

3GPP Paves Way for Accelerated 5G Standards Development

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During a plenary meeting held March 6-9 in Dubrovnik, Croatia, the 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) a standards-developing collaboration between groups of telecommunications associations approved an accelerated time frame for the completion of specifications which will facilitate standards-based 5G deployment to begin in 2019 instead of 2020.

3GPP agreed to a work plan proposal for the first 3GPP 5G New Radio (NR) specification that will be part of Release 15 – the global 5G standard. New Radio is a wireless standard which encodes data across multiple carrier frequencies, a touchstone feature of 5G. This early non-standalone (NSA) implementation of 5G will still rely on LTE for certain network management functions. Specifically, NSA will utilize LTE as the “control plane anchor” while Standalone NR “implies full control plane capability” for NR. Hence, functions such as software defined networking will not fully occur on the New Radio standard until a later implementation of 5G.

While AT&T, SK Telecom, Qualcomm, Intel, Ericsson, Huawei, Sprint and Deutsche Telekom have long been proponents of this accelerated time frame, Verizon and Samsung were opposed. Opponents of the accelerated time frame hoped to give carriers more options by simultaneously completing stand-alone and NSA options. However, proponents emphasized the need for swift action, even though partial, in response to rising global demand for enhanced mobile broadband service.

This accelerated time frame may be an additional factor impacting the timing of Federal Communications Commission efforts to advance the position of the United States as an early adopter and global leader in 5G deployment. Industry players will want to watch closely as Chairman Pai and the Commission press forward and focus efforts on next steps in the *Spectrum Frontiers* proceeding, the Mobilite Petition (small cell proceeding focused on the scope and interpretation of rights of way access under Section 253 of the Communications Act), and related efforts to catalyze and expedite 5G deployment.