

## FCC Announces Tentative Agenda for February 2026 Meeting

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The Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) announced that it will hold its February Open Meeting on Wednesday, February 18 at 10:30 a.m. ET. Details on the four items expected to be considered at the Open Meeting are summarized and discussed below:

1. **Strengthening the Integrity of the Lifeline Program – Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket Nos. 11-42, 17-287, 09-197, 21-450, 20-445.** In this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM), the FCC seeks comment on reforms to the Lifeline program, which supports voice and broadband access for all by providing discounts for qualifying low-income Americans. Specifically, the FCC seeks comment on updated requirements to ensure that program participants are legal beneficiaries of Lifeline discounts, including by collecting Social Security numbers. In addition, it seeks comment on a proposal to enact predictable minimum service standards, ending the voice support phase-down and preventing duplicative support. The item also proposes usage tracking and non-usage de-enrollment for all Lifeline service plans. In doing so, the Commission advances these and other proposals in an effort to “ensure the Lifeline rules reflect current and best practices to support low-income Americans while ensuring efficiency, transparency, and accountability.”

This item comes after the Office of Inspector General issued a report detailing how the Lifeline program has led to millions of dollars being reimbursed from the FCC to deceased individuals. Despite the details in this report, critics, including Commissioner Anna Gomez, argue that the proposed changes are “shortsighted” because they will

lead to eligible households wrongfully losing coverage.

## **2. Maximizing the Potential of the 900 MHz Band – Report and Order, WC Docket No. 24-99.**

The Report and Order (R&O) seeks to maximize the potential of the 896-901/935-940 megahertz (MHz) band (900 MHz band) by enabling broadband deployment on all ten megahertz of the band through a voluntary relocation process. If adopted, the new rules would facilitate additional spectrum access by utilities, critical infrastructure, and other enterprises for broadband deployments while maintaining options for narrowband and other 3/3 megahertz broadband operations. The Commission will largely apply the 3/3 megahertz licensing, technical, transition and anti-windfall requirements to the entities that intend to conduct broadband operations on all ten megahertz of the band.

This R&O, if adopted, will be welcome news to utility companies, who were strongly advocating for expansion of broadband operations in the 900 MHz band as it will allow for more robust private broadband networks that are essential to the grids that utilities rely on for their networks. In addition, although the Association of American Railroads (AAR), which holds a nationwide ribbon license in the narrowband segments, initially opposed expanded broadband operations in the 900 MHz band, we believe that the Commission's nod toward the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau's future actions in "favor" of AAR transitioning to the 220 MHz band is likely an indication of a truce.

## **3. Proposing Application Limit in Upcoming NCE Reserved Band FM Translator**

**Filing Window – Public Notice, MB Docket No. 26-20.** This Notice would direct the Media Bureau to open the first-ever filing window for applications for the new noncommercial educational (NCE) reserved band FM translator station construction permits and to issue a subsequent public notice announcing the specific dates of the 2026 window. In an effort to promote efficiency, curb speculative applications, and preserve spectrum for future secondary service, the Notice would establish eligibility restrictions and impose application and attributable interest limitations on prospective applicants.

As the Commission points out, the last opportunity to file for FM Translators was in 2003, which resulted in an "extraordinary volume" of applications. While the FCC has

seemed hesitant to open another filing window due to, among other things, the high volume of “speculative filings” and “extraordinary procedural delays” stemming from the 2003 filing, the FCC anticipates that its proposed eligibility and application requirements will resolve some of those past issues.

**4. Reforming Intercarrier Compensation – Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, WC Docket Nos. 25-311, 25-208.** The NPRM seeks industry feedback on the FCC’s plan to expedite network deployment and modernization by reforming regulations that are impacting the transition to all-Internet Protocol (IP) networks. In an effort to incentivize carriers to transition, the FCC seeks comment on its proposal to move remaining intercarrier compensation charges to a bill-and-keep framework. Additionally, the NPRM seeks comment on, among other things, how to define the network edge for allocating transport cost responsibilities between carriers and whether the FCC should forbear from tariffing access charges after the transition to bill-and-keep. The NPRM also seeks comment on eliminating and detariffing ex ante pricing regulation of end-user charges and phasing out Connect America Fund Intercarrier Compensation Recovery support.

A few key commenters have already expressed support for the Commission’s proposals. For example, the Voice on the Net Coalition noted that bill-and-keep has already successfully created a “simpler, more efficient framework.” Similarly, USTelecom has expressed that the FCC could fix a key hurdle that prevents the industry from moving to universal IP interconnection by adopting “a framework for agreement-less IP interconnection over the internet for voice services on a bill-and-keep basis.” With this support in mind, stakeholders, especially small and mid-size providers, should be cognizant of the operational and financial impacts that could arise should the Commission ultimately decide to alter how carriers recover network costs and compete in the marketplace.

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