



Spectrum woes continue

The long-standing spectrum battle between satellite and terrestrial operators took a new turn recently with the July announcement that Intelsat, Eutelsat and SES have aligned on a market-based proposal for the future use of the lower C-band spectrum in the USA.

C-band spectrum plays an essential role in the US broadcasting ecosystem, delivering seamless distribution of video and audio programming to more than 100 million US households, and reliably providing critical data connectivity in rural areas and emergency situations, as well as services delivered to the US Government. As such, the utilization of C-band spectrum by terrestrial operators for 5G applications has been a major bone of contention among many in the sector.

The proposal establishes a commercial and technical framework that would enable terrestrial mobile operators to quickly access spectrum in the 3,700 to 4,200MHz frequency band in the USA, accelerating the deployment of next-generation 5G services. The proposal specifies the use of a consortium, which is open to all satellite operators delivering services in the C-band downlink frequencies in any part of the lower 48 United States. The consortium will oversee the governance of the initiative, define and implement the methodology for spectrum clearance, and serve as the sole interface for market-based transactions with parties interested in deploying terrestrial mobile services in specific portions of the C-band.

According to reports, the joint proposal reflects the unique US telecommunications environment, where Intelsat, SES and Eutelsat together represent a very substantial majority of the relevant satellite C-band spectrum in use and aims to protect the quality and reliability of the extensive services provided by satellite operators in the C-band spectrum to US broadcasters, media, and data companies. With Eutelsat joining the proposal, the three satellite operators will continue to work with customers, other stakeholders, and the FCC on the market-based proposal. The next phase of this effort began with the FCC's planned adoption of a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on 12 July.

The USA is leaps and bounds ahead of us in the UK when it comes to spectrum wrangling for 5G applications. Here, the desired spectrum is far more evenly spread between operators and changing its provision is more complex. However, what happens in the USA in the next few months will have far-reaching implications for the satellite and terrestrial sectors globally, so we should all stay abreast of the situation.



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