

FHH Telecom Law
January 2003

**Plans Advance for Dedicated
Short-Range Communications Services**

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The FCC has proposed technical and licensing rules for the Dedicated Short-Range Communications Services (DSRC) at 5.85-5.925 GHz. A low-power radio component of the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS), DSRC seeks to incorporate advanced technology into the nation's surface transportation infrastructure to improve safety, decrease traffic congestion, reduce air pollution, and conserve fossil fuels.

The FCC sees DSRC as a short-range, non-voice radio technology for limited-duration communications between roadside and mobile units, or between mobile or portable units, primarily to advance traffic flow and promote safety. Roadside units (RSUs) would either be fixed in place or mounted on vehicles, but could operate only when stationary. On-board units (OBUs) could be mounted in vehicles or be hand-carried.

Proposed eligible users include traditional public safety agencies such as police, fire, and emergency medical services, and not-for-profit providers of radio service to state and local governments, utilities, railroads, metropolitan transit systems, pipelines, private ambulances, and volunteer fire departments. In addition, the FCC seeks comment on whether to allow private operation, either directly for profit or in support of other business activities. One potential benefit of private use might be a greater incentive for manufacturers to develop equipment, which would then become available to public safety agencies at economies of scale.

The FCC asks whether it should adopt a technical standard for DSRC, or leave those decisions to the industry. It proposes dividing the band into channels for specific purposes, and asks whether part should be set aside for unlicensed operation. It seeks comment on site-specific vs. geographic-area licensing, and raises the possibility of licensing RSUs "by rule," and of authorizing OBUs by rule or on an unlicensed basis, to eliminate the need for cumbersome individual licensing.

Short-range vehicle communications have already shown great success in niche applications such as automatic toll-taking. It remains to be seen whether the FCC's ongoing efforts to expand of these capabilities will amount to something more than a clever solution in search of a problem.