

**FHH Telecom Law**  
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**FCC Opens Wireless  
Broadband Inquiry**

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A new Wireless Broadband Access Task Force is to recommend rule changes for improving the deployment of wireless Internet service providers (WISPs). The Task Force began its work by requesting public comment on a range of WISP-related policy, regulatory, and technical issues. Its goal, following a May 19 public forum and other outreach activities, is a report to the FCC Commissioners by next October.

The FCC's interest in WISPs parallels that in Broadband over Power Lines. Today only 20% of U.S. households have broadband access, nearly all via DSL or cable modem. Those two technologies reach only limited areas, most often where population density and household income are both high. And they do not face much competition. Many areas have only one provider, and even two may not be enough to keep prices down. (Despite the presence of two cellular telephone providers in each market, prices for mobile service dropped sharply when competition from PCS appeared.) The FCC has decided that promoting new access technologies is one way to both increase the reach of broadband Internet and to bring down its cost.

To advance that agenda, the Task Force seeks comment in the following areas, among others:

- Is there enough spectrum for WISPs?
- How do unlicensed, site licensed, and geographic licensed regimes (respectively) affect the provisioning of wireless broadband service?
- What regulatory incentives would foster wireless broadband development?
- What are the barriers to entry for WISP entrepreneurs, and how can the government address them?

The Task Force welcomes comment on any issues related to WISPs, not just those raised in its questions. It emphasizes that this is not a rulemaking (although one may follow), and it does not cover regulatory treatment of particular services that may be offered over wireless broadband networks, such as VOIP. (See related article on Page 1.)

Comments in response to the Task Force inquiry are due on June 3, and reply comments on July 1.