FCC Chair Alludes to Spectrum Aggregation Limits for Upcoming Auctions

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FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler, speaking Monday at Ohio State University on wireless competition, seemed to indicate he favors spectrum-allocation limits for big operators Verizon and AT&T in upcoming 600 MHz auctions.

In prepared remarks [1], Wheeler said, “Spectrum is finite, and the FCC is charged with managing the airwaves that are used for commercial purposes. A key goal of our spectrum allocation efforts is ensuring that multiple carriers have access to airwaves needed to operate their networks.”

Specifically, the Chairman referenced an FCC filing from the Department of Justice [2] in which the DOJ voiced its support for the FCC’s efforts to “address spectrum aggregation in a manner that promotes competition and innovation in telecommunications markets.”

Following Verizon’s and AT&T’s windfall in the 700 MHz spectrum auctions years ago, several smaller carriers have advocated a limit on the amount of soectrum below-1 GHz that a single operator can license in a given Cellular Market Area (CMA).

That lower band spectrum is valued for its propagation characteristics and carriers like Sprint, which recently admitted its need for more low-band spectrum [3], welcomed the Chairman’s remarks.

“Sprint was encouraged to hear the Chairman’s focus on the promotion of effective competition and the need to ensure that competitors continue to have access to the inputs necessary to operate their networks,” a Sprint spokesman told Wireless Week.

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[1] http://www.fcc.gov/document/remarks-fcc-chairman-tom-wheeler-ohio-state-university
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