

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

In Sync: FCC Roundtable Urges Cross-Sector Collaboration in Weather Disasters

The FCC's roundtable Monday on the telecom response during natural disasters was especially timely considering the catastrophic flooding that took place in central Texas over the July Fourth weekend. At least 95 people died across what's known as Texas' Hill Country and an unknown number more are missing.

Charter has Spectrum customers in Kerr County, the hardest-hit area, but it hasn't experienced significant outages stemming from damage or power-related issues. It did sustain impacts in Travis County—where Austin is located—but service was back up and running by Sunday afternoon. **Optimum** is another operator that serves areas affected by flooding. It has a team in Georgetown (a suburb north of Austin) stationed along the San Gabriel River in the event water levels continue to rise, though there haven't been any impacts to its Georgetown footprint so far.

Optimum was quick to help folks out in the San Angelo area over the weekend, deploying a WiFi trailer that offers free connectivity and power charging for anyone in the community who needs it. Several employees were on hand to distribute water as well. Satellite broadband provider **Starlink** said it was providing mini kits for search and rescue efforts, as well as one month of free services for customers in the region. It also worked with **T-Mobile** to enable basic SMS texting for its customers through Starlink's direct-to-cell satellites. T-Mobile, along with **AT&T** and **Verizon**, reports that their networks remain operational.

"The FCC, obviously, is monitoring the situation from a communications perspective. The good news is we're not seeing any sort of significant, widespread communications issues coming from [the floods], but we are monitoring. We stand ready to support and assist in any way that we can," Chairman **Brendan Carr** said Monday.

As relief efforts continue in Texas, the FCC is looking at what it can do to get stakeholders on the same page in preparation for natural disasters, with Monday's roundtable with communications providers, electric utilities and emergency management officials focused on prep for the peak of hurricane season. In Carr's opening remarks, he noted that historically, the most important action after a storm was to restore power. Nowadays, it's a balancing act to restore both power and communications, and that means teams from different jurisdictions will inevitably clash in their respective restoration efforts. Networks tend to hold strong in the aftermath of a storm, but then comes what Carr calls "a sawtooth pattern of restoration efforts."

"There'll be some restoration, then we'll lose service, and there's a lot of reasons for that," he said. "One is commercial power struggling in the long term. Two, you'll get fiber cuts along the way. It's people trying to clear roads so that emergency workers can come in; they're just going to be cutting debris, and they don't realize that there's still a fiber stand in there that's still working. Or, a power company that comes in to replace a pole could end up accidentally disrupting a communications line that's in there."

It doesn't help that storms in recent years have caused

PRESENTED BY CABLEFAX

VOICES OF IMPACT AND Workplace CULTURE

It's time to nominate for the Cablefax Voices of Impact & Workplace Culture Awards!
We're celebrating execs who lead with purpose, rising changemakers, standout mentors,
and teams building workplaces where talent thrives.

Join us in spotlighting the people and companies driving progress in media and broadband.

NOMINATE NOW

levels of damage that haven't been seen in quite some time, if ever. This year may maintain that trend, with **NOAA** [having predicted](#) a 30% chance of a near-normal Atlantic hurricane season, a 60% chance of an above-normal season and a 10% chance of a below-normal season.

Panelist and **Duke Energy** Federal Government Affairs Director *Drew Preston* said one of the lessons he and his colleagues learned from last hurricane season was the scale and scope of damage that modern-day storms can bring. He recounted 30- or 40-year company veterans admitting they had "never seen devastation" like it did during recovery operations last year. Duke Energy provides power to around 10 million customers across seven states, including North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida.

Greg Hauser, Statewide Interoperability Coordinator for North Carolina Emergency Management, is intimately familiar with the devastation Hurricane Helene brought to the Tar Heel State. Twenty-two counties in western NC had significant or catastrophic communications and energy infrastructure damage at one point. That experience has shaped what he views as the main focus of emergency response coordination across industries: having a framework already established.

"The focus really became clear that the emergency communications ecosystem has to be in place before we start taking those reactive measures," Hauser said. "The government-to-government lane of communicating, the government-to-public, the public-to-government and then that public-to-public communications lane. We really have to be methodical, and ultimately, we have to put a team of our friends together to react to those things. That includes power, that includes our friends in the media, the public broadcasting."

In a later panel, **Charter** VP Regulatory Affairs *Joseph Viens* talked about some of the collaboration that already takes place. He said the cable industry has a biweekly call with **Edison Electric Institute** that focuses on how to improve communication from both sides of the table. Plus, power companies are invited to the annual **SCTE TechExpo**, where Viens touted the aspect of establishing relationships in person during an event centered on innovation. However, to him, it still comes down to having the right people in place at the right time.

"In terms of advice I would give is make sure that your operational folks within the power companies and the comms companies are developing relationships at the street level, because ... D.C. does not have all the right ideas or all the answers, and they don't have the screwdriver that gets down to the end," Viens said.

NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association CEO *Shirley Bloomfield* focused on ensuring smaller communications providers aren't forgotten when it comes to prioritizing recovery steps.

Some of the concern is having large power companies such as Duke Energy be just as collaborative and transparent with the likes of Verizon and AT&T as they are with smaller providers.

"It's so interesting, because those that have those long-term relationships, I said, 'Are you exchanging phone numbers before? Are you exchanging contact information?' Some of them are like, 'Well, they were in my wedding.' I mean these are small towns," Bloomfield said. "I look at somebody like Duke Energy, and I think, 'Well, you've got a lot of small communication providers in your footprint, but you might only be thinking about Verizon, and how do you make sure you're sharing that [geographic information system], you're sharing that contact information.'"

NEXSTAR REFUTES ALTAFIBER'S RETRANS COMPLAINT

Nexstar dismissed **altafiber's** retransmission consent complaint against it, calling it nothing more than a "garden-variety case of disagreement over carriage terms that occurs routinely in a negotiation." Approximately 1,000 **altafiber** customers in the Dayton, OH, DMA have been without **NBC** affiliate **WDTN** since May 31. The operator filed a formal complaint at the **FCC** last month, accusing Nexstar of failing to negotiate in good faith and holding it "hostage" unless it agrees to carry the broadcaster's fledgling cable news network **NewsNation** in the Cincinnati DMA, where Nexstar has no broadcast television stations. It's also quibbling with Nexstar including an option for rates for future stations it may acquire (which could happen soon if the FCC nixes the 39% national audience cap). Nexstar said **altafiber's** real complaint is rates, including for **NewsNation**. Nexstar responded to the FCC complaint on July 3, accusing **altafiber** of misconstruing the requirement to negotiate in good faith, saying that both proposals are permissible. "When the FCC developed its good faith rules in 2000, it not only rejected MVPD proposals to prohibit broadcasters from 'offering retransmission consent in exchange for the carriage of other programming such as a cable channel,' but instead found this practice to be 'presumptively legitimate,'" Nexstar said, noting the agency has repeatedly rebuffed MVPD attempts to ban tying channels to retrans negotiations. Similarly, the broadcaster contends that after-acquired clauses are commonplace: "The decades-long and widespread inclusion of these clauses across the industry recognizes that the very purpose of an after-acquired clause is to promote efficiency by obviating the need to undertake separate carriage negotiations every time a broadcaster acquires a station in an MVPD's market or an MVPD a system in a broadcaster's market."

COMCAST MOVING CARTOON NETWORK TO ADD-ON TIER

Cartoon Network (and **Adult Swim**) will soon lose their place in **Comcast's** Ultimate TV and Digital Preferred tiers. The operator began notifying customers that the **Warner Bros. Discovery** channel, which switches over to Adult Swim in the evening, will move to the \$9.95/month add-on More Sports & Entertainment package come Aug. 12. The package is also home to **NFL Redzone**, **FanDuel TV**, **CBS Sports**, **CMT**, **NBA TV**, **Military History**, **Crime & Investigation** and **Turner Classic Movies** (TCM). Comcast moved TCM to the [package](#) in 2019, citing a rise in programming costs as well as the network's drop in popularity. In May, **Sling TV** moved Cartoon Network from its Sling Orange plan to its more expensive Sling Blue offering.

FIBER FRENZY

Astound Broadband has completed a comprehensive refinancing and received a \$400 million capital infusion from its parent company, the investment firm **Stonepeak**, that will allow it to continue the build out of its fiber network. Under Stonepeak, Astound has completed fiber construction to 800,000 households and has identified over 1 million more for future deployment. – **Shentel** announced the launch of **Glo Fiber** in initial neighborhoods of Hillsboro, Ohio. The fiber project began earlier this year and is expected to be completed in early 2026, at which time more than 3,000 homes and businesses will have access to Glo Fiber's symmetrical speeds of up to 5 Gigs.

NETFLIX LEADS ANIME RACE

Netflix said at Anime Expo, which was held in L.A. over the weekend, that over 50% of its audience is now watching anime content on the platform. That's over 150 million households or about 300 million viewers. The streamer also reports that it has tripled its anime viewership over the last five years. 2024 was a particularly big year for anime on Netflix: 33 titles made it onto the platform's global non-English top 10 list last year, which also saw viewers tune into anime more than 1 billion times. It's no surprise, then, that Netflix is continuing to bulk up its anime programming, including with smash-hit action series "Sakamoto Days," which gets new episodes on July 14.

PEOPLE

David Barnes is the new President/CEO of **Comporium**, succeeding his father, **Bryant**. Barnes will oversee corporate strategy and the development of new products as well as ensure profit expectations are met. The Barnes family has led the S.C. operator for five generations. – **Narinder Sahai** was appointed EVP/CFO of **Sinclair**, taking over from **Lucy Rutishauser**, who is retiring at the end of the year. Sahai joins from leisure and hospitality operator **Arcis**, where he served as CFO.

What We're Listening to

YouTube's 'Creator Coup'

The big bad wolf in media may have been in front of our eyes for years, but folks are more than aware nowadays of how much YouTube can—and has—disrupted the ecosystem. CEO Neal Mohan joined "**The Ankler Podcast**" in an episode centered on YouTube and its stature against the likes of Netflix, Disney and other modern media giants. Though YouTube does share some characteristics that a streaming platform carries, its creator-led model inherently separates itself from the rest of the media pack.



"I don't view YouTube as a social media platform. We're not social media. We're not traditional television. We're really in our own lane," Mohan said. "As a result of it, the way I think about YouTube is it's a creator platform ... I'm very proud of the fact that we are the world's original and largest creator economy."

By being a creator-focused platform, YouTube has been able to skyrocket in the media ecosystem without having to spend a single cent on acquiring "premium content." Some, including Netflix co-CEO Ted Sarandos, view that as a hindrance, but in the race to garner the attention of younger audiences, the line between a traditional TV episode and a YouTube video seems to get blurrier.

That's not to say YouTube hasn't broken its piggy bank to enhance its content offering. It reportedly shells out \$2 billion per year for the rights to NFL Sunday Ticket (Mohan did jump in to say "Don't believe everything that's written" about the figure). YouTube is also gearing up to stream the Chiefs vs Chargers contest on Sept. 5, its first exclusive standalone NFL game.

Sports, and the NFL in particular, is an area Mohan embraces because of the simplicity YouTube offers that could enhance the fan experience. Gone are the days of needing a dedicated dish installed to get Sunday Ticket—now, the offering is just a few taps away, and the ease of access in addition to pre-existing connection with younger audiences is something the NFL was intrigued by. That played a key role in YouTube ultimately getting the Sunday Ticket prize.

"My son is a 17-year-old sports nut, but everything that he watches is through the lens of his favorite YouTubers and sports creators. And the NFL recognized that," Mohan said. "When the NFL came onto YouTube ... we aged down their audience because we could actually allow that content now to live alongside all of this amazing, creator-first sports content that's happening on YouTube. And that was the flywheel that we were betting on, that I was betting on, and that we've seen happen with Sunday Ticket and gave me conviction then to double down and do this live game as well."

- Noah Ziegler