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State's plan to reprogram huge spectrum asset faces challenges

Deadline nears for bids on South Carolina 2.5-GHz licenses

By [John Cox](#), *Network World*
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In two weeks, South Carolina will find out if its educational wireless spectrum is a gold mine or an albatross.

On Jan. 2, a recently created state commission released a request for proposals, inviting bids on 67 Educational Broadband Service (EBS) licenses, originally issued decades ago for one-way, analog, education TV broadcasts, allowing a lecture to be watched in multiple classrooms, for example. There's enough of this 2.5-GHz spectrum not only to cover nearly every square inch of the state but also to shower 5.6 million residents with multichannel, wireless broadband voice, video and data services.

All that is possible because the FCC in 2004 and 2006 revamped the 2.5-GHz rules. One key change let EBS holders lease out up to 95% of their spectrum, which is rarely used for its original purpose since new modes of distance learning now are offered over IP-based broadband networks.

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It's prime spectrum real estate, in part because [Sprint](#) and [Cleanwire](#) have combined forces to buy or lease this spectrum to roll out their joint WiMAX 4G network. The early results, in Baltimore for example, are [impressive](#): multi-gigabit uploads and downloads even when mobile. In mid-2008, the WiMAX Forum had begun [certifying](#) an array of Mobile WiMAX products to access networks in this band.

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companies are willing or able to pay for it.

Finally, the whole process could spark a bruising and time-consuming political battle over different visions of how government and industry should partner on a range of broadband policy issues, from contract details, to service-level agreements, to bridging what's called the digital divide between well-heeled broadband users and the poor.

The state's wireless asset

The licenses are owned by the South Carolina Educational Television Network (ETV), a nonprofit that also runs 11 television stations and eight radio stations. After the FCC rules

