

December 2017 Tuesday Topic: Net Neutrality and Intellectual Freedom

Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to one of the [co-chairs of the IFC](#).



You have probably heard the term “Net Neutrality” over the past few years, and now it’s in the news again. We’re hearing that “net neutrality is in jeopardy.” But what does that mean, and how does it relate to intellectual freedom?

The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) enacted regulations in 2015 called the Open Internet Order that treat broadband internet access as a utility, subjecting it to common carrier provisions that prevent internet providers from discriminating against how broadband is used. This means, for example, that a provider like Comcast can’t artificially cause some content to load more slowly or block it entirely in favor of content from its affiliates. Now, FCC chair Ajit Pai has stated that the FCC intends to eliminate these regulations¹.

Concerns about the loss of net neutrality are not without solid backing: in 2008, Comcast was sanctioned by the FCC for blocking access to the file sharing site BitTorrent². Opponents of Pai’s intentions fear that the loss of the Open Internet Order could mean that access to smaller media outlets unaffiliated with major corporations, as well as information freely provided by public and academic libraries online, could be relegated to the “slow lane” or blocked altogether based on content or inability to pay the premium for distribution.

The FCC is expected to vote on the proposed deregulation on December 14, 2017.

What can librarians do?

- [Contact your elected representatives](#). Pressure from Congress and the Senate could persuade the FCC to pause the vote. Should the regulations pass,

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/21/technology/fcc-net-neutrality.html>

² <https://www.cnet.com/news/fcc-formally-rules-comcasts-throttling-of-bittorrent-was-illegal/>

the legislature could also use the [Congressional Review Act](#) to reject the policy. In the long term, Congress could create legislation that codifies net neutrality protections into law. Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) has made it clear that he is a proponent of this legislation.

- **Write a letter to the editor.** Make clear the potential impacts on access to information and intellectual freedom.

For More Information

ALA District Dispatch on Net Neutrality: <http://www.districtdispatch.org/2017/11/net-neutrality-protections-eliminated-draft-fcc-order/>

Business Insider, "Net Neutrality for Dummies." <http://www.businessinsider.com/net-neutralityfor-dummies-and-how-it-effects-you-2014-1>

American Library Association net neutrality page:
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/telecom/netneutrality>

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