

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## New Era: AT&T Has Green Light to Start Cutting Copper Products

AT&T finally has a path forward to retiring a number of its copper phone lines. It announced during its 4Q24 earnings call that it has received the first **FCC** approval opening the door to exiting its legacy network operations across the majority of its wireline footprint by the end of 2029.

It received approval from the Commission late last month to stop selling and discontinue legacy voice services in approximately 1,300 wire centers, totaling one-quarter of those stretched across AT&T's footprint. Instead, AT&T will offer customers its AT&T Phone - Advanced product, which utilizes its wireless network and a broadband connection as a backup.

AT&T plans to submit detailed filings to the Commission in a few weeks on the transition, and while this is a victory for the company that wants to dive even deeper into its fiber investments, CEO *John Stankey* warned investors that this is a process that will take time and energy, including the transition of customers onto new products.

"These are not things that you file and 90 days later, you're starting to see a dramatic shift or a step function shift in cost. These are what gets us to our objectives by 2029 in ultimately reshaping the footprint and the cost structure of the business," Stankey said.

He added there will be collaboration with the FCC to answer any questions around what will be done with those centers and how to move through this process as quickly as possible.

Based on what he's been hearing, Stankey believes the new administration is interested in finding approaches that will allow AT&T to scale more rapidly and find ways to clear these technologies faster.

"They believe if the right policies are in place, that will stimulate investment in the right kind of going-forward technologies and we intend to embrace that, work with them and figure out how we take 1,300 successfully through the Commission and then move through another tranche," Stankey said.

He's also optimistic about the possibility of the Trump Administration extending some expiring tax incentives that would open the opportunity for more investment in U.S. communications infrastructure. Should those come through, he believes the proceeds could be used for increased share repurchases as well as additional investment in the acceleration of AT&T's fiber build.

The provider reported 307,000 AT&T Fiber net adds in 4Q24 and consumer broadband revenues reached \$2.9 billion, a 7.8% increase YOY. Overall revenues were \$32.3 billion.

Stankey also took a moment to touch on the topic of immigration and the sensitivity of AT&T's postpaid phone business to significant policy changes on that front. AT&T hasn't effectively played to that side of the market over time, so the good news is it is less vulnerable to the impacts of meaningful reforms. But Stankey also said he believes having more people moving into the U.S. is ultimately good for business.

"Part of what we all want to see is that the economy continues to grow and services continue to be invested in, and I think

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a key element to that is we have to have the right immigration policies. I'm hopeful that policymakers kind of go through the next number of months... and they get to an appropriate place that understands that for the U.S. economy to continue to grow, we need smart immigration," he said. "Hopefully, wise minds prevail and that's what takes place."

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## CARR SHREDS BULK BILLING PLAN

**FCC** Chair *Brendan Carr* rolled back an action of his predecessor on Friday, removing from circulation an item related to the alleged harms that arise from bulk billing arrangements between ISPs and MDUs. The proposal was largely opposed by cable operators that utilize such agreements, arguing such arrangements have historically given those living in low income and affordable housing properties the ability to access the internet at discounted rates. There were also concerns around how the proposal could impact communities like student housing, campgrounds and more. The **Bulk Broadband Alliance**, which counts **ACA Connects**, the **National Multifamily Housing Council** and **EducationSuperHighway** among its membership, celebrated Carr's decision, calling it a major victory for millions of households. "Today's action marks the third time in 15 years—2010, 2017, and now 2025—that the FCC, under Democratic and Republican leadership, has not moved to regulate bulk billing arrangements after evaluating their pros and cons in the record," the organization said. "It's undisputed that consumers benefit most when these arrangements remain free from government interference and are left to the market."

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## CRUZ TAKES STAND AGAINST FCC WIFI HOTSPOT ORDER

**Senate Commerce** Chair *Ted Cruz* (R-TX) led a group of 13 Republicans on the committee in introducing a resolution of disapproval that would nullify an **FCC** order allowing USF funds to be used to subsidize WiFi hotspots for off-campus use by students. The legislators argue the order is an overreach of the FCC's mandate given how the Communications Act limits USF authority to classrooms. They also highlighted the order's lack of a limit on the amount of federal dollars to be used for hotspots, opening the door for waste, fraud and abuse and strain on the already-troubled USF. Additionally, the senators have concerns the order poses risks to children's online safety given hotspot use may not be supervised as closely as internet use within a traditional classroom environment. "Every parent of a young child or teenager either worries about, or knows first-hand, the real dangers of the internet. The government shouldn't be complicit in harming students or impeding parents' ability to

decide what their kids see by subsidizing unsupervised access to inappropriate content," Cruz said in a statement.

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## SINCLAIR'S EARLY 4Q24 READINGS, NEW PRIVATE OFFERING

**Sinclair** unveiled preliminary, unaudited media revenues and certain media operating expenses for its local media segment in 4Q24. Sinclair expects the quarter's local media segment media revenues to be \$931-933 million, down from the previous guidance of \$936-945 million. That does include political ad revenue of approximately \$203 million (down from an expected \$204 million) as well as core non-political advertising revenue of \$300-301 million, distribution revenue of \$392-393 million and other media revenue of an estimated \$37 million. Those last three segments are each down from past guidance of \$307-315 million, \$392-393 million and \$38 million, respectively. On the bright side, Sinclair anticipates 4Q24 local media segment combined preliminary media programming and production expenses and media selling, general and administrative expenses to reach \$580-582 million—down from what was expected to be a total of \$589-590 million. Results are subject to revision before next month's earnings report. Sinclair complemented the early report with a new private offering of \$1.43 million in first-out first lien secured notes due in 2033 for Sinclair Television Group, subject to market conditions and other factors. The issuer expects to use the net proceeds to repay its outstanding \$1.175 million of aggregate principal amount of term loans B-2, purchase notes held by certain parties and pay related fees and expenses from transactions.

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## OPTIMUM'S LATEST MSGN PUNCH

It's looking like another week of the carriage spat between **MSG Networks** and **Optimum**. Optimum got its Monday started by releasing another statement that continued to point blame across the table while emphasizing it's "open to reaching a fair deal." However, it also shed some light on a previous statement alleging MSG leadership pulled out of negotiations. "MSG Networks' Executive Chairman *James Dolan* abruptly ended negotiations with Optimum. His exact words to Optimum's CFO were, 'I'm here to shut this down.' This was a shocking turn of events as tremendous progress had been made to reach a deal, and Optimum was preparing for content restoration when he shut down conversations," Optimum said, again encouraging customers to call for other options if they want to watch programming they're missing due to the blackout. **CFX** reached out to MSGN for comment, but didn't receive a response by our deadline.

## MLS MOVES IN WITH WWE

MLS unveiled a slew of new broadcast and production changes as the league gets ready to kick off the 2025 campaign. A big part of those changes includes MLS Productions moving to **WWE** HQ in Stamford, Connecticut, enabling them to use WWE's production facility for the MLS Season Pass offering found on **Apple TV** in addition to live studio programming and other English- and Spanish-language content. Additionally, MLS is renewing a partnership with IMG that'll expand their existing broadcasting partnership. IMG will continue to produce live match and studio productions and programming for over 600 games annually on MLS Season Pass.

## NIELSEN, CMG RENEW

Nielsen continued its [string of positive news](#) with a multi-year renewal for TV and audio measurement services spanning **Cox Media Group's** local TV and radio stations. CMG will continue to use Nielsen's suite of measurement services including local media impact, streaming dynamic ad insertion and more.

## SHORT FORM, TALL TRENDS

Short-form content has etched its way into the entertainment habits of many, especially among younger demographics. **Hub Entertainment Research's** annual "Video Redefined" survey found that platforms such as **YouTube** or **TikTok** have usurped traditional TV viewing for some, with consumers aged 13-24 estimating that 21% of all entertainment screen time goes to non-premium video. About 16% of that time is spent on traditional TV shows, while consumers aged 35+ spend 39% of their screen time on TV shows—while spending 14% on online videos. Approximately 58% of viewers aged 13-24 indicate that short videos are "just as much fun" as premium TV. That number increases to 64% for the 25-34 group, but falls to 41% for the 35+ category. Fifty-seven percent of viewers 13-24 said they spend less time watching "regular TV" because of time spent on other platforms (50% for 25-34 and 35% for 35+). However, over 63% of folks 13-24 and 66% of viewers 25-34 said they often discover new TV shows and movies through short clips seen on other social media platforms. It's notable that nearly half of survey respondents under 35 feel they spend too much time on short-form platforms like TikTok or **Instagram**, and that it might be better to carve more time for TV and movies. The Video Redefined survey was conducted among 1,919 U.S. consumers aged 13-47 with broadband access.

## FIBER FRENZY

**Mediacom** took another step in its expansion in Baldwin County, Alabama. The company activated services for over 700 homes and businesses across Bay Minette and Silverhill, giving customers access to speeds of up to 2 Gbps. Media-com's 143-mile fiber build began in May and will continue throughout 2025. The first batch of addresses went live in

November. – Colorado-based StratusIQ is entering a strategic financial partnership with a commercial banking consortium led by CrossFirst Bank. The agreement comes as **StratusIQ** looks to expand its fiber network to more residents and businesses in the greater El Paso County area. CrossFirst holds over \$7.5 billion in assets.

## AWARDS

**NAMIC** extended the deadline for Vision Awards submissions to Friday at 11:59pm ET. A reminder that the Vision Awards seek to recognize original TV and digital programming that reflects an increasingly diverse, multicultural and multi-ethnic audience. Eligibility requirements, judging criteria and more info can be found on the Awards' [website](#).

## PROGRAMMING

**TLC** is premiering a new series looking behind the scenes of *Alec* and *Hilaria Baldwin* along with their seven children. "The Baldwins" will make its debut Feb. 23 at 10pm. – **HGTV** signed "Home Town" stars *Ben* and *Erin Napier* to a new exclusive talent deal. The show will get a 32-episode extension shooting through 2027. It's currently in its ninth season, with episodes available on Sundays at 8pm. – **Fox Nation** inked its second deal with *Kevin Costner* that'll see the three-part limited series "Yellowstone to Yosemite" debut Feb. 8. The series will kick off Fox Nation's year-long "America 250 campaign" commemorating the U.S.' 250th anniversary in 2026. Costner's first special "Yellowstone: One-Fifty" premiered on the platform in 2022. – **BET+** unveiled plans for its first adult animated series. "LIL KEV," created by actor and comedian *Kevin Hart*, will premiere this Spring. Fellow comedians *Wanda Sykes* and *Deon Cole* will also star in the show.

## PEOPLE

**TDS** is getting some new leadership at the top. Effective Feb. 1, *Walter Carlson* will succeed *LeRoy Carlson, Jr.* as the company's President/CEO. LeRoy Carlson will assume a newly-created Vice Chair position at that time focusing on enterprise strategy. He will also continue to serve as **UScellular's** board chair. Walter Carlson has served on the TDS board since 1981, acting as its non-executive chair since 2002.

## FAXIES NOMINATIONS OPEN

It's time to celebrate the best and brightest across marketing and PR. [Entries are now open](#) for **Cablefax's** 2025 FAXIES Awards, showcasing marketing, communication and PR initiatives that have made waves over the past 12 months. This year's awards include Marketing Executive of the Year, Campaign of the Year, Media Event and more, in addition to new awards such as AI Innovation Team of the Year and AI Executive of the Year. Early bird pricing for nominations expires Friday.