

FCC Rule Changes Could Accelerate The Space Economy

By **Stephanie Roy, Jiazhen Guo and Connor Haffey** (May 7, 2026, 5:52 PM EDT)

The Federal Communications Commission has advanced a series of rulemakings aimed at expanding opportunities for commercial space and satellite operations.

These actions focus on improving positioning, navigation and timing resilience; modernizing licensing frameworks; and increasing spectrum availability for emerging space activities. This article summarizes these developments and their potential implications for stakeholders.

The FCC promulgated multiple rulemakings aimed at providing more opportunities for space-adjacent companies starting in 2025. In spring 2025, it released a notice of inquiry, or NOI, to promote the development of positioning, navigation and timing technologies and solutions as alternatives to the Global Positioning System.

At the end of 2025, the FCC issued a notice of proposed rulemaking seeking to modernize space and Earth station licensing by overhauling Part 25 and creating a new Part 100 with streamlined procedures.

More recently, on March 26, the FCC unanimously adopted an NPRM aimed at identifying ways to allocate spectrum availability for space telemetry, tracking and command, or TT&C, operations.

Just weeks later, on April 9, the agency released a report and order, formally adopted on April 30, that modernizes spectrum sharing for satellite broadband, replacing decades-old technical limits with a more flexible, performance-based framework.

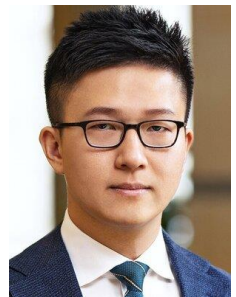
Collectively, these actions signal that the FCC is taking a more forward-leaning and holistic approach to spectrum management, licensing reform and infrastructure resilience in support of a growing commercial space economy.

Modernizing Satellite Spectrum Sharing Report and Order

On April 8, the agency released a draft report and order that revises the spectrum sharing framework governing how geostationary orbit, or GSO, and nongeostationary orbit, or NGSO, satellite systems share spectrum for broadband services.



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The commission adopted the report and order at its April 30 open meeting, finalizing a shift away from legacy equivalent power flux density limits toward a performance-based approach intended to support higher capacity space-based broadband services.

The report and order reflects the FCC's view that the existing equivalent power flux density limits, which were developed in the late 1990s, no longer appropriately reflect current satellite technologies, and in practice have constrained NGSO operators from delivering the full speeds and capacity their systems can support, particularly in rural and remote areas.

The proposed new framework focuses on actual service performance and preserves room for private coordination between GSO and NGSO operators to, for example, negotiate appropriate interference protections by agreement, while also adopting technical backstops that apply where coordination is not achieved.

The FCC also adopted an initial set of GSO reference links against which those protection criteria will be evaluated. At the same time, the report and order maintains existing protections for co-frequency terrestrial services and existing coordination procedures for radio astronomy sites.

The FCC expects these changes to significantly increase satellite broadband capacity, potentially enabling faster speeds, lower costs and greater competition, particularly in underserved and rural areas.

Emergent Space Operations Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

A March 26 NPRM on expanding spectrum for companies working on "weird space stuff," proposes ways the FCC can make spectrum available for "emergent space operations," which the notice defines as spacecraft and commercial operations in space that use radio spectrum for the control of, or communications with, a spacecraft, but which are not communications satellites that provide radio communications services to the public.[2]

The FCC acknowledges a shortage of available spectrum for these services due to unclear categorization, federal prioritization and otherwise usual congestion. Comments are due on May 11, with reply comments due June 8.

The FCC proposes codifying piggybacking, or allowing a spacecraft to use bands already authorized for a consenting licensed satellite, and seeks input on consent, evidence and non-U.S. scenarios. It also seeks to clarify how emergent operations fit within existing services like fixed satellite service, mobile satellite service, Earth exploration satellite service and space research service, while keeping case-by-case categorization.

The agency explores potentially excluding passive Earth exploration satellite service to create predictability.

The NPRM also considers TT&C access by seeking input on permitting TT&C in fixed satellite service-allocated bands, or even whether TT&C could be acknowledged as fixed satellite service. The NPRM also asks whether certain services could host TT&C on similar terms as fixed satellite service and whether the definition of TT&C should include data downlinks.

The NPRM hopes to open more spectrum that is nonfederal, lightly used geographically and not heavily shared with federal users, and explores flexible use, leasing and auctions. It proposes a new secondary

SOS uplink allocation at 2,320 megahertz-2,345 MHz, citing S-band — 2,000 MHz-4,000 MHz — proximity, few users and limited incumbent coverage in Hawaii and parts of Alaska.

The FCC has requested comments on international compatibility, equipment adaptability above 2,320 MHz and any technical limits needed. It also asked about nearby S-band options at 2,305 MHz-2,315 MHz, 2,315 MHz-2,320 MHz, 2,345 MHz-2,350 MHz and 2,350 MHz-2,360 MHz for command uplinks.

Finally, the FCC is seeking comments on authorizing FCC-licensed satellites and inter-satellite links to provide TT&C and data downlinks.

Space Modernization Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

With the space modernization NPRM, issued in October 2025, the FCC plans to replace Part 25 of its rules with Part 100, representing a major overhaul that it hopes will remove outdated rules and reorganize the new rules for clarity.[3] By doing so, the FCC aims to develop an expedited licensing framework with bright-line measures and characteristics that place such systems as "presumed to be in the public interest."

This is a shift from the current discretionary review based on applicants' statements justifying why the grant is in the public interest.

The space modernization NPRM proposes reforms to application handling to increase efficiency by simplifying requirements, establishing review timelines, shortening public notice periods and allowing conditional grants. Notably, a proposed new review timeline would require staff to inform the applicant and public of any reasons preventing a license's approval if no action is taken within 60 days after the public notice expires.

Moreover, the FCC proposes to (1) modify processing round procedures for NGSO satellite systems; (2) remove surety bond requirements for GSO space stations and NGSO space stations of fewer than 200 satellites; and (3) simplify milestones, including removing the milestone requirement for GSOs.

A proposed rule may also shift the surety bond formula from an escalating to a de-escalating bond calculation. The NPRM proposes two different calculations, one for NGSO space station licensees with 200 or more satellites and another for those with fewer than 200 satellites.

The proposed changes aim to incentivize full deployment of satellites and provide flexibility in meeting deployment milestones.

The space modernization NPRM also proposes to extend license terms for most space and Earth stations to 20 years and expand the list of modifications that can be made without prior approval. The FCC is considering a nationwide blanket license approach for Earth stations to move towards a simplified authorization process.

Lastly, the space modernization NPRM proposes that space station operators be required to share space situational awareness data.

With the comment period recently closed, it is possible that proposed rules related to this NPRM will be adopted before the end of the year.

Positioning, Navigation and Timing Resiliency Notice of Inquiry

In addition to these rulemakings, in 2025 the FCC initiated a broader inquiry into positioning, navigation and timing — the systems that allow devices and networks to determine location, route movements and synchronize time that are essential for critical infrastructure sectors and daily applications.

The Global Positioning System, a U.S. global navigation satellite system operated by the U.S. Department of Defense, is the primary source of these positioning, navigation and timing services in the country. Heavy reliance on GPS creates vulnerabilities due to low-power satellite signals, indoor unavailability, and susceptibility to jamming and spoofing. The communications sector and public safety systems depend on positioning and timing systems to synchronize networks and operations, and disruptions can impair 911, wireless emergency alerts and first responder communications.

In the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's 2020 report to the U.S. Congress, the agency reported that the negative effects of GPS disruptions could cost over \$1 billion per day.[4]

The positioning, navigation and timing resiliency NOI aimed to gather input on actions the FCC could take to promote complementary and alternative positioning and timing technologies for civil use.[5]

Noting the widespread reliance on GPS across key sectors such as communications, finance, transportation, emergency services and defense, the NOI's goal was to support a resilient system-of-systems that works with the GPS to maintain reliable positioning, navigation and timing services even when GPS is disrupted or degraded.

The NOI sought comment on technologies, risks, costs, benefits and the regulator's roles, including spectrum management and equipment authorization.

Specifically, the FCC sought input on devices receiving unauthorized signals from foreign global navigation satellite systems, such as Russia's Global Navigation Satellite System and China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System, and associated security risks, and the roles of chipset vendors and wireless providers. It asked whether allowing additional foreign global navigation satellite systems could improve accuracy and resilience while addressing national security concerns.

The FCC also sought comment on international coordination, standards and interference protection through bodies like the International Telecommunication Union and the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs.

The FCC also considered whether the nonrivalrous nature of these systems favors public provision or private deployment, and the implications for adoption, innovation and market power. The FCC asked how to minimize deployment costs, leverage existing infrastructure, and facilitate interoperability and standards development.

Last month, industry sources reported that the FCC was internally circulating a draft NPRM that is expected to address amendments to policies, service rules, allocations and equipment authorization rules to support positioning, navigation and timing systems, and remove regulatory barriers, as well as define key terms for a consistent framework.

The NPRM may discuss potential technologies and how they can be leveraged, as well as coordination

efforts that may take place at the international level, such as the International Telecommunication Union and the UN Office for Outer Space Affairs.

Conclusion

Taken together, these proceedings show that the FCC is moving toward a more active and strategic role in shaping the future of the space economy. Recent actions, including the agency's adoption of a new performance-based spectrum sharing framework for satellite broadband, demonstrate that this shift is already underway.

From strengthening positioning, navigation and timing resilience beyond GPS, modernizing satellite and Earth station licensing, and opening new pathways for TT&C operations, the agency is responding to growing commercial demand and evolving national security concerns.

Although each proceeding is at a different stage, collectively they signal a regulatory shift toward greater flexibility, faster processing and more deliberate spectrum planning for space-adjacent and emergent space activities.

Stakeholders across the communications, satellite and infrastructure sectors should watch these developments closely, as they are likely to influence both near-term business opportunities and the long-term regulatory framework for operating in and around space.

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[1] <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-420708A1.pdf>.

[2] <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-26-13A1.pdf>.

[3] <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-69A1.pdf>.

[4] https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/report-on-pnt-backup-complementary-capabilities-to-gps_508.pdf.

[5] <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-20A1.pdf>.