

Informational Item - LightSquared

February 27, 2012

What is LightSquared?

LightSquared is a new telecommunications company that had planned to provide a wholesale, nationwide 4G-LTE wireless broadband network integrated with satellite coverage. The service would combine existing mobile satellite communications services with a ground-based wireless communications network that would offer users high speed Web access. The planned services would have competed against AT&T Inc. and Verizon Wireless among others. Several billion dollars had been invested in LightSquared's technology and service implementation.

What has been the concern?

LightSquared's base stations were using radio frequencies immediately adjacent to GPS frequencies. Testing showed LightSquared's ground-based transmissions overpowered the relatively weak GPS signals from space, even though it was operating in its own radio band. GPS devices would pick up the stronger LightSquared signal and become overloaded or jammed.

FCC Ruling

On February 14, 2012, the FCC ruled LightSquared would not be allowed to move ahead with the commercial network it had proposed and pulled its conditional operations waiver. The FCC action was taken following NTIA's¹ investigation and findings. NTIA Chief Larry Strickling wrote the FCC on February 14th stating it would require significant replacing, upgrading and retooling of GPS devices in the public and private sector to overcome the interference and the NTIA "cannot support the scheduled deployment of terrestrial services proposed by LightSquared." Following the FCC ruling, LightSquared indicated it plans to fight the ruling and is anticipating legal action.

¹ The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), located within the Department of Commerce, is the Executive Branch agency that is principally responsible by law for advising the President on telecommunications and information policy issues.