

# FCC Plans to Open Up 6 GHz Band for Unlicensed Use, Propose \$9 Billion Rural Mobility Fund, and Address Orbital Debris at April Meeting

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As the flurry of [coronavirus-related](#) actions continues, the FCC [plans](#) to return to “bread and butter” policy areas of spectrum and rural 5G deployment at its [next meeting](#) scheduled for April 23, 2020. First, the FCC plans to move forward on its [proposal](#) to open up 6 GHz band spectrum (5.925-7.125 GHz) for unlicensed use by smartphones, IoT devices, and other technologies. The FCC would allow standard-power unlicensed operations in certain band segments, subject to controls designed to avoid interference with incumbent microwave, cable, and satellite operators. The FCC also would permit lower-power unlicensed operations across the entire band, but only for indoor uses. Second, the FCC would consider a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to seek public input on a “5G Fund” offering up to \$9 billion over ten years through an auction to support deployment of wireless broadband and voice services in rural and other hard-to-serve areas. The 5G Fund would represent the wireless counterpart to the wireline-focused [Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#) adopted earlier this year and replace Phase II of the [Mobility Fund](#), which the FCC [mothballed](#) after questions arose about reported coverage data. Finally, the FCC would update its orbital debris mitigation requirements to mandate additional disclosures and incorporate new inter-agency standards.

Running the gamut from rural networks to outer space, the FCC’s April agenda will impact service providers across the industry. Consequently, stakeholders should closely examine the deployment and funding opportunities presented in the FCC’s proposals. You will find more information on the key April meeting items after the break:

**Unlicensed Use of 6 GHz Band:** The draft [Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) would authorize two types of unlicensed operations in the 6 GHz band. First, the FCC would permit unlicensed operations in the 5.925-6.425 GHz and 6.525-6.875 GHz sub-bands at standard power levels used in nearby bands (*i.e.*, 23 dBm/MHz), provided such operations use an automated frequency control (AFC) system. The AFC would determine the frequencies available for use without causing harmful interference to incumbent operators and make only those frequencies available for unlicensed operations. Second, the FCC would permit unlicensed operations across the entire 1,200 megahertz of the 6 GHz band at a lower power (*i.e.*, 5 dBm/MHz) without an AFC system, but restrict such operations to indoor uses. The FCC would seek comment on allowing a higher power level (*i.e.*, up to 8 dBm/MHz) for indoor unlicensed operations. The agency also plans to ask whether it should permit very low power unlicensed operations without an AFC system both indoors and outdoors and, if so, what that power level should be.

**5G Fund:** The draft [Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Order](#) would seek comment on establishing

a 5G Fund to provide up to \$9 billion to support the deployment of 5G mobile broadband and voice networks in rural and other hard-to-serve areas over ten years. The 5G Fund would support deployments in areas left uncovered by the recently-approved T-Mobile/Sprint merger, which included a commitment to serve 90% of rural Americans within six years. Under the FCC's proposal, funding would be awarded through competitive bidding in two phases. Phase I would provide up to \$8 billion in support, including \$680 million in funding reserved for deployments on Tribal lands. The FCC would request input on two options for the Phase I timeframe. Under the first option, the FCC would initiate Phase I in 2021 using existing wireless deployment data to determine eligible areas and prioritize support for areas historically lacking 4G LTE (or even 3G) service. Under the second option, the FCC would hold off on Phase I until at least 2023 in order to use more granular deployment data developed through its upcoming [Digital Opportunity Data Collection](#). Phase II would take place after the completion of Phase I, targeting especially hard-to-serve areas and reserving at least \$1 billion to support networks used for precision agriculture. In addition, the FCC would seek comment on 5G Fund auction procedures as well as the appropriate eligibility, application, and performance requirements for auction participants.

**Orbital Debris Mitigation:** The draft [Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking](#) would mark the FCC's first major update to its orbital debris mitigation requirements in over 15 years and incorporate a number of recommendations developed by the agency with NASA, the Defense Department, and other federal agencies. The FCC would require all satellites to be able to perform collision avoidance maneuvers any time they are in orbit above the International Space Station (approximately 400 kilometers altitude). The FCC also would update its disclosure requirements to include new information related to satellite collision risk, protecting inhabitable spacecraft, maneuverability, and how operators plan to share information related to space situational awareness. In addition, the FCC would codify requirements for geostationary-orbit satellite license extensions and limit such extensions to five years. The FCC further plans to ask whether it should impose a bond requirement for geostationary and non-geostationary space stations contingent on successful post-mission station disposal.