Wheeler Says FCC Won't Allow Internet 'Slow Lane'

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The nation's top telecommunications regulator defended his latest proposal to protect an open Internet, warning cable companies that manipulating data traffic on their networks for profit would not be tolerated.

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Tom Wheeler told The Cable Show on Wednesday that the so-called net neutrality rules he's proposed won't allow Internet service providers to push most users onto a "slow lane" so others who pay for priority access can have superior service.

"Prioritizing some traffic by forcing the rest of the traffic into a congested lane won't be permitted under any proposed open Internet rule," he said. "If someone acts to divide the Internet between 'haves' and 'have-nots,' we will use every power at our disposal to stop it."

Wheeler's comments come after he proposed rules last week that would replace the FCC's open Internet order from 2010, a measure which was struck down by a federal appeals court in January.

The rules are not expected to be made public before a May 15 FCC meeting to discuss them. Following a public comment period, a commission vote on the rules is likely to occur sometime in the summer.

While the proposed rules would allow for paid priority access, Wheeler said the focus on the so-called "fast lane" ignored that non-priority traffic would have to be "sufficiently robust to enable consumers to access the content, services and applications they demand."

He also reiterated that "all options are on the table" if the rules don't achieve the goal of fair and open access to the Internet, including his option to define Internet service providers as "common carriers" like utility companies, which would subject them to harsher regulatory scrutiny.

"As chairman of the FCC, I do not intend to allow innovation to be strangled by the manipulation of the most important network of our time, the Internet," he said.

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