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BUSINESS CENTER September 23, 2010 11:32 AM

FCC Approves White Space "Wi-Fi on Steroids"

By Tony Bradley, PCWorld

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With a unanimous, bipartisan vote of the FCC commissioners, the [unused television broadcast spectrum](#) has been [unleashed for use in wireless networking](#). Using the broadcast white space for wireless networks will usher in billions in investment and innovation, and could fundamentally change [the nature of wireless networking](#).

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Compared to standard wireless networks today that have a range of about a football field--assuming no obstacles are obstructing the signal, the white space networking is like Wi-Fi on steroids. Like television signals, the white space networks will have a range of several miles and can travel through walls.

Microsoft and Google are already [embracing the white space](#) wireless technology on their own campuses. Rice professors Edward Knightly and Lin Zhong are likely to be among the first in the nation to put the FCC's new rules to the test, thanks to a recent \$1.8 million federal grant to establish a white-space test-bed network in East Houston. The five-year project calls for Rice and Houston nonprofit Technology For All (TFA) to add white-space technology to a wide spectrum Wi-Fi network they jointly operate in Houston's working-class East End neighborhood.

The bizarre bipartisan support--[unusual for matters related to the FCC](#) and the Internet--extends to the United States Senate as well. Both Democratic Senator John Kerry, and Republican Senator Olympia Snowe issued statements in support of the FCC decision.

"Releasing unused spectrum is a sure-fire way to promote innovation and provide low-cost internet to folks in Western Massachusetts and across the country," Senator Kerry said. "National broadband access has the power to create jobs, stimulate the economy, and enable towns, businesses, students, and families to succeed in the digital age. Today's announcement from the FCC is a critical step towards a robust wireless future that will benefit all Americans."

"While broadband is an indispensable resource to millions of Americans and businesses across the country, nearly 14 million citizens are still unable to use it due to lack of access," said Senator Snowe. "The 'white spaces' spectrum provides an opportunity to reach these Americans and further bridge the 'digital divide' that unfortunately continues to exist today."

Keerti Melkote, founder and CTO of [Aruba Networks](#) also favors the FCC plan. "Making 'whites spaces' available as unlicensed spectrum will drive a great deal of innovation in the wireless space. The multi-billion dollar Wi-Fi industry has grown rapidly precisely because the spectrum it operates in is free and unfettered. The Internet era was ushered in due to the open nature of Internet standards creating the online economy. TV whitespace as unlicensed spectrum promises to change the game in network access in ways that benefit consumers

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