

AT&T Charging for FaceTime Would Breach Net Neutrality, Groups Say

AT&T would almost certainly violate net neutrality rules if it begins charging for using FaceTime over its cellular network when Apple's newest mobile operating system debuts in September.

At least, that's what digital rights groups said Tuesday of the leaked plan to charge yet another special fee to customers to use the full capability of devices on AT&T's network.

On Monday, [9to5Mac](#) discovered that, when testing [iOS6 beta 3](#), a popup message said AT&T needed to be contacted to enable the FaceTime service when using the cellular network. Using the same iOS6 beta with a Verizon iPhone, 9to5Mac did not get the same popup.

Apple's FaceTime app allows live video conversations between users of Apple devices. FaceTime works only over Wi-Fi currently, but is slated to also work over cellular connections when Apple's iOS6 debuts this fall.

"It's hard to believe AT&T could contemplate blocking consumers' access to a video-calling application unless those consumers pay AT&T an additional fee," Matt Wood, Free Press' policy director, said in a statement. "Such a move would almost certainly violate the open internet rules that AT&T worked with the FCC to craft — rules that we've criticized as far too weak, but that are acceptable to AT&T according to the company's own congressional testimony."

AT&T charges \$50 for 5 gigabytes of data on high-end plan, and now might add to that an unspecified price to use broadband via FaceTime.

AT&T did not immediately respond for comment. But it told 9to5Mac

Monday that the company was “working closely with Apple on the new developer build of iOS6 and we’ll share more information with our customers as it becomes available.”

Peter Eckersley, the technology project director for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, said AT&T should not add additional charges. FaceTime use should count against a customer’s broadband plan, he said. “This is definitely dangerous territory,” he said in a telephone interview.

At issue are new net neutrality rules that went into effect in November.

The rules prohibit DSL and cable companies from unfairly blocking services they don’t like and require them to be transparent about how they manage their networks during times of congestion. Mobile carriers like AT&T and Verizon face fewer rules, but are banned from interfering with alternate calling services such as Skype that compete with the carriers’ services.

That’s the provision that Free Press says AT&T’s reported plan would violate.

Verizon is already suing the FCC over the rules. A federal appeals court struck down a previous FCC attempt to enforce similar principles against Comcast after it was caught secretly interfering with peer-to-peer file sharing.