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# Report from Washington

## The Federal Communications Commission Proposes Modernized Space Licensing Rules

December 10, 2025

### Introduction

The Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”) has proposed rules to completely overhaul its satellite and earth station licensing process by creating a “licensing assembly line” that is more efficient and predictable than current licensing procedures. The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (“NPRM”) was published on December 5, 2025, with comments due on January 20, 2026 and reply comments due on February 18, 2026. The proposed rules are a response to the recent surge in applications and increasing complexity of space technology, in furtherance of the Commission’s Build America agenda to boost the space economy and “delete, delete, delete” regulatory red tape. Among other things, the proposed rules seek to expedite applications that do not raise concerns related to harmful interference, spectrum efficiency, space safety, or foreign ownership.

### (I) Modular Licensing Assembly Line

The NPRM envisions a “licensing assembly line” that is designed so that an application is either fast tracked if it meets presumed acceptable criteria or segmented for review of all nonconforming aspects of the request, with an eye towards increased automation of the process over time.

The current licensing framework relies on non-standardized application materials for space technologies that were not within the scope of the early satellite industry, which can result in subjectivity and delays that ultimately hinder innovation. The proposed framework seeks to simplify procedures by organizing the application into modules specific to the system’s frequency bands, orbital characteristics, and services, so that applicants do not need to complete superfluous and narrative-heavy materials. This modular approach also allows applicants to submit the FCC Form 312—Main Form in advance of seeking authorization, enabling the Commission to review applicants’ basic ownership information and grant preliminary clearance. All future license requests would be associated with the form, providing for an accelerated path for transfers of control or assignments.

The proposed framework would set bright-line performance measures and system characteristics that are presumed to be in the public interest, and default towards granting applications that fall within that safe harbor. Applications that (1) meet certain presumed acceptable criteria, (2) do not request waivers, and (3) are not subject to limited exceptions will have an expedited processing pathway. In most circumstances, these applications will be placed on public notice for seven days and then granted promptly.

Applications that do not qualify for expedited processing will require additional submitted material, and the elements that do not meet the bright-line criteria, require a waiver, or raise an exception will receive targeted review. These applications will be on public notice for 15 days. At the close of the public comment period, the Commission will review the application with an expectation of granting a license within 60 days.

## **(II) Additional Reforms**

The proposed rules contain several other reforms with the objective to increase the speed, predictability, and flexibility of the licensing process, including:

- Less onerous surety bond requirements;
- Extended 20-year license terms for most earth stations and space stations;
- An expanded set of license modifications that are permitted through simple notification and certification procedures;
- The option for applicants to request conditional grants while in the process of finalizing their system design;
- Requirements for operators to share space situational awareness data; and
- A new variable trajectory spacecraft system (“VTSS”) licensing pathway category to accommodate missions that do not follow predictable trajectories.

## **(III) Foreign Ownership Information**

Currently, space station applicants must disclose foreign management and ownership information. This NPRM seeks to expand that requirement to earth station applicants, so that all Form 312 applicants must disclose information about individuals or entities holding a 10% or more direct or indirect equity and/or voting interest or a controlling interest, and the names, citizenship, and address of each officer and director. The Commission will use this information to evaluate national security concerns and determine whether to refer the application to Team Telecom.

The Commission previously released a Foreign Adversary NPRM which proposes to impose foreign adversary ownership certification and information collection requirements for satellite networks and other regulated entities. Specifically, the Foreign Adversary NPRM proposes to require every entity to certify whether it is directly or indirectly owned by, controlled by, or subject to the jurisdiction or direction of a foreign adversary, and if so, submit additional information on foreign adversary control. If that proceeding results in separate rules for space stations and earth stations, the final space licensing rules will incorporate those.

#### **(IV) United States Market Access**

The NPRM seeks to replace piecemeal site-by-site licensing with a nationwide earth station license approach. Satellite systems that are licensed outside of the United States are permitted to have access to the U.S. market with a demonstration that U.S.-licensed space stations have effective competitive opportunities to provide analogous services in the country where the foreign space station is licensed. Currently, the Commission allows U.S. market access via either a petition by the space station operator or a request to access the foreign satellite by the domestic earth station operator. The NPRM proposes to eliminate the earth station pathway so that rules only permit market access pursuant to applications from the foreign satellite operator. The Commission reasons that the current earth station pathway creates confusion because it only allows communication with a specific earth station and not broader access to the U.S. market and creates a burden on the Commission to process multiple earth station market access applications rather than a single market access application from the foreign satellite system.

#### **Conclusion**

The proposed rules would have positive implications for the space industry. Shorter and more predictable timelines combined with clearer standards create a hospitable environment for investment in space innovation. Space innovation becomes more accessible through these proposed reforms, which are designed to enhance technological flexibility by reducing the regulatory burden of modifying systems and pioneering non-traditional missions.

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