Before the
Federal Communications Commission

In the Matter of

Open Internet Remand
GN Docket 14-28

Framework for Broadband Internet Service
GN Docket 10-127

COMMENTS OF THE
ASSOCIATION FOR INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Submitted by

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Introduction and Statement of Purpose

I submit these comments on behalf of the Association for Information Systems (AIS) and its governing Council and members. As the preeminent global academic society in this field, we comprise 4,000 educators of Information Systems. Approximately one third of our membership resides in the United States.

Our comments reflect the perspective of a volunteer professional association, and more specifically, the voices of our members whose research, teaching careers and lives illustrate the extreme importance of fair and equal Internet access. We write to express our strong support for a free and open Internet as the vital lifeline for improving society, enabling individual communications and effecting business innovation and competition throughout the world. Specifically, we strongly support reclassifying broadband providers as common carriers.

Background on the Association

The Association for Information Systems serves society through the advancement of knowledge and the promotion of excellence in the practice and study of information systems. AIS is the premier professional association for individuals and organizations who lead the research, teaching, practice, and study of information systems worldwide.

AIS has members from over 100 countries, representing three different regions: Region 1, the Americas; Region 2, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa; and Region 3, Asia and the Pacific. The Association is incorporated in the state of Illinois as a non-profit organization. AIS was founded in 1995, and is currently in its twentieth year of service. We host two annual international conferences, twelve affiliated conferences, 34 special interest groups, 65 student chapters and 36 geographic chapters. Our eLibrary hosts over 10,000 research papers in our ten research journals, two affiliated research journals, and many conference proceedings.

A strategic goal of the AIS is to position information systems as a leading profession in the service of society. It is our position that society is best served when its information backbone, the Internet, is fairly available to all who use it, regardless of the power (read: size) of its providers and users, and regardless of the size and nature of the data it transports.
Impact of Paid Prioritization on Professional Associations

AIS, like many professional associations, uses the Internet for most of our interactions with members, subgroups and other interested parties. AIS hosts a long-lived open listserv that experiences high volume usage by members and nonmembers around the globe. We publish an electronic newsletter to our members, and also use several social media services to communicate with and among members. The association’s staff uses the Internet to administer member and conference activity.

Like most professional associations, our finances are tightly controlled and our sources of income are limited. Our governing body consists of a small staff who work with a small but dedicated team of volunteer officers. We cannot afford to compete with large companies for an Internet fast lane. With our heavy reliance on the Internet, the future viability of the association relies on each member’s ability to access our services and products. Given our global reach, our members in each of our 101 countries must have consistent and reliable access to our website, to our eLibrary, and to each other. If the cost or the reliability of the Internet were to be impacted by the lack of a neutral Internet, the future prospects for our and many other professional associations will diminish.

This country and all countries are better served by professionals who have access to the knowledge sharing and professionally productive individuals professional associations foster. Although this in itself is not the primary reason to reclassify ISPs as common carriers, it can easily become a second-order victim of the lack of centralized control over Internet access. Therefore, as a successful, Internet-dependent, professional association, we join our voices with the many other individuals and companies requesting that Internet access be treated as other utilities (with equal access for all) in this country.

Member Opinions

AIS members were recently polled to assess the strength of individual member commitment to this issue. Results show overwhelming support for keeping the Internet as a neutral infrastructure globally. 87% of our responding members favored net neutrality, with only 9% opposed to it (4% had no opinion). What follows are excerpts from the comments provided by these Information Systems academics in response to this survey:

“This issue shouldn’t even have reached the level of being debated as it is one of the most important pieces of global infrastructure fundamental to advancing our societies.”

“Absolutely essential! Carriers should not be able to 1) read the envelope or 2) open the envelope and make a decision on service.”
“The Internet is basically like water … and people don’t pay for ‘different qualities’ of water in the US. That is how the Internet should stay…maybe paying for volume but not quality.”

“This is one of the most important issues of our time. Allowing ISPs to filter and throttle Internet traffic is anti-competitive, anti-free-market and anti-privacy. Just as your electricity provider has no business tracking what devices you power or providing less electricity to your television than your heaters, your Internet provider has no business tracking what you download or providing less bandwidth for video than for email.”

“Given the change in most telecommunications traffic to packet switched, the internet is in essence the common carrier network of 30 years ago. As such, those providing access to the internet and managing the backbone should be designated as common carriers and prevented from doing anything to control the speed of traffic based on content. While there can still be different rates for different speed access lines, content shouldn’t be used to determine the speed of different traffic. To do so will stifle innovation because startups will not have the ability to get the same level of access to consumers as established organizations.”

“Presently, Internet infrastructure costs are shared among users. Charging intense users may seem a good thing because it is believe my personal cost will be lower. I don’t believe my Internet bill will get lower the day after. But I think there will be precedence given to ‘paying’ customers like Netflix and, by consequence, my Internet speed will get lower because of this ‘priority traffic’.”

And representing the opinions of our international members:

“You might compare this to Pakistan where the wealthy can take priority on the roadways and make the lesser folk wait on the sidelines for them to pass.”

“And any moves against net neutrality will have serious effect on developing countries such as Nigeria where presently broadband access is still a challenge.”

Conclusion

If allowed to pass, these rulings will be the end of an open and neutral Internet. Large international companies like Comcast, Time Warner, and Verizon (ISPs) make the argument that companies such as Netflix, who use a large portion of their networks' bandwidth, should help pay for speed, capacity and security improvements. The proposed plan would create a tiered Internet, allowing ISPs to charge companies for access to an online "fast-lane". These funds are supposed to be used to expand broadband infrastructure, which would be impossible to enforce. Also included in the proposal is wording to prevent the ISPs from slowing or blocking access to their competition, but the courts have already ruled that the FCC does not have the
power to enforce such safeguards. Essentially this plan would give ISPs more tools to control the flow of the Internet, without installing adequate checks or balances.

As an association, these policies would install large roadblocks in our ability to provide the quality and pricing of our products and services at a level our members would benefit from and afford. As academics in a domain where the Internet is primary to our research, teaching and livelihood, we oppose any rules that enable a tiered system of access, as is found in the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking under Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. We urge the Federal Communications Commission to provide a common and open infrastructure to all users by reclassifying broadband access as a Title II telecommunications service.

Representing the Association for Information Systems,

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