

**September 9, 2014**

The Honorable Tom Wheeler  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th St. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Chairman Wheeler:

We represent more than 20 million people fighting to protect the open Internet. As organizations that engage and mobilize our memberships online, we have a keen understanding of the central role that Net Neutrality plays in protecting free speech, spurring innovation and engaging people in civic affairs. That's why so many of our members have flooded the FCC with comments in response to your call for input on the Commission's proposed open Internet rules.

We are writing today to urge you and your fellow commissioners to leave Washington and directly engage with the public in open dialogue on this issue at four town-hall style hearings across the country.

It's abundantly clear that this is an issue of great concern to people across the country. To date no other rule making at the FCC has received a larger response. So far this year millions have contacted you about protecting Net Neutrality; millions more are likely to take similar action before the agency closes its official docket (GN Docket No. 14-28).

A review of the comments the FCC has received thus far, conducted by data analysis firm Quid, found near-unanimous support for real Net Neutrality — the principle that establishes Internet users' right to connect with anyone else on the network without their service providers discriminating, censoring or otherwise interfering with their communications.<sup>1</sup>

But there is a considerable divide between your current proposal and the Net Neutrality protections that the public wants.

Commenters have also overwhelmingly rejected the agency's proposal to base an Open Internet rule on Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act. In fact, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals made it clear in its January decision that Section 706 does not provide the FCC with the authority to ban unreasonable discrimination, access fees, paid prioritization, exclusive deals, or discriminatory exemptions to bandwidth caps.

People across America support a different approach. Analysis of comments by the Sunlight Foundation found an approximate two-thirds majority urging the agency to reclassify Internet access providers as “common carriers” under Title II of the Telecommunications Act — something the agency has the clear legal authority to do.<sup>2</sup>

Open, public hearings across the country are a very important way to help close this distance between FCC proposals and the millions of Americans voicing their opinions. Your predecessors at the FCC recognized the importance of face-to-face discussions on important matters before the agency. They regularly convened and attended open hearings where participants were invited to place their comments into the public record. For the most part your office has avoided leaving the Beltway to discuss Net Neutrality in open dialogue with the public. (The FCC “Roundtables” scheduled to begin later this month are restricted to Washington, D.C., and to our knowledge the panels are limited to a few participants selected by the agency.)

We urge you and your fellow commissioners to — as soon as possible — schedule four public hearings across the country. The millions of people commenting on this issue have been very clear: The open Internet must be protected. Your agency owes it to the public to convene hearings on Net Neutrality and hear their voices before the Commission makes a final decision.

Respectfully,

Access	Greenpeace USA
American Civil Liberties Union	MoveOn.org
Avaaz	National Hispanic Media Coalition
ColorOfChange	Presente.org
Common Cause	Progressive Change Campaign Coalition
Consumers Union	Progressives United
Courage Campaign	Public Knowledge
CREDO	reddit
Daily Kos	Represent.Us
Demand Progress	RootsAction.org
Democracy for America	Rootstrikers
Electronic Frontier Foundation	SumOfUs
Fight for the Future	ThoughtWorks
Free Press	

1. Elise Hu, “A Fascinating Look Inside Those 1.1 Million Open-Internet Comments,” NPR, Aug. 12, 2014: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/alltechconsidered/2014/08/12/339710293/a-fascinating-look-inside-those-1-1-million-open-internet-comments>

2. Bob Lannon and Andrew Pendleton, “What Can We Learn from 800,000 Public Comments on the FCC’s Net Neutrality Plan?” Sunlight Foundation, Sept. 2, 2014: <http://sunlightfoundation.com/blog/2014/09/02/what-can-we-learn-from-800000-public-comments-on-the-fccs-net-neutrality-plan/>