

After intense lobbying, wireless phone companies won a significant reprieve from the watered-down 2010 Net Neutrality policies introduced by Federal Communications Commission chairman Julius Genachowski.

Now some of America's largest cell phone companies are considering plans that would offer special "toll-free" access to favored partners' content, while leaving everyone else subject to the companies' usage capped data plans.

Much of the discussion about exempting certain content from data allowances is taking place at this week's CTIA Wireless trade show in New Orleans.

The *Wall Street Journal* [reports](#) the plans, in some cases, fly in the face of rhetoric about spectrum shortages and a wireless data traffic crisis (underlining ours):

T-Mobile's Mr. Ducea said the goal of new video offerings that don't count against data plans would be to get customers interested in consuming more data, and set T-Mobile's plans apart from those of other carriers.

A Verizon Wireless executive ironically blamed the need for "toll-free" pricing partly on the wireless industry itself, which has almost universally abandoned unlimited data plans.

Current FCC Net Neutrality rules require wireless carriers to not block competing services from companies like Skype and Google, nor censor content. Both Verizon and MetroPCS are challenging those rules in federal court. But wireless carriers are already exempt from giving preferential treatment to certain types of data or traffic, which opens the door to "toll-free" data services.

Net Neutrality supporters believe these practices will uneven the playing field for content creators and innovative new online start-ups, who may not be able to afford the prices carriers charge for first class treatment. It also influences consumer decision-making by encouraging customers to use the "toll-free" services to preserve their monthly data allowance.

Companies like Ericsson and Cisco have plans to market technology that will allow carriers to divide up data traffic into different traffic lanes, some fast and free to use, others subject to a customer's monthly data allowance, and certain undesirable traffic shunted to low priority slow lanes.