FCC 'Net Neutrality' Rules Expected to Advance on Vote

By Cecilia Kang
Washington Post Staff Writer
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The Federal Communications Commission's proposal of new rules to prevent companies such as AT&T, Verizon and Comcast from deliberately blocking or slowing certain Web traffic is expected to advance with three votes out of the five-member agency, according to sources.

The proposal, to be announced Monday by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, will include an additional guideline for carriers that they make public the way they manage traffic on their network, according to sources at the agency. The additional guideline would be a "sixth principle" to four existing guidelines adopted in 2005 on Internet network operations. A fifth principle is expected to be announced by Genachowski on Monday during a speech at the Brookings Institute that would prohibit the discrimination of applications and services on telecommunications, cable and wireless Internet networks.

Genachowski is expected to receive support from Democratic commissioner Michael Copps, who has publicly supported the idea of an additional rule that prevents Internet traffic discrimination, according to sources at the agency. He has also talked publicly about the need for transparency from carriers on how they run their networks to ensure that they aren't singling out technologies that might compete with their own services.

The question was whether new commissioner Mignon Clyburn, a Democrat, would also agree to the proposed rules. Clyburn was nominated to the commission by President Obama after serving on the South Carolina Public Service Commission. Clyburn is also the daughter of Rep. James E. Clyburn (D-S.C.).

"There won't be any question that she is going to support the chairman on this," said a source close to the commissioner. "Commissioner Clyburn sees transparency and an open Internet across all platforms as key for consumers to know what kinds of services they receive."

The FCC is expected to vote on the
FCC Vote Expected to Advance New Net Neutrality Rules

Sources said the guideline on transparency is viewed as important for consumers, so they know what services would be offered to them. Such a rule would ensure to Web applications companies that their new services would be permitted on networks.

"Be they entrepreneurs or innovators or consumers or less powerful voices, a principle on transparency is about knowing how large carriers manage traffic on networks and understanding how their content will be treated ahead of time so no one is surprised," said a source at the agency. "So a CTO of a fledging start-up isn't shocked when a new product that got angel investment won't actually work on the Time Warner system, for example."

The sources spoke on condition of anonymity because the new rules have not been officially announced.

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