More Spectrum, More Competition

T-Mobile CEO John Legere told Newsweek that if the company can get more spectrum, they will turn the heat up on the competition. "There’s so much work to do on solving the problems of this screwed up wireless industry," he told the news outlet. Legere has the plans and the motivation to rival AT&T and Verizon, but the company simply doesn’t have the resources. There’s a few options, and one is merging with a bigger company like Comcast or Dish Network. However, these deals could take months—even years, and Legere wants to deliver now. Telecom analyst Susan Welsh de Grimaldo did tell Newsweek that because the newest iPhone runs on Band 12 of the 700 MHz spectrum, which T-Mobile has, their marketing potential will increase. This apparent advantage won’t be enough in the long run, though.

With the incentive auction coming up in March, T-Mobile will have a chance to purchase more spectrum. Unfortunately for the company, the FCC did not grant their request to increase the spectrum reserve in a given market from 30 MHz to 40 MHz. Legere lobbied for the change that would promote competition and help out the smaller carriers. Hopefully for the carrier, it will get what it needs next March.

Kingman Storm Knocks Out Towers

Strong storms blew through Kingman, AZ, last Saturday causing power outages and even knocking out cell service for a brief period. Verizon customers saw outages in their service for about 45 minutes when power to the communication lines to the towers went down. "Crews worked very quickly to repair a vendor's telecommunications outage that briefly interrupted service for Verizon Wireless customers in Mohave County," said Jenny Weaver, spokesperson for Verizon. (The Daily Miner)

Rural America is Not Cost Effective

Wireless dead zones plague rural America. Kentucky residents, with few large cities and vast rural expanses, are no strangers to problems with wireless service. Most coverage in the state comes from cell towers located close to interstates and in downtown areas that see a high volume of traffic from lots of local users. Jeff Cohn, founder of a website that tracks dead cell zone complaints, says the majority of feedback from bad cell service is “coming from people who are in rural America.” (WKYT)
Why are there not more towers in rural areas? Associate Professor at the University of Kentucky, Dr. William Smith, explained, “It costs a certain amount of money to put up a cell tower. If you are not getting enough business from it, you won’t put a tower there.” (WKYT) In short, carriers cannot provide high speed service in some areas, simply because it is not cost effective.

However, in the case of Kentucky, large efforts are being made to expand wireless infrastructure. AT&T, one of the largest wireless providers in Kentucky, currently has over 100 ongoing projects in the state. (WKYT) Most of the projects are dedicated to improving or expanding 4G LTE service by installing technology to add spectrum and network coverage to more regions.

GovNet Expands in Arizona

GovNet is a private provider that received a $39 million federal grant to expand communications services for government entities. The company is currently building a new tower in Cottonwood, AZ, and has offered to mount the police antennas atop the new tower. According to the Verde News, the 80-foot tower was located on top of an existing hill next to south Willard Drive, where the United Verde Extension copper smelter once stood and is now home to city water tanks, a church and a small communication tower used for city emergency service. The tower is mounted on city property and replaces the smaller tower.

Faux Water Tower Will Boost Service

Apparently water towers are more attractive than faux trees. At least that’s how the officials in Oakley, CA. Last week, the city leaders approved a proposal from Verizon to construct a traditional looking water tower instead of adding a sixth faux tree. The 64-foot tower will be painted so that it looks like wood and include the city’s name on it, the year it was established and some grapes. “There are vineyards on this property and the location was chosen to minimize the amount of vines removed. About 10 vines will need to be removed,” Oakley Senior Planner Ken Strelo said. (Contra Costa Times)

The structure will house nine Verizon antennas and have room for others to co-locate in the future. When Verizon initially proposed the faux tree, the city officials explained they had issue trying to hide the antennas and make the structures look real. "We saw the tower design and staff thought it would be a good idea to bring forward," said Strelo at last week’s Oakley City Council meeting. (Contra Costa Times) Other aesthetic options were tossed around, like painting the water tower white, but ultimately the staff believed the tower would look more authentic if it was less modern looking.

More Money in Minnesota

The Lake County Board in Minnesota approved a new lease agreement with Verizon Wireless for a tower in Isabella. The new lease agreement calls for an increase in rent to $1,100 per month with a 3 percent increase each year and an option to extend the lease every five years for the next 25 years. This is similar to the lease agreement with county signed in 1995, but it more than doubles the rent payment. "This puts us in that ballpark or maybe a little ahead of some of those other ones," county administrator Matt Huddleston said about the county’s other towers.
Is This Cell Tower Detuned?
By David Horn of LBA Group

If you are involved in cell tower construction, this is a very important question. Few people associate AM broadcast and cellular radio. After all, they are a thousand megahertz and 100 years apart! So, a quick physics lesson: In AM radio, the tower itself functions as the antenna, while cell antennas are mounted on a support-only tower. Consequently, a nearby cell tower, water tank, power pole or other metal structure can intercept the AM signal, pull it out of the air, and become an unintended part of the AM antenna system, reradiating the AM signal and distorting the broadcast station’s FCC-authorized AM radiation pattern. However, the AM station has no effect on the cellular antenna, so its presence is often ignored by cellular engineers.

Once upon a time, cell tower site acquisition people kept new towers several miles away from AM stations wherever possible. In the current cell environment, engineering requires much more density of cell towers, so locations near AM stations are becoming unavoidable. There are three primary reasons why “Is this cell tower detuned?” is such an important question to answer on your job site today. Continue reading here.

Small Cells

Mini Cell Towers Improve Service for Residents

Wheeler County, OR, officials recently struck a deal with Verizon to install four mini cell towers throughout Mitchell, which has a population of 130. Mini cell towers, or network extenders, will increase the local coverage in the small eastern Oregon city. Volunteers have also stepped up to put these extenders inside their homes and business to create a makeshift wireless network. The Blue Mountain Eagle reported that while AT&T has an existing tower in the town, its antennas face the wrong direction and reception doesn’t reach the town.

There has been an uptick in tourism, after the nearby Painted Hills National Monument was named one of the “Seven Wonders of Oregon.” This fact has made cellular service a priority to keep residents and visitors safe. U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, asked the federal First Responder Network Authority to help upgrade the area’s cell service to reduce emergency response times, the Blue Mountain Eagle reported. “As the situation now stands, in the event of a traffic accident or fire, one would need to visit a ranch, store or find the payphone on Main Street in order to call 911,” Wyden said in a letter sent June 10 to FirstNet Board Chairwoman Susan Swenson. (Blue Mountain Eagle) Cell service has become absolutely necessary for public safety, and while network extenders help, they won’t solve the problem entirely.
Tower Project Moves Forward

Residents in Aurora, IL are one step closer to seeing a difference in their cell service after an Aurora City Council Planning Committee recently voted unanimously to recommend a special use plan to place a telecommunications tower in Lincoln Park on the West Side. The committee also plans for the tower, standing 110 feet tall, to serve as a flagpole. City planners strategically placed the tower in a corner of the park owned by Fox Valley Park District. Three separate carriers will be leasing the tower, and the park district is expecting to take advantage of the much needed additional income. Alderman Bill Donnell, who represents the district, noted that some people called his office to oppose construction of the tower. He reasoned that the park already has emergency siren poles located in it, and the tower itself will be erected in a region "not normally used for recreation." (Chicago Tribune)

The plan still has one more step before it reaches the full City Council. The Committee of the Whole must hear the plan for special use first, and then decide whether to pass it on to the City Council. The committee previously approved a special use plan for a tower requested by T-Mobile, but the carrier backed out.

Balloon Test Didn’t Fly

The residents of Snohomish, WA, weren’t too pleased when they saw a big blue balloon in the area marking where a cell tower would be placed near the Boys & Girls Club. According to the Tribune, the balloon could be seen at 100 feet from the city hall but not the rest of downtown. The balloon was flown at 60, 80 and 100 feet so residents could see the difference, but some people visiting the playground last Thursday aren’t on board with the plan. “They’re seriously going to put it there?” said a mother named Beth. “I think it’s going to affect the beauty here. They couldn’t have chosen a place that’s not so close to the kids? This is where kids play.” (Tribune)

However, some people are pleased with the project because cell reception is spotty in the area. Other observers didn’t notice the balloon or didn’t care. “People are so used to those towers, I think it’s not an issue,” said Snohomish resident Morrie Sachsenmaier. “I don’t think they’re going to see it from downtown.” Some complained that the color of the balloon made it difficult for people to see. But the first balloon, a red one, popped before launch so a backup blue balloon had to be used on
the sunny, cloudless day. Residents also felt that the city was keeping this project from them. “I don’t think they let the public know about this and I think it was intentionally done,” said Snohomish resident and tower opponent Rolf Rautenberg. (Tribune) However, the city denied a lack of transparency and noted they have made no attempt to keep this from the public.

(Photo courtesy of Melanie Russell, Tribune)

Approved in Appomattox

The Appomattox County Board of Supervisors approved a new tower to be constructed in Vera, VA, earlier this week. Vice President of National Communication Towers Al Doss requested a conditional-use permit for the structure, which would be built on private property owned by David Almond. According to the News & Advance, National Communication Towers is based in Richmond and currently operates 20 towers in Virginia counties. “The tower will provide service to the Vera community, which does not have cell or wireless internet service at this time,” Doss said during the public hearing. (News & Advance) The Board approved the permit with the conditions that the tower won’t be taller than 199 feet and a row of cypress trees will be planed between the tower and Old Grist Mill Road.

T-Mobile Dead Serious About Tower

T-Mobile has proposed to build a tower in the southeast corner of Mount Emblem Cemetery in Elmhurst, IL. The 100-foot tower plan went before the Zoning and Planning Commission last week. Residents who attended the meeting shared their concerns about health risks and the flooding issues the area has seen lately. “There’s no detriment to public health,” said Derek McGrew, a T-Mobile representative. (My Suburban Life) Zoning and Planning Administrator Nathaniel Warner explained to the residents that there are already towers in the tower, and this new structure will help expand T-Mobile’s service but also help with 911 calls.

According to My Suburban Life, in 2014, McGrew has worked closely with city engineer Kent Johnson to determine whether building the tower on that property would contribute to stormwater mitigation troubles for residents. Johnson determined that this particular site would not pose a problem. Tony and Gina Ordonez live a 130 feet from the proposed tower site and believe it would be an "additional nuisance." They suggested T-Mobile move the tower a few properties east, but McGrew explained that the tower would be disguised as a pine tree to blend in with its surroundings. The Commission is scheduled to deliberate September 24 and will make its recommendation to the Development, Planning and Zoning Committee.

Register for NATE’s Live Webinar on September 24

On Thursday, September 24, 2015 at 11:00 a.m. EDT, former Secretary of Labor for OSHA Edwin G. Foulke Jr. will be conducting a live NATE webinar entitled “OSHA’s New Recordkeeping Requirements: Are you in Compliance?” This presentation will (1) examine the many recordkeeping pitfalls that employers face, especially those with multiple locations; (2) cover how to coordinate your injury and illness recordkeeping with other recordkeeping requirements and how employers can effectively use recordkeeping to improve their current safety and health management program; and (3) examine in detail the changes made by the final rule and, in particular, the increased employer reporting requirements for all employers. Register here.