Making the Public Network Work For Everyone

The FCC's Role in Promoting Functioning Networks and Competitive Markets
Shared Principles — Public Interest Organizations & Competitive Providers — January 2014

The FCC must make sure that the public telecommunications network works for everyone, no matter the technology that powers individual networks or the services delivered over them.

The Commission must maintain its historic role in ensuring that our nation's communications system serves everyone. The Act is clear, and its mandates for the Commission are not limited to one form of technology. No matter the technologies used for various telecommunications networks and services, the Commission must ensure that the system provides reliable and affordable connections, with an evolving level of communications service available to all parts of the country and all classes of users.

The Commission's job is to ensure functioning networks and functioning markets.

The Commission has the authority and the duty to serve the public interest and foster investment and innovation by promoting universally available networks and competitive choices in services. The 1996 Act was adopted on a bipartisan basis, and made into law the earlier pro-competition principles adopted by administrations of both parties. The Commission's task today is a return to enforcing that law—taking account of technology evolutions, but without abandoning its role or these timeless principles.

Network users should be better off as a result of any technology transition.

The transition to IP is just one of the most recent evolutions in a long history of changes to the public switched telecommunications network. Prior steps yielded substantial benefits for residential and business users alike. The Commission must ensure that network users are better off as a result of technological advances. All users should have more meaningful choices among service providers, and more reliable, affordable, and innovative offerings available to them.

The FCC should move with urgency to adopt policy frameworks ensuring this result. Analyzing the transition properly means focusing on the net impact on all types of users.

The Commission should weigh the costs, benefits, and outcomes of any technology and service changes undertaken by individual providers or classes of providers. Where service quality and choice diminishes, or the costs are greater than the benefits, the FCC should act to even the balance. That means considering costs that may be imposed if users, including wholesale customers, must migrate to different services due to technology changes in underlying networks. It also means using clear Commission authority to ensure that the last mile is not a bottleneck for wireline or wireless broadband transmission, and ensuring efficient interconnection no matter what services are transmitted over those facilities.