

The Rural Cellular Association (RCA) says its members need more time to build out their networks in the lower 700 MHz band ahead of a looming deadline.

Operators could lose two years off their 700 MHz licenses if they fail to meet a June 2013 deadline mandated by the FCC to provide service to 35 percent of the area covered by their 700 MHz spectrum.

With that deadline less than a year away, the RCA says operators with lower 700 MHz A block spectrum have been unable to procure devices and equipment compatible with their niche band class. Some A block holders have also been prevented from using their spectrum because of interference with broadcast television signals in adjacent Channel 51, which lacks a guard band with the lower A block.

"Faced with these substantial obstacles, competitive carriers unequivocally qualify under the FCC's standard that allows extensions when a licensee is hindered by causes beyond its control," RCA President and CEO Steve Berry said in a statement. The organization, whose members include Sprint, T-Mobile USA and Leap Wireless International, wants the FCC to give lower A block holders two more years to meet the buildout requirements. Barring that, the RCA has asked for the deadline to be extended to no less than two years after the FCC wraps up a rulemaking on the interoperability issue.