

Remarks by
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Federal Communications Workshop
Innovation, Investment, and the Open Internet
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I am very pleased to be here today, and, on behalf of the Internet Society I appreciate the opportunity to help set the stage for this workshop. In particular, we are happy to see the FCC reaching out even more broadly to involve the Internet Community.

The Internet Society was founded in 1992 by Internet pioneers Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn as a global not-for-profit organization dedicated to ensuring the open development and use of the Internet for the benefit of people throughout the world. As a global community with over 28,000 Individual members, 100 organization members and chapters in more than 90 countries, we address issues at the intersections of technology, policy, and development.

The Internet Society is also the organizational home for the Internet Architecture Board (IAB), and the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), which is the premier standards body for the Internet.

The topics embodied in the title of this workshop—“Innovation”, “Investment”, and the “Open Internet”, as well as the important dependencies amongst them—are critical to the future of the Internet, and central to the Internet Society’s mission.

Of course, the Internet of today is very different from the Internet when the Internet Society was founded over 18 years ago. The World Wide Web was in its infancy. There was no Twitter or Flickr. No Facebook. And companies such as Google and Skype didn’t yet exist. The infrastructure was very different in size and capability as well; in the course of less than two decades, the reach of the Internet has grown nearly 1000-fold, and today connects more than 1.5 billion people.

What has remained constant about the Internet, what is at the heart of its growth—and what distinguishes the Internet from other technologies or communication networks—is its continued evolution. Its amazing success has only been possible because of its development model built on openness, transparency, decentralization, and its distributed nature. Because the Internet is an open platform, users, network engineers, and businesses of all sizes can innovate both with regard to the platform itself—the Internet—and in how that platform is used. Everyone can participate in its development.

This distributed, open, and transparent approach has come to be called the “Internet Model” of development.

Some have suggested that the openness of the Internet is somehow in conflict with innovation and investment. This often plays itself out in polarizing discussions that set at odds the interests of network operators and content providers. On the one hand, too much openness, it is said, will diminish investment in infrastructure by network operators, thereby stifling innovation and the expansion of Internet connectivity. On the other hand, discrimination of Internet traffic will prevent content providers and individuals from developing new services and using the Internet as they wish.

The Internet Society takes a different view: we do not believe openness is a zero sum game.

For example, following the Comcast BitTorrent dispute, which involved peer-to-peer application traffic, the companies engaged in an open Internet standards process at the Internet Engineering Task Force to build better technology to address the heart of their problems going forward. Two new, open Working Groups were created within the IETF following long-established protocols. The LEDBAT (Low Extra Delay Background Transport) working group is standardizing a congestion control mechanism for peer-to-peer applications, and the ALTO (Application Layer Traffic Optimization) working group is developing a protocol to inform applications about network characteristics and topology.

That work has stimulated even further work as network operators and content providers use the open IETF forum to engineer longer term approaches to refining congestion management in the global Internet – that is, beyond the reach of their own networks and services. In this way, open participation in collective development efforts leads to broader opportunities for innovation and development than would be possible through narrow or closed, private efforts.

The result of this process is that the knowledge and skills of many companies as well as the broader Internet community can be brought to bear to address a specific challenge. We all stand to benefit from the more robust Internet architecture that will result from this kind of engagement.

The fact that the Internet remains open to ongoing evolution in its development, operation, management, and use means that the opportunities for context-shifting innovation and creativity still abound today. Innovators are not locked into a centrally predetermined future. Instead, they have the freedom to create multiple possibilities, with success or failure dependent upon whether they are taken up by users.

Similarly, policy should not be written in terms of today's technologies or applications or around narrow assumptions about how bandwidth is managed. Just as the ability to engage and benefit from a broad range of ideas has been a hallmark of what has made the Internet so successful, it is also true for Internet policy. Looking at the diversity of the panelists here, I think this workshop is a good example of a multi-stakeholder approach to tackling a difficult issue in the marketplace. So I commend the FCC for engaging in such an open process and for seeking out a wide range of viewpoints.

This workshop is being webcast, so it is important to note that governments, businesses, and Internet users in other countries are keeping a close eye on how these issues are addressed in the United States. While the Internet reaches 1.5 billion people today, it will reach billions more in the next few years. The ability of those people to contribute to the Internet's continued evolution will shape its future.

In closing, the Internet is an extraordinary platform for innovation, and has benefited from broad participation in both the use and development of Internet technology, services and applications. The Internet's openness has been critical to its past success and is the key to continued innovation and investment.