CFX DAILY
WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2026
VOLUME 37 | NO. 156
CABLEFAX.COM

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Adtaxi's new Consumer & Economy Survey: Nearly half of respondents (49%) are comparing prices more often, followed by eating at home (42%), switching to lower-cost brands (40%) and buying fewer discretionary items (39%). The digital marketing agency said the survey found value means more to consumer than simply low price, with 47% of respondents selecting "high quality for the price" as one of the most important characteristics of a good value—outperforming lower price alone.

APCO: COMCAST UNDERPAYING FOR POLES

The power struggle between **Comcast** and **Appalachian Power Company** (APCo) continues, with the Virginia-based utility telling the **FCC** that the connectivity provider contends it should pay "next to nothing" for pole replacements.

On Monday, APCo filed its formal answer to Comcast's complaint, asking the FCC to deny and dismiss it. Rather than charge Comcast too much, APCo argues its proposal of 20% of the entire cost of pole replacements actually undercounts the costs, citing new engineering data that it says shows the fair share should be closer to 25%.

Comcast filed the FCC complaint in July, claiming APCo isn't complying with a Feb. 5 Commission order that found that when a utility-owned pole has pre-existing safety violations or repair requirements, it can't charge a broadband provider the full cost of replacement. APCo maintains that Comcast is interpreting the order incorrectly by focusing on the phrase "incremental costs," while ignoring Rule 1.1408(b)'s language about "proportional" cost-sharing.

"There was no 'clear mandate' in the Feb. 5 Order. The Feb. 5 Order outlined broad cost allocation principles and rejected the primary positions of each party," the company said. "If there was a 'clear mandate,' there would have been no need for discussions between the parties regarding the proper manner of implementing the Feb. 5 Order."

What's more, APCo claims it's "comical" that Comcast has proposed paying $100 towards an $8,000 pole replacement as a "compromise." For its part, APCo is seeking 20% of the cost to replace a pole, a figure it arrived at by rounding down. The utility first had a vendor study a sample of 26 poles, finding they generated 13% more loading capacity than needed to fix the underlying safety violations. APCo added that to a separate 10% excess vertical capacity that Comcast itself had already conceded new attachers typically benefit from, for a combined 23% excess capacity—which APCo rounded down to 20%.

After Comcast filed its complaint, APCo had a second vendor study another 21 poles, this time finding 22% excess loading capacity. Blended with the first study, the full pole sample showed 17.5% excess loading capacity on average—which, added to Comcast's conceded 10% vertical capacity, brings the total to 27.5%. APCo says that number would support raising Comcast's share to 25%, rather than lowering it, but for now the utility is still applying its original 20% allocation.

Comcast has also complained about a related APCo policy: if the original violator removes its unauthorized attachment before the pole is replaced, APCo will bill Comcast—as the new attacher—for the full cost of the pole, not just its 20% share. APCo defends this, arguing that once the violation is gone, Comcast becomes the sole cause of the replacement, and it says the Feb. 5 order supports charging the full cost in that scenario.

Pole attachment disputes are nothing new, but this one has drawn a lot of interest because it was lauded by the FCC as evidence that its Rapid Broadband Assessment Team (RBAT) and accelerated docket procedures are helping address barriers to broadband deployment. When Comcast first informed the FCC in May that it didn't think APCo was complying with the order, state broadband associations representing West Virginia and Virginia offered their support along with **NCTA**. Comcast followed up its May letter with a formal complaint in July.

APCo told the FCC that with the benefit of hindsight, it doesn't believe Comcast was acting in good faith during the conversations between the parties prior to the May letter. "In fact, APCo believes that Comcast's sole objective was to force APCo to unilaterally implement the lowest possible allocation to the new attacher, knowing that Comcast would simply challenge whatever methodology APCo implemented," the utility wrote.

The utility also filed a list of questions for Comcast to answer that it says are necessary for resolution of the dispute. It wants to know whether Comcast has performed any engineering analysis to ascertain the excess capacity created by the pole replacements at issue in the complaint along with the specific APCo poles to which Comcast intends to seek access in order to "connect approximately 13,000 unserved and underserved locations in Virginia" as part of the BEAD-funded deployment referenced in its complaint.

APCo also wants Comcast to detail reasons it makes attachments to APCo's poles without first obtaining written permission from the utility. This is important because the utility claims that the "vast majority" of preexisting safety violations on poles arise because broadband companies attach their facilities to APCo's poles without submitting an application and without obtaining authorization. APCo said its recent pole audit identified 2,862 unauthorized attachments made by Comcast to its poles.

Comcast declined to comment on APCo's brief. The company is expected to file a reply in the docket. In its original complaint, Comcast argued that pole-owner practices like APCo's make it harder and more costly to expand broadband access, and it has asked the FCC to resolve the dispute on an expedited basis.

DIRECTV LOSES CIRCLE CITY ABC STATION

Circle, circle, dot, dot, now your retransmission consent is shot… We warned you Friday that things didn't look good for **DirecTV**'s continued carriage of WRTV-**ABC** in Indianapolis, and sure enough, it went dark at 8pm ET Monday on the MVPD's lineup. New owner **Circle City Broadcasting** is tying carriage of the station to its Indianapolis **CW** and **MyNetwork TV** stations, which DirecTV hasn't carried since 2019. "Unfortunately, Circle continues to insist that any Indianapolis customers must pay for its less-popular WISH-CW and WNDY-MyNetwork stations to get WRTV-ABC back, at a cost nearly double what its previous owner collected," DirecTV said. Circle City called the claim false and misleading, saying it's not asking for "anywhere close to double" what DirecTV paid WRTV's previous owner Scripps. "Circle City Broadcasting is also seeking less compensation for WISH-TV and WNDY than DirecTV paid their previous owner seven years ago. Yet DIRECTV continues to compensate large media companies for other

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CW and MyNetworkTV affiliates while resisting comparable treatment for our locally owned stations," the broadcaster said. DirecTV has noted that the higher retrans costs come after Circle City laid off most of WRTV's newsroom employees when it took control of the station in late March. For its part, Circle City said it's since hired more than 40 employees, expanded weekday morning news and restored weekend morning newscasts after eight years without. It pointed to other investments including a new set and studio and additional locally produced content. In other words, these two aren't on the same page or even the same chapter.

NTIA DOINGS

NTIA Administrator *Arielle Roth* tapped *Tricia Paoletta* as her No. 2, elevating her to Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary from her role as Senior Advisor for Spectrum. In applauding the move, **NCTA** said Paoletta's leadership will be especially important as the U.S. prepares for WRC-27 and made sure to mention one of its pet causes—protecting the full 6 GHz band for unlicensed use. Meanwhile, on Tuesday, NTIA published a notice seeking comment on the application it'll use for its revamped Digital Equity Competitive Grant program. A 60-day comment period runs through Oct. 26. In July, a federal court rejected the *Trump* administration's bid to kill the broader Competitive Grant Program entirely, finding that the allocation of federal money based on a racial classification was unconstitutional but severable from the program. The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act set aside $2.75 billion for the grant initiative to expand broadband adoption and digital skills among communities facing barriers to internet access.

CHARTER'S AMAZON PRIME BENEFIT

Charter is rolling out free **Amazon** Prime benefits to eligible Spectrum Internet customers who qualify for the $25/month Spectrum Internet Assist plan for low-income households. Valued at $14.99/month or $139/year, Prime benefits include exclusive deals and savings, free delivery, and access to **Prime Video**, the Amazon Luna cloud gaming platform and more. Amazon Prime's delivery benefits alone saved members an average of $550 in fees last year. Qualifying customers can sign up for Prime through a simplified portal on the Spectrum website. This benefit will also soon be available to qualifying legacy Cox customers.

COURT REJECTS FCC'S PARTY AD RATE RULE

A federal appeals court granted a Petition for Review of a March **FCC** Media Bureau Public Notice that said broadcasters were obligated to give their Lowest Unit Rates not only to political candidates and their campaign committees, but also joint fundraising committees and candidate-coordinated political party ads. Four Democrats running for office filed the legal challenge, claiming it expanded who qualifies for the lower cost ads. "We conclude that the LUC requirement and campaign finance statutes are clear that neither political parties nor joint fundraising committees with non-candidate members can be entitled to the LUC," the court said. TVB filed a petition for reconsideration, with the Media Bureau dismissing it and saying the public notice was merely a reminder of existing guidance. The 2-1 court ruling is timely, with the LUC window set to open Sept. 4. Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson dissented on the merits and the court's jurisdiction in the case. He argued the court jumped the gun because the FCC is still considering an application for review of the notice brought by the four candidates. He also said that even if the court had jurisdiction, the majority's narrow reading of the statute risks violating the First Amendment by favoring solo candidate ad-buying over constitutionally protected candidate-party coordination.

MONUMENTAL GETS IN DAZN

DAZN continues to grow its presence in the RSN space. Last month, it struck a deal to be the DTC provider of New York's **YES Network** and **MSG Networks**. Now it's heading down I-95 and stopping in the nation's capital, signing a deal to offer **Monumental Sports Network**'s **Monumental+** as a subscription through DAZN. Users will be able to watch all live programming and studio content and utilize DAZN's app features such as real-time chats, in-game polls and quizzes. In addition to its RSN moves, DAZN also recently completed a deal to buy **ViewLift** and bolster its streaming platform technology.

PALEY IC SUMMIT AGENDA AND SPEAKERS SET

The **Paley International Council Summit** (Oct. 19-21) unveiled this year's agenda and full speaker list, which includes the inaugural *John Malone* keynote address. Also joining the three-day gathering in NYC are **Versant** CEO *Mark Lazarus*, **Optimum** CEO *Dennis Mathew*, **ESPN** Anchor *Hannah Storm*, **CNN** Host *Fareed Zakaria*, **NHL** Commissioner *Gary Bettman*, **Liberty Global** CEO *Mike Fries*, **Sony** President/CEO *Hiroki Totoki*, *Yahoo* CEO *Jim Lanzone* and more. This year's theme is "Global Media in Focus: Power, Platforms and Perspective," exploring the forces shaping the media landscape. To that end, the summit will include a panel on "The Next Wave of Media Consolidation," Mathew joining a talk on "The New Economics of Attention" and Lazarus discussing leading global organizations through a period of change. The Cable Cowboy's keynote is happening Oct. 21 at 9:15am. It'll be a sit down with Fries, offering insights on where the media industry is headed next. You can find the full agenda, speaker list and how to register here.

WOMEN'S SPORTS KEEP UP THE MOMENTUM

U.S. audiences consumed 46 billion minutes of women's sports last year, a 71% increase from 2022, according to a new **Nielsen** report. That momentum has continued into 2026, with viewers consuming 28.3 billion minutes so far, well on the way to another record-breaking year. Nielsen reports that more than half of the general U.S. population (approximately 122.5 million) is now interested in women's sports. That growth isn't confined to just one league: 2026 has already delivered the most-watched women's hockey game ever (5.3 million average viewers for the Milan Cortina Gold Medal match), the **NCAA** Softball Women's College World Series reached an all-time high of 30.7 million unique viewers (+54% YOY) and the Wimbledon final between *Linda Noskova* and *Karolina Muchova* delivered **ESPN**'s most-watched women's tennis championship match with 1.9 million average viewers. The **WNBA** alone has delivered 3.8 billion minutes viewed so far this season. Nielsen also notes that 48% of U.S. women now say they are very interested in at least one sport, making them one of the fastest-growing segments across the live sports ecosystem. Forty-six percent of women say they are interested in the **NFL**, up from 40.5% in 2023. Women also made up 2 out of 5 viewers for the 2026 **FIFA World Cup**.

A NEW WAY TO WATCH DUKE, AUBURN AND GEORGIA TECH GAMES

Homesteam, a mobile app that automatically syncs a team's local radio broadcast to the live national or regional televised game, is launching this fall for Duke, Auburn and Georgia Tech football and in November for basketball. The app, which recognizes exactly where they are in the TV broadcast, has positioned itself as a solution for superfans who prefer to seamlessly listen to their hometown announcers call games. The subscription is priced at $79.99 for a full season of football or basketball, or combine both for $129.99. Fans can also opt to pay $9.99 per game. The app is available on iOS and Android devices.

FIBER FRENZY

Xfinity and **Comcast Business** are now available in Columbia County, Florida, initially connecting more than 3,300 locations across Ellisville, Fort White, Mikesville, Springville, Suwanee Valley and Winfield. The operator expects to connect 2,000 additional addresses by EOY. – Over 1,200 homes and businesses in Newfield, Maine, are also now online with **Comcast** services.

PROGRAMMING

Fresh off this month's strong debut of drama "Anna Pigeon," **USA Network** is ordering another scripted original—medical drama "Diplomatic Immunity" from Fox Entertainment Studios. Anna Pigeon is USA's highest-rated original scripted series premiere in eight years, averaging 2.25 million total viewers in L+3. -- **AMC Global Media** will premiere "Archive X: Unexplained Phenomena," a six-part docuseries investigating paranormal encounters, on Oct. 1 at 10pm on **SundanceTV**, **AMC+** and **AllReality**. – "The Gilded Age" will debut its eight-episode fourth season on Nov. 1 at 9pm on **HBO** and **HBO Max**.

PEOPLE

Canela Media promoted *Andrés Rincón* to EVP, Revenue, expanding his leadership across sales, go-to-market strategy, agency and client partnerships and the commercialization of Canela's portfolio.