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FCC Proposes Making Spectrum Available for 'Weird Space Stuff'

May 12, 2026

On March 26, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking titled, "Spectrum Abundance for Weird Space Stuff," seeking comment on ways it can make spectrum available for new space activities. The FCC proposes two pathways to opening more spectrum for new space activities: clarifying and expanding its traditional regulatory classifications and exploring new spectrum bands that can support new use cases on a dedicated basis.

Comment due date: May 11, 2026

Reply comment due date: June 8, 2026

Clarifying existing spectrum allocations

Authorizing spectrum 'piggybacking'

The first avenue the FCC proposes for accessing additional spectrum resources for new space operations is to expand some of its existing frequency authorizations. "Piggybacking" entails a space station using the same frequencies as a separate, consenting spacecraft that is also authorized by the FCC, as long as the space station certifies that it will only use its authorization for servicing, monitoring or collaborating with the consenting spacecraft, and its operations will conform with the consenting spacecraft's license.

Authorizing stand-alone TT&C within existing FSS allocations

The FCC also proposes authorizing applicants for emergent space operations to conduct telemetry, tracking and command (TT&C) in fixed-satellite service (FSS) bands. FSS space station licensees are routinely authorized to conduct TT&C in the same frequency bands that are allocated for FSS. This allocation would be on an unprotected, noninterference basis subject to coordination with other authorized spectrum users.

Refining definition of TT&C

In line with its proposal to authorize emergent space operations to conduct TT&C operations, the FCC also proposes an updated interpretation of the definitions of space telecommand and space telemetry to include downlink of video and other data during maneuvers, such as rendezvous and proximity operations (RPO) or docking with other spacecraft, eliminating concerns that the current definitions could be narrowly construed to exclude those activities.

Existing service allocations

The FCC reviews requests to operate space stations within specific service allocations on a case-by-case basis and does not plan on abandoning this approach. In response to concerns regarding potential interference of new applicants requesting service in existing bands, the FCC clarifies that it will not preemptively exclude operators from applying to use frequencies in any service allocation where their operations could justifiably fit. The FCC's rules already require applicants to demonstrate compliance with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) rules and recommendations and subject applicants to FCC review.

New spectrum bands for emergent space operations

The second avenue that the FCC is considering for new space operations is making available frequency bands that are already allocated for nonfederal use. The FCC is particularly interested in bands that are either not shared with federal users or are shared with federal users but are not intensively used and are allocated for federal use on a secondary basis. The main bands the FCC is considering are the 2320-2345 MHz band, 2315-2320 MHz and 2345-2350 MHz bands, 2305-2315 MHz and 2350-2360 MHz bands, and intersatellite links. While these frequency bands are the focus of the FCC at present, it seeks comment on any additional bands that may be suitable.

2320-2345 MHz band

The 2320-2345 MHz band is exclusively used by SiriusXM to provide satellite radio service (SDARS), and no other federal operations are authorized to operate in it. As such, the FCC proposes creating a secondary allocation for SOS operations in the Earth-to-space direction, as well as allowing SiriusXM to lease use of the spectrum to earth station licensees.

2315-2320 MHz and 2345-2350 MHz bands

These bands serve as the “guard band” spectrum between SDARS and terrestrial operations. The FCC proposes utilizing these bands in the same way as the 2320-2345 MHz band for command uplinks.

2305-2315 MHz and 2350-2360 MHz bands

The FCC seeks input on the potential to create a secondary allocation for SOS operations in the Earth-to-space direction and allowing AT&T, which has near-exclusive use, to lease the spectrum.

Intersatellite links

The FCC also proposes authorizing licensed satellite operators to use their FCC-licensed satellites and intersatellite links to provide TT&C and data downlinks in support of new space operations without the need to file a modification or obtain additional FCC authorization. This would allow the use of off-the-shelf equipment and already established ground and space infrastructure. It could also potentially open up a new avenue of business for established non-geostationary orbit (NGSO) or geostationary orbit (GSO) space station licensees.

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