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FCC Still Considering Allowing Potentially Interfering Uses Of Spectrum Previously Set Aside For Connected Car Technologies

Over a decade ago, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allocated spectrum in the 5.9 GHz band for the Dedicated Short Range Communications (DSRC) Service, which would be used for vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) and vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) communications. Since then, the automobile industry has spent hundreds of millions of dollars, and considerable time and effort, designing, developing, and testing V2V and V2I equipment and technologies, including an expansive pilot program in Ann Arbor.

In early 2013, the FCC commenced a rulemaking proceeding requesting public comment on, among other things, a proposal to allow other uses, such as WiFi use, of the DSRC frequencies that had been set aside for V2V and V2I communications. Not surprisingly, numerous commenters from the telecommunications and technology sector supported such expansion, while commenters from the automotive sector expressed concern over the potential for interference to V2V and V2I communications.

The FCC issued a decision in the proceeding earlier this week that expanded unlicensed usage in the 5 GHz band, but delayed making any decision about expanding such usage into the DSRC (5.9 GHz) portion of the band. While the FCC acknowledged that further analysis of the interference issue was required, there was no mention of the benefits or importance of protecting V2V and V2I communications using the DSRC spectrum.

The debate over the fate of the DSRC spectrum will continue before the FCC. The companies on the opposite side of the debate include some of the largest and most well connected telecommunications and technology companies, and their message of the importance to our economy of expanding unlicensed services like WiFi seems to be resonating with the FCC. Indeed, in her separate statement accompanying the recent FCC decision, Commissioner Rosenworcel underscored her support for expanding WiFi spectrum usage by noting that the economic impact of unlicensed spectrum has been estimated at \$140 billion annually.

The task at hand is to make certain that the FCC and the FCC Commissioners fully appreciate the virtues and benefits of V2V and V2I communications, which hold the potential to save lives, save energy and create jobs here in the United States. V2V and V2I technologies and communications must be fully protected from harmful interference.

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