

When the FCC auctioned off the 700 MHz band, the lower 700 MHz was originally a single band, band 12. Many regional providers bought licenses in the lower A and B blocks, and AT&T bought mainly lower B and C block spectrum. The smaller operators planned to use the spectrum for LTE networks, a critical step to staying competitive with their national rivals.

After the FCC auction concluded, AT&T lobbied international standards bodies for its own band class, claiming it needed protection from A block interference. AT&T got its wish, with the result that LTE equipment and smartphones running on its band 17 spectrum are not compatible with band 12, even though they're both located in the lower 700 MHz band.

The upper 700 MHz spectrum remains a single band, band 13. Verizon bought upper 700 MHz C block spectrum during the auction, currently being used for its LTE service. It is now trying to sell off the lower 700 MHz A and B block spectrum it won during the auction.

The RCA says that as a result of AT&T's actions, the ecosystem of devices regional operators had counted on for their LTE networks never materialized, since manufacturers have little incentive to make small quantities of smartphones compatible with band 12.