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Pennsylvania residents, businesses and community organizations are being asked to take part in an internet speed test. The year-long initiative from the state's Public Utility Commission and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania is part of an effort to map the state's "digital divide." "The data from these tests will help us generate a 'real-world' picture of internet access speeds across Pennsylvania and help identify the areas of greatest need," PUC Commissioner Norman J. Kennard said. "The better our maps, the clearer our understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing our communities, and the better equipped we will be to identify the necessary resources to move Pennsylvania forward."

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is sponsoring the research by Penn State University, which is using the data to analyze and assess broadband availability across the state. To participate, visit the testing website at [broadbandtest.us](#). The speed test takes about 30 seconds and automatically sends data to researchers. It also displays a summary of the results for participants. The tests do not collect personal identifying information.

The research is being led by Penn State professor Sascha Meinrath. "For far too long, advertised broadband speeds and availability have been treated as ground truth, resulting in persistent discrepancies that have stymied efforts to address the economic and social detriments faced by communities on the wrong side of the digital divide," Meinrath said. "Our research empowers Pennsylvania officials and the general public with accurate information about the current state of broadband connectivity, both across the commonwealth and within our own communities."

The PUC has raised concerns about the impact of lost federal broadband funding fueling a growing economic divide between communities and businesses that have access to higher internet speeds, and those that do not. The commission has supported the launch of a new statewide broadband investment incentive program and has launched a rulemaking process intended to more quickly resolve disputes over access to utility poles, which it says is a key issue for enhanced broadband deployment. — *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

donations to his campaign -- and made money on the deal

**Philadelphia Inquirer**

Op-ed: Pa. legislature, one of the largest in the country, has become expensive and embarrassing

Verizon and AT&T won big at the Federal Communications Commission on Wednesday as the agency voted to make it easier and cheaper to place 800,000 small antennas for super-fast 5G services on utility poles, traffic lights, sidewalks, and other public areas. Philadelphia; Santa Barbara, Calif., and other municipalities have blasted the new rules as subsidies to profitable wireless companies through low fees and mandated quick response times for 5G antenna applications that will flood local government offices. A top Philadelphia official said Wednesday that the financial impact from the FCC's action "could be substantial."

The boxy 5G equipment sprouts five-foot antennas on poles or buildings. They will proliferate like weeds throughout the nation over the next decade. "The rhetoric is that towns want to hold up this new network," John Davis, the manager at Doylestown Borough in Bucks County, which spent about \$150,000 fighting 5G antennas proposed there, said Wednesday. "And that's not so at all." Pennsylvania and other state governments also have passed, or are considering, wireless-friendly legislation to help the companies upgrade their networks with the use of public rights-of-way.

Introduced this summer, proposed Pennsylvania legislation would strip local towns of much of their zoning authority over small-cell antenna placements in public rights-of-way. The measure would be another blow to local towns that would like to retain control over the antennas when they are proposed for historic districts, in neighborhoods without utility poles, or in front of residential homes. The new FCC rules do not diminish local zoning authority over placement of the antennas but instead set deadlines for towns to process applications and fees. FCC officials warned that local red tape and exorbitant fees would slow 5G for years and cost billions of dollars as town officials look at the antennas as revenue sources.

FCC Commissioner Brendan Carr, the prime backer of the new federal rules, said Wednesday that the favorable treatment for wireless companies was "about economic leadership for the next decade. Those are the stakes." Carr compared the potential of 5G to the innovation related to the current 4G wireless network that unleashed the "app economy" and services such as Uber and Lyft in recent years. He also warned that the U.S. was losing out to China in developing a 5G network and that the nation had to close the gap.

Wireless firms and their infrastructure providers, such as Crown Castle, are expected to install the antennas over the next decade in the next wave of wireless-technology upgrades, leading to driverless cars, internet-of-things devices that will automate daily life, and high-speed wireless broadband services to compete with Comcast Corp. and other cable companies. "At the FCC, we're working hard to ensure that the United States leads the world in developing this next generation of wireless connectivity so that American consumers and our nation's economy enjoy the immense benefits that 5G will bring," FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said in a statement.

FCC rules force a shot clock on towns, making them respond to wireless companies requests for 5G antennas within 60 days. They also have a deadline of 90 days for new utility poles with 5G antennas. The rules set \$270 annual fees for each antenna or pole and a \$500 application fee per antenna, though this can be slashed if a wireless

company seeks antennas in batches, or multiple ones at the same time, according to the FCC website on Wednesday. Verizon was pleased. "Today's action by the Federal Communications Commission to accelerate small-cell deployment is another critical step toward making our nation's 5G future a reality, sooner than later," said Nicola Palmer, Verizon's head of wireless networks.

The "order will significantly boost 5G deployment by adopting common-sense guidelines, modeled on state legislation, that reduce the time and cost of small-cell deployments while accounting for legitimate local interests," Palmer added. "We would like to thank the FCC for demonstrating vision and determination ... as we enter the 5G age."

Philadelphia wasn't so ebullient. "Today's actions by the FCC ignore longstanding local authority to manage the public rights-of-way. The city has agreements in place for service providers to pay up to \$3,000 per year per site with a 3 percent annual escalator, consistent with city ordinance. To incentivize development, the fee starts at \$3,000 but falls to \$250 to reflect economies of scale," Michael Carroll, the city's deputy managing director for transportation, said Wednesday after the FCC vote. "Today, the FCC declared that service providers should be charged a flat annual fee of \$270 per site, leaving the city's existing agreements and ordinance subject to judicial challenge," Carroll added. "The financial impact to the city could be substantial." Santa Barbara Mayor Cathy Murillo said in a letter filed with the FCC that the rules "effectively give access to public property to for-profit companies to install their equipment and to sell their private services, while limiting the ability of jurisdictions to recover their costs through the collection of rents and fees for the use of their public right-of-way."

The new FCC rules make it impossible for towns to do what Doylestown Borough officials have done over the last year: force Crown Castle to pay the borough what they consider appropriate fees for the use of the public rights-of-way. When Doylestown finally settled with Crown Castle in July, the borough won the right to reduce the number of poles as well as camouflage and relocate some of them. It also won a 5 percent share of the revenues for the services Verizon or other companies sell through some of those Crown Castle small cells and \$750 a year for other antennas. The Doylestown deal with Crown Castle — which will lease the small-cell antennas to Verizon and other wireless carriers — should be grandfathered, thus not jeopardized by the new FCC rules, Davis said. But other towns will miss out on a similar lucrative deal. — *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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Wireless carriers have spent years pounding each other with discounts like family plans, taxes-included offers, unlimited data and free Netflix. Now they're putting their targets on the cable industry. Verizon Communications plans to launch the nation's first 5G -- or fifth generation -- wireless service in four cities next week. Using new frequencies that beam data straight to home receivers, the phone giant promises to match or beat the fastest cable offerings and deliver the ultra-HD videos consumers have come to expect on their living-room sets.

Even with its limitations -- potential interruptions caused by weather, the need for thousands more antennas -- 5G could become a new cord-cutting option for almost 90 million U.S. households that now get

broadband, phone and TV via cable or satellite. And if the wireless industry's history is any guide, it'll be cheaper, a break for consumers who pay \$150 a month or more for those services now. "The idea that wireless was a risk to cable broadband didn't make sense, until now," said Reed Hundt, the former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

Like Verizon, AT&T Inc. is also poised to launch 5G, underscoring the urgency among wireless carriers to challenge the cable industry's dominance in broadband and TV. Together, the big four U.S. wireless companies have more than 260 million customers -- a ripe audience to target with new internet and TV services for the home. "Certainly 5G is going to be the future of TV," said Amy Yong, an analyst with Macquarie. "5G mobile TV will force cable companies to rethink how to sell video."

First, though, the phone industry has to clear some hurdles. Two decades ago, major carriers made a similar promise: that fiber-optic lines would revolutionize internet service and make them viable competitors to cable. That project hit a wall. Installation costs in the tens of billions of dollars -- approaching \$2,000 per home -- kept AT&T and Verizon from ever reaching more than a few million homes with their speediest connections. As of June 30, AT&T had 15.8 million broadband subscribers, while Verizon had 7 million. The cable industry has 68.5 million.

5G faces its own challenges. The signals are so fragile they can be disrupted by mist or rain drops. Such interference may mean the new service can never deliver the speed and quality customers demand. If consumers don't embrace 5G in a big way, the phone companies may not complete their build-out of the networks. Because 5G waves don't travel very far, the phone companies will need to erect more antennas -- lots more. This represents an enormous investment -- like the national fiber-to-the-home networks the carriers never completed -- with no guarantee of payback.

Researcher IHS Markit estimates the phone carriers, their suppliers and others in the product chain will spend \$200 billion annually on 5G technology, though some of that will lay the groundwork for new services like driverless cars. The FCC voted 4-0 Wednesday to cut the fees localities can charge for permission to install the new antennas. The agency also tightened deadlines for towns and cities to consider applications to put antennas on publicly owned poles. Still, for all these reasons, the phone giants are starting small.

New York-based Verizon is limiting its 5G effort to four cities this year. Dallas-based AT&T is launching in six cities, while T-Mobile plans to use an assortment of airwaves to create a national 5G network by 2020. And even with Verizon starting service, 5G is still very much in development phase. Lab tests on new equipment are just moving into the field. This month, for example, the company and Nokia Oyj performed their first successful outdoor data transmission in Washington using newly standardized network gear. Fortunately it didn't rain, according to records of the test.

Big cable, meanwhile isn't standing still. In the past year, both Comcast and Charter have added wireless services to their bundle by selling mobile-phone service under contract with Verizon. Competition could

force them to adopt a 5G strategy. Comcast, the largest provider, is also expanding overseas with its proposed \$39 billion purchase of Sky.

Cable customers are a loyal group, despite all the attention going to cord-cutting and rival video services like Netflix and Amazon Prime. Monthly defection rates, or churn, for the cable industry have been under 2 percent. Adding wireless service could retain customers even more. Cable executives like Greg Maffei, chairman of Liberty Broadband, Charter's largest shareholder, have addressed the technology threat with a touch of denial and swagger. Speaking to investors at a conference in November, Maffei said there's "no such thing as 5G really. It's just a radio format. And we have a lot of radio formats at our disposal."

Others in the industry like Leo Hindery, a former cable executive and managing partner of the private equity firm InterMedia Partners, say that at the end of the day 5G's real impact may be on the profit and loss statements of the combatants. Verizon's initial entry into the 5G broadband market, at \$50 a month, is modestly lower than cable company prices -- and typical for the largest U.S. wireless carrier, which usually emphasizes service quality over price. The company's is also offering YouTube TV and an Apple TV box to new customers.

Rather than triggering an epic industry upheaval, the more likely result is a bloody price war, where wireless companies relentlessly lower the cost of their fastest internet services and offer TV at below-cost prices, forcing the cable industry to respond. "It's a nightmare scenario, as the plethora of Verizon ads already touting 5G as the next best thing are evidencing," Hindery said. – **Bloomberg; in New York Times, "FCC Puts 5G Rollout Rules in Federal Hands"**

Lawmakers said there is growing consensus on the need for legislation to strengthen online users' privacy, but a hearing Wednesday highlighted potential disagreements on what exactly a bill should aim to do. The emerging disputes underscore the difficulty of the job ahead for lawmakers—as well as the big risks that legislation could entail, particularly for some internet companies that depend heavily on monetizing the massive amounts of data they gather.

Executives from tech giants including Amazon.com Inc. and Alphabet Inc.'s Google unit warned in the hearing that certain types of regulation could limit the services they offer to consumers. The battles that lie ahead could require months or even years to resolve.

At Wednesday's Commerce Committee hearing, Sen. John Thune (R., S.D.), the committee's chairman, said he sees growing bipartisan agreement on the need for legislation. "We have arrived at a moment where, I believe, there is a strong desire by both Republicans and Democrats, and by both industry and public interest groups, to work in good faith to reach a consensus on a national consumer data privacy law," Mr. Thune said in his opening statement.

Sen. Bill Nelson of Florida, the committee's top Democrat, added that recent revelations about online data abuses have undermined people's trust in the internet environment. "Consumers are worried—do they have any privacy anymore?" Mr. Nelson said. But many companies are already worrying about the risks of over-regulation by Congress.

Amazon's representative, vice president Andrew DeVore, urged lawmakers to "ensure that additional overhead and administration demands any legislation might require actually produce commensurate privacy benefits." The e-commerce giant contends that it uses customers' personal data responsibly, for example to develop product recommendations for its users. But it could face disruption to those practices if new data-privacy regulation goes too far.

Another issue likely to perplex lawmakers is how to legislate for potentially sensitive information that can be obtained through smartphones, such as user location data. Its treatment under current federal regulations varies depending on how it is used, creating a confusing puzzle for consumers. "These points highlight the complexity of the challenge," said Len Cali, AT&T Inc.'s senior vice president for public policy. Telecommunications providers are urging more uniform treatment across businesses, a move that could reduce internet companies' advantages.

Several companies appeared to stop short of endorsing expanded powers for the Federal Trade Commission, the agency that likely would be charged with enforcing new internet privacy rules. Many observers believe the FTC currently is outgunned. Another looming fight is over whether federal legislation would block state privacy laws like the one that California recently passed. Other states are expected to follow California's example, leading to what the industry views as an unworkable patchwork of different legal standards.

Some lawmakers are uncomfortable with simply adopting a looser federal standard that would supplant stronger state laws. A number of potential compromise solutions are being floated, such as the possibility of giving state attorneys general a greater role in enforcement. Also unclear is whether the legislation would entail strengthening remedies for consumer-data breaches that have become commonplace.

For its part, Google was focused on reassuring lawmakers that it is working to improve its user protections. Google increasingly has been in Washington's crosshairs, in part because of concerns over its privacy practices around its Gmail function. "We acknowledge that we have made mistakes in the past, from which we have learned, and improved our robust privacy program," said Keith Enright, Google's chief privacy officer.

But Mr. Enright added a note of caution for lawmakers looking to regulate on consumer privacy. He urged lawmakers "to take into consideration the impacts on service functionality, the consumer benefits of free and low-cost products, the future of the open web and app ecosystem" and other potential effects on the market. Google, which was chided by senators when it declined to appear at a hearing earlier this month, also was grilled Wednesday on the company's reported plans to develop a search engine adhering to China's internet censors.

Sen. Maggie Hassan (D., N.H.) said she was "troubled" by reports that Google would consider working with the Chinese government despite concerns raised by human rights groups that doing so could jeopardize the safety of rights activists. Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Tex.) pressed Mr. Enright on whether there is any truth to reports that the China project,

known internally as “Project Dragonfly,” is working towards developing a censored search engine. “There is a Project Dragonfly,” Mr. Enright said. “My understanding is that we are not close to launching a search product in China and whether we eventually would or could remains unclear.” Mr. Enright added that any potential work in China would have to go through the company’s normal privacy-review process and adhere to the company’s values. — **Wall Street Journal**



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