

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2007 - VOL. CCXLIX NO. 53

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## BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY

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### *FCC Eases Video Entry For Telecom Companies*

By COREY BOLES

WASHINGTON—Efforts by telecommunication companies such as **AT&T Inc.** and **Verizon Communications Inc.** to compete head-on with cable operators in the provision of video and broadband service were made easier by the Federal Communications Commission yesterday.

The agency released new rules that aim to standardize the process for new entrants to the video market to get a license from local governments. Given that new entrants use Internet technology to provide video service, the FCC also hopes its new rules will speed up broadband deployment across the country.

Currently, in the majority of states, companies wanting to enter the video market must apply for a license from the local government, a process that phone companies have complained is costly and time consuming.

The FCC doesn't have the authority to create a national system, but Chairman Kevin Martin believes it does have the ability to limit the behavior of local governments. The new rules state that local authorities must decide on a franchise application within 90 days; if they don't within that time frame, the li-

cence will be deemed granted. In addition, they can no longer make extraordinary requests from applicants for the deployment of hardware or for requests unrelated to the provision of video service.

Justifying this, the FCC's final order points to evidence submitted by Verizon, which claimed that in parts of the country it has been asked to provide a number of unrelated services to get a license. These included the purchase of streetlights, wiring for churches, installation of cellphone towers and cellphone subsidies for town employees.

The rules, which were adopted in December and posted on the FCC Web site yesterday, are likely to be met with a legal challenge from state and local authorities.

The rules were voted for along partisan lines at the FCC's December public meeting with the three Republicans—Mr. Martin and Commissioners Deborah Taylor Tate and Robert McDowell—defeating Democratic Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps.

"The sum total here is an arrogant case of federal power riding roughshod over local governments," said Mr. Adelstein in a statement accompanying the final order.