

Rep. Leonard Lance
Opening Statement for the Record
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Challenges and Opportunities in the 5 GHz Spectrum Band” Hearing
November 13, 2013

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

I’m glad we are having this hearing to examine how the 5 GHz spectrum band can be used in the most effective way possible. It is my goal to ensure that we are using our entire spectrum in the most efficient way possible and to promote advancement of both incumbent services and the myriad unlicensed products and services that are becoming ubiquitous in our daily lives.

I think this Committee took the correct approach in directing the FCC and NTIA to examine the possibility of expanding the use of unlicensed devices in the 5 GHz bands as long as they do not cause harmful interference to the incumbent licensed operators already operating here. Much of this work has been done and I look forward to its work formally being finalized. There is a strong likelihood that we can make more efficient use of this spectrum and allow continued innovation of unlicensed devices using spectrum in this range without unduly hamstringing the commercial and public safety incumbents currently holding licenses.

In recent years the innovation in devices making use of unlicensed spectrum has been breathtaking. Wi-Fi internet access is no longer something restricted to our residences. The wireless phone carriers are “offloading” data traffic to Wi-Fi hot spots at ever growing rates due to their own spectrum crunch. There are fewer and fewer public places without publically available Wi-Fi. It has even been used to protect public safety. In the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy Cable companies opened their Wi-Fi networks to first responders aiding in communication during the recovery. Bluetooth technology continues to advance, connecting us to our devices and residences in more and more effective and innovative ways. Remote controlled toys, wireless microphones, garage door openers, cordless phones and other devices also use unlicensed spectrum to operate.

The band we are discussing today seems to be the logical place to increase these products and services but we also must take care not to foreclose completely the incumbent license holders already making use of this band. There is innovative and important research and development taking place by auto companies and important services being provided by satellite providers and radar operations already licensed here. It is important that we find the right balance to ensure that these services continue to operate as well.

Qualcomm Research--located in my district in Bridgewater, New Jersey--has a long history of innovation in wireless systems, silicon design and infrastructure products. The Bridgewater facility focuses on the development and design of small cell networks, mobile ad hoc and device-to-device communications, telematics and related wireless technologies.

Engineers from Qualcomm Research in Bridgewater and other Qualcomm facilities are working with NHTSA and the automobile manufacturers at the renowned University of Michigan

Transportation Research Institute to ensure the rapid rollout and proliferation of innovative and potentially life-saving Dedicated Short Range Communications (DSRC) services in the 5.9 GHz band, specifically the 75 MHz from 5.850 to 5.925 GHz allocated to DSRC.

As we are progressing on DSRC, demand for Wi-Fi continues to grow exponentially. We all recognize that as a nation we must be efficient in the way we allocate and utilize spectrum and what made sense ten or twenty years ago no longer works. At today's hearing we will hear from both Cisco and Comcast about the need for additional spectrum to support Wi-Fi. Cisco points out that global mobile data increased 70 percent in just one year from 2011 to 2012. I appreciate all that Cisco, Comcast, Qualcomm and others are doing every day to advance Wi-Fi services for American consumers.

The challenge we face as policymakers is to find a way to advance both DSRC and Wi-Fi. The FCC allocated the 75 MHz between 5.850 and 5.925 GHz in 1999—long before Wi-Fi was on the horizon and when DSRC was in its infancy. Given rapid technological advances since 1999, it is logical to ask whether Wi-Fi can share with DSRC on a secondary basis in a way that accommodates both activities.

In a May 28 filing with the FCC, Qualcomm stated that sharing would place DSRC safety services at risk of harmful interference. Qualcomm suggested a middle-ground alternative under which the upper portion of the 75 MHz—20-30 MHz—would be exclusively dedicated to DSRC so as to avoid any interference problem, while allowing Wi-Fi to share with DSRC in the remaining spectrum on a secondary basis, but only if this sharing works on a non-interfering basis.

The Qualcomm proposal may not be the final answer to how to reconcile DSRC and Wi-Fi. However, the proposal does provide a framework for discussion among all interested parties so that their talented and dedicated engineers can develop a solution. After all, virtually every American has a compelling interest in better wireless communications.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing.