of Dish Network, the satellite television provider.

Mr. Blum made his comments during a conference call Thursday held by a coalition of companies, advocacy and industry groups publicizing the potential harms of Charter's takeover bid.

If approved, the proposed merger would create a powerful new force in the country's broadband market. The combined company would rank as the country's second-largest broadband provider behind Comcast with about 19.4 million subscribers, and the country's No. 3 video provider with 17.3 million customers, across about 40 states. That increased heft is coming under close scrutiny as federal regulators continue their review of the Charter deals. If approved, the merger would most likely include strong conditions meant to prevent Charter from leveraging its market power to hurt rival streaming services, regulatory experts said. With increased clout, for instance, the company could restrict television networks from selling their content through stand-alone streaming services.

Charter, which already has announced a number of commitments related to the merger, has extra incentive to agree to conditions. Time Warner Cable would receive a breakup fee of up to \$2 billion if the transaction falls apart. The company received nothing when Comcast walked away from its deal.

Another prominent issue is the role and influence of John C. Malone, the media mogul whose company Liberty Broadband would hold a 20 percent stake in a reconstituted Charter. Some groups have called for regulators to place restrictions on the involvement of Mr. Malone, saying that his interests in entertainment companies — including Discovery Communications and Starz — could represent untenable conflicts. Whit Clay, a spokesman for the Liberty businesses, declined to comment.

Charter has argued that its deals pose no threat to the online video market because the future of its business depends more on broadband than its legacy video business. Alex Dudley, a Charter spokesman, said in a statement that the company is committed to creating American



jobs, offering innovative products, faster Internet speeds, preserving an open Internet and online video with no data caps or modem fees.

“It should come as no surprise that Dish and other parties seeking to use the regulatory review process to extract concessions are also engaging in tired P.R. tactics to further their self-interests,” Mr. Dudley said in a statement. “Their arguments against the pending transactions are baseless.”

Federal regulators declined to discuss their reviews of Charter’s proposed merger with Time Warner Cable and Bright House. But in recent months, antitrust officials have provided some insight into their priorities when considering cable mergers. Central to their analysis has been whether bigger cable firms — with strong bargaining power with programmers and fast-growing broadband Internet businesses — could harm their newest threat: streaming video providers like Netflix and Hulu.

In a September speech, Jonathan Sallet, the general counsel for the Federal Communications Commission, said that the agency focused on the streaming companies in its decision to reject Comcast’s bid for Time Warner Cable.

The biggest concern was how a combined cable giant, with more than half of the high-speed Internet market and a major portion of the cable video market, could pressure programmers to keep their best content off online video services that competed with cable TV. Such market concentration over distribution would have given the company too much of an incentive to do so, Mr. Sallet said.

“Simply put, the core concern came down to whether the merged firm would have an increased incentive and ability to safeguard its integrated Pay TV business model,” Mr. Sallet said in the speech at a telecom policy conference.

Announced a month after Comcast aborted its bid last spring, Charter’s proposed acquisitions have been the target of significantly less backlash than the Comcast merger, which would have united the two largest cable operators in the country.

Some of the loudest critics of the Comcast deal, like Netflix, have come out in support of Charter’s takeover bid. Reed Hastings, Netflix’s chief executive, said this week that it would be a “tremendous positive” for the streaming industry because of Charter’s agreement to a “multiyear, strong net neutrality policy” across its new, bigger footprint.

“That means that we, Hulu, Amazon and others can compete on an open basis,” Mr. Hastings said. “We think it would be a huge step forward for U.S. policy” for streaming services.

Yet criticism of the deal has escalated in recent weeks as a number of media and technology companies, public interest groups and other organizations stepped forward to voice concerns over Charter’s proposed acquisitions.

In a meeting with F.C.C. officials last week, for example, executives from the media giant Time Warner said that public and private statements by Charter executives suggested that the deal could deter the development of streaming video options to the detriment of consumers. Dish, one of the most vocal opponents, has urged regulators to reject the proposed merger; its new Sling TV video service, which offers streaming television without a traditional cable or satellite subscription, is one of the offerings that could be harmed.



Dish has joined other opponents of the deal to form a new Stop Mega Cable coalition, which wants to raise awareness of the harms that could result from the deal, including increased costs and worse service for customers. In addition to Dish, members of the coalition include the public interest group Public Knowledge and industry trade group USTelecom — The Broadband Association, and Consumers Union, the advocacy arm of Consumer Reports.

“We want to make sure that the very dangers that enforcers were willing to challenge in the Comcast-Time Warner Cable merger are not allowed to go forward through a second company that can coordinate with Comcast,” Gene Kimmelman, chief executive of Public Knowledge and a former antitrust official at the Justice Department, said on the conference call Thursday.

“There is the danger of coordination on one side,” he added in an interview later. “But the opportunity here, through the right enforcement requirements, is to actually push for a new business model. That won’t happen automatically. It will have to be pressured.”

STOP  **CABLE**



Coalition Forms To Fight “Mega Cable” Merger Between Charter, TWC & Bright House

By Ashlee Kieler | January 21, 2016

Last year a group of unlikely allies came together to create the coalition called Stop Mega Comcast to, well, stop the creation of the Comcast-Time Warner Cable mega company. This year, a similar group of improbable allies have come together to oppose the latest big-cable merger between Time Warner Cable, Charter, and Bright House Networks.

Similar to last year’s mission, the “Stop Mega Cable” coalition aims to raise awareness about the potential harms consumers face should Charter’s acquisition of TWC and Bright House be approved, while also calling for thorough investigations into the merger by federal regulators.

The 17-member alliance includes media companies, consumer advocacy groups, and TV/telecom businesses. On the business side, Dish is the biggest headlining name. They are joined by trade groups representing mid-sized and rural communications companies.

Advocacy group Public Knowledge is also in the alliance, as is Consumers Union. They are joined by the Writers Guild of America and by groups representing diversity interests, musicians’ interests, and sports fans’ interests.

Chief among the coalition’s concerns is the fact that the merger would form a new “mega cable” company that would have a Comcast-like hold over consumers.

The group believes the combination of Charter/TWC/Bright House would create a duopoly in the high-speed broadband market, stifle innovation, reduce competition, and raise costs for consumers.

“We have the same concerns as last year’s merger,” Gene Kimmelman, President and CEO of Public Knowledge, said during a press call Thursday. “This merger, as proposed, would create a cable giant that, alongside Comcast, would control the overwhelming majority of high-speed broadband homes in this country, most of which have very few competitive options.”

The group also fears that if Charter becomes as large as Comcast, the two mega companies would coordinate their treatment of programs and consumers in a way that harms consumers.

“This merger demands the highest degree of scrutiny,” Kevin Rupy, Vice President of USTelecom – The Broadband Association, said. “The stakes of this merger are too high – for both consumers and the future of the broadband marketplace. Regulators and elected officials must ensure that the threatened harms to consumer choice, competition and innovation are fully addressed.”

While Kimmelman said that Charter should be commended for taking action to placate concerns about the merger by offering free interconnection deals to content providers for three years, it’s not enough.



"We want to acknowledge them for eliminating some discriminating practices," Kimmelman said. "However, in becoming a dominant firm, they would have durable market power for many years to come."

Jeff Bloom, deputy general counsel for Dish, raised concerns about Charter's ability after three years to impose data caps that would destroy over-the-top options like Dish's SlingTV.

"Charter's argument for the merger is that they aren't as terrible as Comcast," Bloom said. "That's not sufficient. The people who will benefit [from the merger] are not customers, it's shareholders. Allowing this merger to take place... means you will have two companies that have a stranglehold over broadband access."

On the advocacy side, George Slover, a policy advocate for our colleagues at Consumers Union, said that the merger would harm consumers and increase prices.

"These two cable companies routinely show up near the bottom on Consumer Reports surveys for customer satisfaction," he said. "Letting them become more powerful will only make things worse."

STOP  **CABLE**

VARIETY

Charter-Time Warner Cable Merger Faces Fierce Opposition From New Coalition

Ted Johnson | January 21, 2016

The conventional wisdom has been that Charter Communications faces a smoother regulatory approval process in merging with Time Warner Cable than Comcast did.

A Charter-TW Cable combination would not be as mammoth, New York regulators have already signed off on the merger and Netflix CEO Reed Hastings, a vocal opponent of the Comcast deal, supports this one.

But some opponents are raising the volume on their opposition, particularly when it comes to what the potential combination would mean for the growth of online video services.

On Thursday, Dish Network, USTelecom, Public Knowledge and a number of other groups launched the Stop Mega Cable Coalition, with members sharing criticisms of the transaction, but differing on whether they would like to see the deal blocked outright or subject to stringent conditions.

“Comcast was a category 5 hurricane; Charter is a category 4. It is still really bad,” said Jeff Blum, senior vice president and deputy general counsel of Dish Network, which believes the merger should be blocked. He noted that Charter would have the incentive to try to restrict programmers from offering content to Dish’s online service Sling TV, a cheaper alternative to cable bundles.

Gene Kimmelman, the president of Public Knowledge, said that the merger would create a cable giant that would control the “overwhelming majority” of high-speed broadband homes in the country. From an antitrust perspective, he warns of two dominant players, Comcast and Charter, that could coordinate the way that they treat video programmers and the emerging market of online video, also called “over-the-top” services. Public Knowledge is asking regulators to address the potential duopoly and other issues.

Other members of the coalition also include the Writers Guild of America, which opposed the Comcast merger as well.

They contend that the newly merged company would control 35% of the market for cable pay TV and 36% for cable broadband, with a dominant position in markets like Los Angeles and New York.

In a statement, Charter said that it “should come as no surprise that Dish and other parties seeking to use the regulatory review process to extract concessions are also engaging in tired PR tactics to further their self interests. Their arguments against the pending transactions are baseless.” Charter has said that it would impose no data caps, which pose a potential limitation to online video.



Charter noted its support not just from Netflix, but independent channels like Fuse Media and RFD-TV, as well as groups like the National Urban League and the National Action Network.

“These parties have taken a close and honest look at the benefits of these transactions and have all come to the same conclusion: they are in the public interest.”

Last week, representatives from Time Warner (the former parent of Time Warner Cable and not a member of the coalition) and HBO met with FCC officials to raise concerns that the Charter-TW Cable merger would “be inclined to take action directed at programmers in response to the development of” online video services. HBO has launched HBONow, which offers the ability to subscribe to the premium service on platforms like Apple TV. The meeting was at the invitation from FCC staff.

Critics of the merger have cited comments made by Charter CEO Tom Rutledge, who told CNBC in 2014, “Anybody who sells their content over-the-top and also expects to continue to exist within a bundle sold to cable or satellite providers is really deluding themselves.” That comment came before Charter had proposed to acquire TW Cable.

Late last week, Charter posted a blog entry in which it said that it was the “most friendly” operator to online video distributors, along with more recent comments from Rutledge on CNBC.

“We like over-the-top television because it makes our broadband product look better,” he said in November. “We like it because it pressures the price of video. Obviously, if consumers are unwilling to pay for video at a certain price, we’re unwilling to pay for that as well. So our cost structure is positively impacted by over-the-top.”

In its filings with the FCC, Dish has charged that the merger would only increase the incentive for Charter to limit the growth of online video services because they pose a threat to the more lucrative cable bundle. Dish said that Rutledge’s 2014 comments were “outright threatening behavior” to discourage content providers from granting rights to online video services.

Dish’s Blum was asked at a press conference why Netflix, the online video giant, would support the Charter merger after opposing the Comcast deal. Hastings praised it in the Netflix earnings call as a “tremendous positive for the [over-the-top video] industry.”

“I don’t know what deal Netflix and Charter entered into,” Blum said.

Another issue raised has been the role of John Malone, and whether he would withhold Discovery Communications programming from competitors. Malone is chairman of Liberty Broadband, an investor in Charter and its biggest shareholder, and the largest shareholder in Discovery Communications.

In an FCC filing, Discovery said that they would not have an incentive to favor Charter, “because doing so would cause each economic harm.”

“Despite having had a common owner in John Malone for a number of years, Charter and Discovery are both structurally and operationally independent of each other,” Discovery said in the filing.



VARIETY

Why the Charter-Time Warner Cable Merger is a Bad Deal (Guest Column)

Writers Guild of America West | January 25, 2016

In April 2015, after a 14-month review process, [Comcast](#) dropped its bid to acquire [Time Warner Cable](#), having learned that the Department of Justice and FCC were preparing to block the merger. FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler explained that “the proposed merger would have posed an unacceptable risk to competition and innovation especially given the growing importance of high-speed broadband to online video and innovative new services.” It was a major victory for content creators and consumers alike.

But the victory was soon put in jeopardy. Only a month later, [Charter](#) Communications, a small cable operator and broadband provider, announced its intention to acquire Time Warner Cable and Bright House Networks, making it the nation’s second-largest residential broadband company. This latest attempt at consolidation is still a bad deal.

Had the Comcast-Time Warner Cable merger had been approved, one company would have controlled more than half of the nation’s high-speed broadband market. If this latest merger is approved, two companies—Comcast and the new Charter entity—will control close to 90% of that market. This is a problem because these two companies will have both motive and opportunity to coordinate actions to stifle online video competition that threatens their traditional cable business.

Companies like Charter, Time Warner Cable and Comcast have controlled video distribution for decades, deciding what networks were available to consumers. But the Internet has put consumers in charge and the results are compelling.

Subscriptions to Netflix, Amazon and Hulu are all surging. Original programming for the Internet is booming. In 2015, 37 WGA-covered television-length series were released online. Traditional television networks are even bypassing the cable companies, with HBO, Showtime and Starz offering consumers direct access to their programming through an online subscription. Satellite provider Dish Network has joined in, offering customers more flexible, Internet-delivered TV network bundles. All of this means more content, more competition and more consumer control, none of which cable operators like.

That’s why the Writers Guild of America, West is part of the Stop Mega Cable Coalition, which includes more than a dozen organizations that represent consumers, online video providers and broadband providers and are opposed to this merger.

If this merger is not stopped we can expect a future that looks very much like the past, with the same cable gatekeepers controlling Internet-delivered video. Companies like Charter and Comcast can use the pricing of Internet service and proprietary set-top boxes to determine which online content is accessible and at what price to their customers; they can add data caps

STOP MEGA CABLE

to make online video more expensive; or they can pick which video services can be watched through the company's set-top box.

This future is not only possible, it is probable: two-thirds of households in the merged company's footprint will have no other choice for broadband at speeds of 25 Mbps or greater, leaving the company free to implement practices that make online video less attractive, knowing that most consumers have no alternative. In Los Angeles County, the merged company will reach 98% of County residents and 70% of those residents will have no alternative for high-speed broadband.

We are once again faced with a merger that threatens competition and innovation. WGAW is not the only industry organization to hold this belief. Both Dish and HBO have expressed their concern about this merger's effect on the online video market. To protect the new opportunities for talent and the breadth and depth of content the Internet now offers consumers, this merger must be stopped.

David Young is the executive director and Ellen Stutzman is the senior director, research and public policy, Writers Guild of America, West.



The Scariest Cable Merger Nobody in Washington Is Talking About

Michael Copps | February 1, 2016

When Comcast tried to merge with Time Warner Cable last year, reaction was swift and negative. Not many people liked the idea of America's largest and least loved cable company getting any bigger; the deal collapsed after hundreds of thousands of Americans spoke out and federal regulators signaled that they would not let it go forward.

Big Cable should have gotten the message. But here we are just a year later with a new cable mega-merger in the works. This time, Charter Communications wants to snatch up Time Warner Cable along with Bright House Networks.

Unfortunately, this deal hasn't received nearly as much public attention as the Comcast-Time Warner Cable proposal. The harms it presents are just as serious however—serious enough for lawmakers and regulators to give this outrageous proposal the attention it merits.

Let's start with some basics. The three merging companies would create a new Mega Cable company, controlling about one-third of the nation's cable and cable broadband markets. In addition, the new colossus would own programming, including regional sports networks all across the country, and would completely dominate some of America's largest media markets, including New York City, Los Angeles, Dallas, Charlotte, Tampa Bay, Orlando and St. Louis. Finally, the combined companies would have an anticompetitive incentive to preference their streaming video offering over that of competitors.

When you add it up, the new company would look a lot like, well, Comcast. Yes, this merger would create a new Comcast—a national cable giant with the ability and the incentive to thwart competition, diversity, and consumer choice.

And it gets worse. Because they don't compete in any markets, Comcast and the new Mega Cable company would stand shoulder-to-shoulder in control of more than 70 percent of the high-speed broadband market. The two companies would have no incentive to compete against each other, but every incentive to coordinate against their shared marketplace competitors.

Thanks to services like Netflix, Hulu, and Sling, television is in the midst of a creative renaissance. These emerging services are finally breaking the decades-long stranglehold of the cable bundle on American consumers who have been forced to collectively fork over billions of dollars in monthly cable bills, largely to pay for channels they never watch. The services' growth has been fabulous for consumers, content creators, and workers in the entertainment industry. Now, just when competition is finally gaining traction, the Comcast-Mega Cable duopoly could squash it.

Then there is the issue of independent programming. Already, too much of the cable dial is filled with content produced by a handful of media conglomerates. When the vast majority of cable

STOP MEGA CABLE

homes are served by just two companies, it will become even harder for independent and diverse voices to gain a foothold. That is especially problematic because Comcast and the new Mega Cable will own content that directly competes with independent programmers.

That kind of dominance leads to homogenization of content and the marginalization of independent voices, cutting right to the heart of the public interest in diverse cable offerings that give voters a broad range of perspectives on the issues of the day.

Finally, there is the issue of price and customer service. To finance this deal, Charter will be taking on \$27 billion in new debt—about \$1,142 for each subscriber. To keep its lenders and creditors happy, the merged company will have every incentive to raise prices and slash service. And because it will face very little competition, the company will run little risk in doing so. How much more beneficial it would be if Charter invested those billions in building cable competition in presently uncompetitive markets!

The bottom line is that this merger is no less threatening to consumers than the Comcast-Time Warner Cable tie-up would have been. It points a dagger directly at competition, diversity in programming and consumer rights. Before it's too late, the public should send a message telling regulators to once again stand up to the cable giants and stop this harmful merger. More than a hundred thousand have already spoken, but there's still time to speak out if you have not already. Take action today to stop this affront to the public interest.

Michael Copps is a retired FCC Commissioner, public interest advocate, and special adviser for Common Cause's Media and Democracy Reform Initiative.