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For Immediate Release

FCC PROPOSES RULES TO PROMOTE RELIABLE SUBMARINE CABLE COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE
Proposal Would Require Submarine Cable Licensees to Report Major Outages to FCC

WASHINGTON, September 17, 2015 – The Federal Communications Commission today proposed rules that would require submarine cable licensees to report significant outages to the FCC to help safeguard this critical communications infrastructure and promote reliable communications for businesses and consumers.

There are approximately 60 submarine (that is, undersea) cables that provide connectivity – voice, data and Internet – between the mainland U.S. and Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as virtually all connectivity between the U.S. and the rest of the world. While submarine cables are vital to America’s economic and national security, licensees currently only report outages on an ad hoc basis, and the information received by the FCC is too limited to be of use.

The Commission is therefore seeking timely information about submarine cable outages, with enough detail to understand the nature and impact of any damage and disruption to communications, help mitigate any impact on emergency services and consumers, and assist in service restoration. More consistent reporting on submarine cable outages can improve the agency’s ability to spot trends, address systemic issues, and inform policy making.

Specifically, in the Notice of Propose Rulemaking adopted today, the Commission seeks comment on a proposal that submarine cable licensees report major outages (i.e. outages involving either lost connectivity or degradation of 50 percent or more of an undersea cable’s capacity for periods of at least 30 minutes, regardless of whether the cable’s traffic is re-routed) to the agency’s Network Outage Reporting System (NORS). The Commission also seeks comment on how the agency can improve submarine cable deployment processes generally. In addition, the International Bureau, in coordination with the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, will develop and improve interagency coordination to facilitate deployment of this critical infrastructure.

Other communications providers – including wireline, wireless, and satellite —already are required to report outages to NORS. This has allowed the agency to analyze outage trends and work with network operators and providers to develop solutions to make communications more resilient and reliable.

Action by the Commission September 17, 2015 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 15-119). Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O’Rielly. Chairman

Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O’Rielly issuing statements.

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