

FCC Adopts Rules Overhauling Space Station Licensing Rules

August 10, 2026

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted a [Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) on July 22 overhauling its space and earth station licensing framework. The rules aim to provide entities with a more efficient, predictable and flexible process to support commercial deployment of space infrastructure.

Updated licensing framework

The FCC establishes a “licensing assembly line” to provide space companies a clearer and quicker process for obtaining authorizations. The framework adopts a modularized, certification-based application designed to only collect necessary information and streamline the review and approval process.

Removal of surety bond requirements

The new rules eliminate the surety bond requirements for all systems, except for non-geostationary orbit (NGSO) systems involved in processing rounds (i.e., fixed satellite service and mobile satellite service systems). For NGSO systems subject to processing rounds, the FCC will require a bond set at an initial amount of \$10 million, with the bond amount being reduced based on the percentage of the total authorized satellites deployed.

Elimination of streamlined small satellite and small spacecraft rules

The FCC eliminates the streamlined small satellite and small spacecraft rules, stating that those processes are no longer necessary. The FCC does not, however, address how it will handle current streamlined small satellite or small spacecraft licenses, or how it intends to calculate annual fees for such licenses moving forward, which historically have been less than 1/20 of the annual fees of other NGSO systems.

New ‘variable trajectory space stations’ licensing category

Recognizing the continuous development and use of new space technologies, the FCC creates a new category for space stations that does not readily fit into the traditional NGSO or geostationary orbit (GSO) space station categories. The variable trajectory space stations (VTSS) category is for systems “of one or more space stations either operating beyond the geosynchronous orbit or operating without fixed or predictable patterns over the course of its lifetime and operating under one space station call sign.” These systems include, but are not limited to, orbital transfer vehicles, rendezvous and proximity operations platforms, in-service servicing systems and missions involving transit to, orbiting of, or operations on the moon or other celestial bodies.

Conditional grants

Under the new rules, the FCC will issue conditional grants of authorization to further streamline and expedite the licensing process. These conditional grants will allow applicants to move forward with launch and/or certain operations prior to obtaining full authorizations from the FCC.

Revised processing rounds

The FCC updates its processing-round framework to provide NGSO systems greater predictability. Under the new framework, the FCC will open annual processing rounds and review applications on a rolling basis for each year. The Space Bureau will initially open processing rounds for Ka-, Ku-, V- and Q-bands and then add additional bands.

Further notice of proposed rulemaking

In addition to adopting new licensing rules, the FCC seeks comments on additional rules and revisions to further modernize its licensing framework to promote deployment of space operations. Some of these proposed rules include creating a new space-based experimental license; allowing currently operating NGSO satellite systems to combine authorized satellites under a single call sign; and permitting space station licensees to change or add radio frequency sensing capabilities through a minor modification or notification process.

If you are interested in learning more about the rules and their potential impact, [please register for a Lunch & Learn panel](#) on these and related topics on August 13 from 12:00 to 2:00 pm ET, or reach out to one of the Cooley lawyers listed below.

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