

Summary

Increasingly, the wired and wireless networks are converging in architecture and function. For example, the further fiber moves towards the customer, the more wireless capabilities are available in cellular networks. As wireless offers more bandwidth, it can deliver video and other functions previously thought to require more substantial broadband pipes. The question then arises, to what extent are wireless offerings substitutable for wireline services, and vice versa? The 2013 Aspen Institute Roundtable on Spectrum Policy (AIRS), "Spectrum Policy for the Wired Network," met on November 13-15, 2013 to consider what spectrum policies would foster best the goals of a robust, reliable and effective communications system in the United States.

The 24 leading communications policy experts who met at the Aspen Wye River Conference Center in Queenstown, Maryland began by looking at the characteristics of network architecture, both wired and wireless, that are relevant to a robust communications network. In the course of this exploration, the group considered public goods that need to reach consumers, and the desire for consumer choice of competitive services. They also investigated what essential elements of the wired network are required by public policy, and which of these can wireless services substitute for. The overall goal was to discover how spectrum services and spectrum policy can advance overall communications policy goals, e.g., robust, reliable, and effective communications with choice where possible.

As the following report details, the discussions were lively and knowledgeable. Throughout the report, the Roundtable rapporteur, Geoff Manne, sets forth a number of recommendations that he gleaned from the conference dialogue, specifically concerning the issues of rural communications, public services, and competition. While these recommendations generally reflect the sense of the meeting, there were some opponents to the viewpoints recorded and there were no votes taken. Accordingly, participation in the dialogue should not be construed as agreement with any particular statement in the report by the participant or his or her employer.