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AT&T kills plan to use LTE in WCS C, D Block for in-flight Wi-Fi services

November 10, 2014 | By Mike Dano

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AT&T Mobility (NYSE: T) is no longer planning to build a nationwide wireless network for airplane passengers, and will instead invest in international and video products.

The news, first reported by *Runway Girl Network*, comes shortly after AT&T announced plans to acquire Mexican wireless network operator Iusacell for $2.5 billion, and as it works to compete its $49 billion acquisition of DirecTV.

"After a thorough review of our investment portfolio, the company decided to no longer pursue entry into the Inflight Connectivity industry," Fletcher Cook, a spokesman for AT&T, said in a statement to *Bloomberg*. "We are focusing our capital on transformative investments, such as international and video."

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AT&T recently said its Project VIP network investment plan is ahead of schedule and that it has "essentially completed" its LTE network buildout. The carrier also reduced its capital expense budget for next year by 14 percent to around $18 billion.
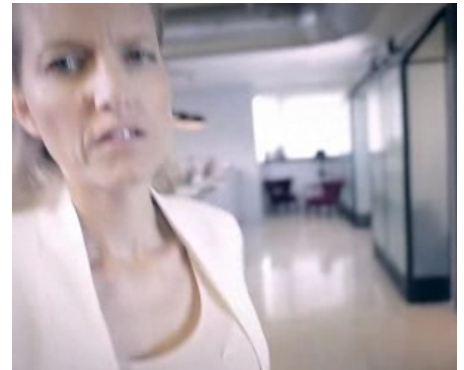
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The news that AT&T is vacating the in-flight Wi-Fi space appeared to buoy others in the market. As *Bloomberg* pointed out, Gogo's stock rose 10 percent immediately after the news broke. Gogo has spent about $1 billion building its business and EV-DO network to serve airlines. "We look forward to competing with existing competitors and anyone else who wants to get into the space," Gogo CEO Michael Small told *Bloomberg*.

Contact Author

Reprint

AT&T announced in April that it would build an "innovative air-to-ground network" using LTE technology and some of its spectrum to offer in-flight Wi-Fi services starting in late 2015. The action directly challenged current in-flight connectivity players like Gogo, Row 44, Inmarsat and others. AT&T said it would partner with aerospace company Honeywell to install the required hardware on airplanes to

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support the service. Honeywell said the service could generate as much as $1 billion in revenue over the next decade, *Reuters* reported in April, though AT&T declined to provide its own revenue estimates.

In an FCC filing that came to light in August, AT&T offered an insight into the reasons behind its in-flight Wi-Fi plans. The company said it would likely use its WCS C and D Block spectrum to provide in-flight Wi-Fi services because pointing the antennas up at the sky would reduce the possibility that a standard, ground-targeted wireless network would interfere with operations in adjacent bands, including Sirius XM radio.

AT&T in 2012 acquired $600 million worth of more WCS spectrum from NextWave. It's unclear what the carrier will now do with those airwaves.

For more:
- see this *Re/code* article
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Wireless_learner · a day ago
ATT could use it for FDD Carrier Aggregation or Small cells or mix and match of both. Some readers suggesting TD LTE, I honestly dont think mixing TD LTE and FD LTE is any good idea. I know Sprint is doing it. I am not in favor it.
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     Jason Maloney → Wireless_learner · a day ago
AT&T is already deploying WCS blocks A and B for carrier aggregation. This article is about the unpaired C and D blocks which cannot be used for traditional LTE service due to causing harmful interference to the SDARS spectrum in-between them. That spectrum is used for satellite radio, both via satellite and via terrestrial repeaters.
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Nate Opgenorth · 2 days ago
They should have just ran TD-LTE 2300MHz (Band 40). This way they could get two 10MHz TD-LTE channels going....they originally wanted to essentially make their own band class of Band 30 and do FDD LTE which would only get them a single 10MHz LTE channel....they are tripping up...I know SiriusXM has interference concerns but did they really think blasting 2.3GHz at the sky would mitigate this over blasting it horizontally at likely lower powers?! Someone explain this to me! I'm been practically praying AT&T would use the WCS 2300 Band for TD-LTE lol

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