

You may have heard some people talk about Net Neutrality lately, unlike other things this issue is very simple. Here are the facts:

An Internet Service Provider, or ISP is the company that connects you to the Internet. If we think of the Internet as a road network there are different buildings or businesses for serving movies & TV content, mail, news, music, porn etc.

Your ISP builds and maintains your driveway.

That metaphor's not perfect: On roads you can choose a destination when you leave your driveway.

With the Internet you pick your destination when you start, so your ISP knows where you're going.

Net Neutrality or the ("Open Internet") means that your ISP has to give you access to all websites on the same terms. Chairman Wheeler's proposal violates Net Neutrality.

That shouldn't sound strange it's how the Internet has worked all along. But of course you see more data at some websites than others.

This frustrates ISPs. Data-heavy websites cost us more. If they want fast access we should be able to charge them for a fast lane. But with Net Neutrality we can't.

Verizon sued to allow this. In January 2014 a court voided Net Neutrality but not because it was wrong in principle. The judge said you've been going about this the wrong way. Here's how to do it.

But why bother? What's so bad about a fast lane? Well first of all fast lane makes it sound like the ISPs are offering to build new infrastructure.

They're not offering to sabotage existing infrastructure.

Oh and that's our infrastructure they'll be sabotaging That is when we as individuals and businesses use more data our ISPs charge us more.

So if I want to watch movies all day I pay for faster data and an unlimited plan (assuming unlimited is offered by ISP).

So if the ISP also charges the movie site, it's billing them for data I've already paid for.

In the end I'll pay twice because the movie site will have to increase its rates.

And we can't go to our ISP's competitor because most of the time there is no meaningful competitor.

And if we let Comcast merge with Time Warner Cable there will be even less competition.

Still so far this might not seem like a big deal:

But without Net Neutrality here's what can happen:

Let's say your ISP is AT&T and AT&T wants to create a Netflix like service (they in fact want to do this). Instead of competing by providing better service AT&T could compete just by slowing Netflix down.

Or let's say the CEO of Comcast likes CNN's take on current events better than Fox's. He could speed up CNN's website and slow down Fox's.

Or if he thinks Republicans are more likely to approve of Comcast's Time Warner Cable merger than the Democrats are he could slow down access to Democratic websites.

Did you contribute to Franken? I tried.

And even small differences in speed matter; people use Google less if the results take even a fifth of a second longer.

Heck, people started using Google more because its stripped down front page loaded quickly.

The front page of Altavista a big search engine before Google is now defunct.

Point being if you slow something down enough you've effectively blocked it.

So anyway the FCC came out with a draft rule in May that allows a fast lane but forbids the abuses just described.

So what's the problem? The rule doesn't make any sense:

Chairman Wheeler is basically saying: ISPs can give one website faster access but they can't give others slower access.

Obviously these things are the same: the power to charge for a fast lane is the power to impose a slow lane.

So the new rule means at best endless arguments and lawsuits over whether ISPs are misusing the power to impose a slow lane, a power that there's no particular reason for them to have.

Because there isn't enough bureaucracy already.

And at best new companies will be at disadvantages compared to established companies that can afford to avoid the slow lane. Imagine if that had been the rule all along.

There would be no Facebook or Twitter or LinkedIn.

And that's the best case. At worst the restrictions will be forgotten like how broadcasters were supposed to operate in the public interest in exchange for free use of public airwaves.

Next up a 30 minute commercial. But first a few words from our sponsor.

And ISPs will be able to choose what we do and don't see on the Internet. Did you watch that video calling for the restoration of Net Neutrality? It won't load.

A better solution would be to redefine or reclassify ISPs under Title II as common carriers. That would mean treating them like utilities. Then Net Neutrality would be given. Like how phone companies provide the same service no matter who we're calling and can't charge for a clean signal.

Of course Comcast thinks the open phone system is bad for the Internet and thinks the open rules for phones should never have been in place even for the phone system.