



The Daily Dish

The Road to 5G

DOUGLAS HOLTZ-EAKIN | NOVEMBER 5, 2020

Eakinomics: The Road to 5G

Implementing the fifth generation wireless broadband (5G) standard is an enormous opportunity for U.S. innovators, firms, and consumers. There is no single 5G, as it turns out. 5G can run on low-, mid-, or high-frequency spectrum. There will be flavors from Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile, and others. It will be different in 2022 than in 2020, as innovation and competition change the hardware and apps that support and operate on 5G. That was the experience with 4G, which started rolling out in 2010 but caught fire with apps such as Snapchat, Uber, and video calls starting in 2013 and later. An overall lesson is that, to deploy 5G rapidly, it is important to have vibrant competition.

The idea of having advanced telecommunications capabilities is also attractive to various government agencies, including the military. So, at some level it is understandable that the Department of Defense (DoD) is looking closely at 5G and the potential use of the military's own valuable spectrum. But the DoD gave policy experts pause on September 18 when it issued a request for information (RFI) that would inform a government-run 5G network using a single contractor to implement the critical infrastructure of the network.

This approach would be problematic in at least two ways, and AAF's Jennifer Huddleston has all the [details](#). The first is that some policymakers have advocated for a single, government-run 5G network as the fastest and most efficient way to deploy the new technology. Is the DoD RFI a stalking horse for such a policy? If so, it is a terrible idea. Awful. Hideous. Monopolies are a bad idea. Government-created monopolies are the worst. The light-touch regulatory framework that fostered the 4G revolution should be preserved to nurture 5G as well.

But even if there is not a government monopoly, a DoD network raises some concerns. As it turns out, mid-band 5G is the most promising and the government – especially DoD –

controls large swaths of this spectrum. The ideal policy is to auction or otherwise deploy this spectrum for commercial purposes. Instead, the RFI raises the concern that a crucial piece of the infrastructure will be withheld or limited.

The road to 5G success runs through a competitive private sector, not the Department of Defense.