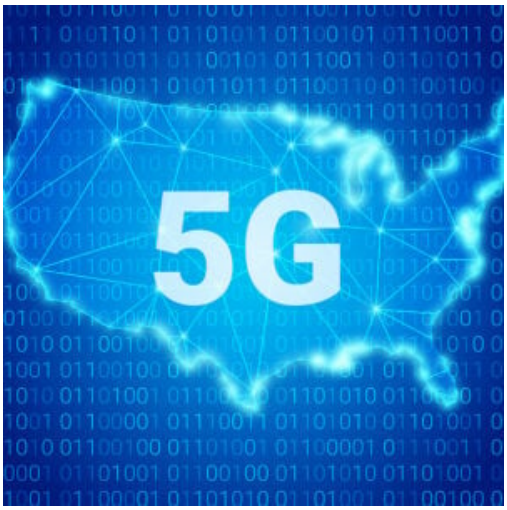


# NATIONAL SPECTRUM STRATEGY IS UNDERWHELMING - INSIDE SOURCES

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Last year, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, at the direction of the Biden administration, released its long-awaited National Spectrum Strategy (NSS). As part of its Presidential Memorandum, the NSS outlines the government's plan to advance wireless communications and technologies. While the release is a welcome development, the strategy itself is lacking. Specifically, it fails to free up any licensed spectrum for commercial purposes or call on Congress to renew the FCC's auctioning authority.

The result is a missed opportunity by the administration to establish concrete steps for identifying adequate amounts of spectrum (invisible radio frequencies over which wireless signals travel), specifically licensed mid-band spectrum, needed for fueling the fifth-generation revolution and securing U.S. leadership in wireless communications.

Advertised by the White House as a blueprint for the future that will "guide decisions about how to allocate limited spectrum resources and ensure that these decisions are made through a rigorous, transparent process," the NSS correctly acknowledges that emerging technologies are creating "increasing demand" for spectrum. To meet this demand, the administration suggests that the NTIA conduct a short-term study on potentially repurposing 2,786 Megahertz of spectrum. Specifically, the administration suggests that a mix of bands, including 3.1-3.45 GHz, 5030-5091 GHz, 7125-8400 GHz, 18.1-18.6 GHz, and 37.0-37.6 GHz, be reconsidered for commercial purposes. Incumbent users like the Department of Defense currently occupy these bands.

While a good first step, considering the looming spectrum shortfall, studying spectrum is not enough. The administration has had several years to identify new spectrum bands and build a spectrum pipeline, but its NSS only suggests studying five bands over the next two years. This is insufficient.

Over the last few years, it has become abundantly clear that the United States is quickly falling behind the rest of the world in the race to 5G. International competitors like China have already made large amounts of licensed spectrum available for 5G networks, including 1,160 MHz of mid-band spectrum. Other countries lead the United States in this area. A report published in 2022 comparing mobile spectrum availability across several international markets found that France, Japan, Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom each led the United States in licensed mid-band spectrum. More recent studies have reached similar conclusions and predicted that this spectrum gap will expand significantly in the years ahead if nothing is done.

The problem with the new NSS is that it's missing the most important ingredient — more licensed spectrum. As Commissioner Brendan

Carr noted in his statement on the administration's strategy, "The Biden Administration does not commit to freeing up even a single MHz of spectrum." In contrast, between 2017 and 2020, the Trump administration freed up **"**6,000 MHz of spectrum for licensed use alone," not to mention thousands more for unlicensed Wi-Fi use.

Much of this was made possible by the previous administration's 5G Fast Plan, which made pushing more spectrum into the marketplace a national priority. In other words, the previous administration repurposed more spectrum than this NSS even calls for studying.

The NSS also fails to push Congress to reauthorize the Federal Communication Commission's auctioning authority. While discussing the importance of increased agency cooperation, spectrum sharing, and how certain bands of spectrum should be reallocated from incumbent users, the strategy document does not mention that the FCC has been without the ability to auction spectrum for nearly a year.

Spectrum auctions play a critical role in making spectrum more readily available for the commercial market. They grant providers the opportunity to purchase spectrum licenses, which give them exclusive access to certain radio frequencies necessary for expanding their networks and delivering quality services to customers. Since 1994, the FCC has conducted more than 100 of these auctions and, in the process, generated $258 billion for the U.S. Treasury. Yet, last March, Congress inexplicably allowed the FCC's auctioning authority to expire and, so far, they have failed to restore it.

By not acknowledging this problem, the administration has missed an important opportunity to put pressure on Congress to act. Simply announcing its intention to study five spectrum bands makes little difference if the FCC can't auction spectrum.

Moving forward, the administration must be bold in its efforts to make additional licensed spectrum available for commercial use. Building a robust spectrum pipeline will require accelerating its timeline for studying spectrum and a commitment to freeing up spectrum now and pushing Congress to reauthorize the FCC's auctioning authority.

The NSS is a useful starting point, but when the NTIA publishes its implementation plan in March, it must be careful to establish clear benchmarks for how it will achieve results.