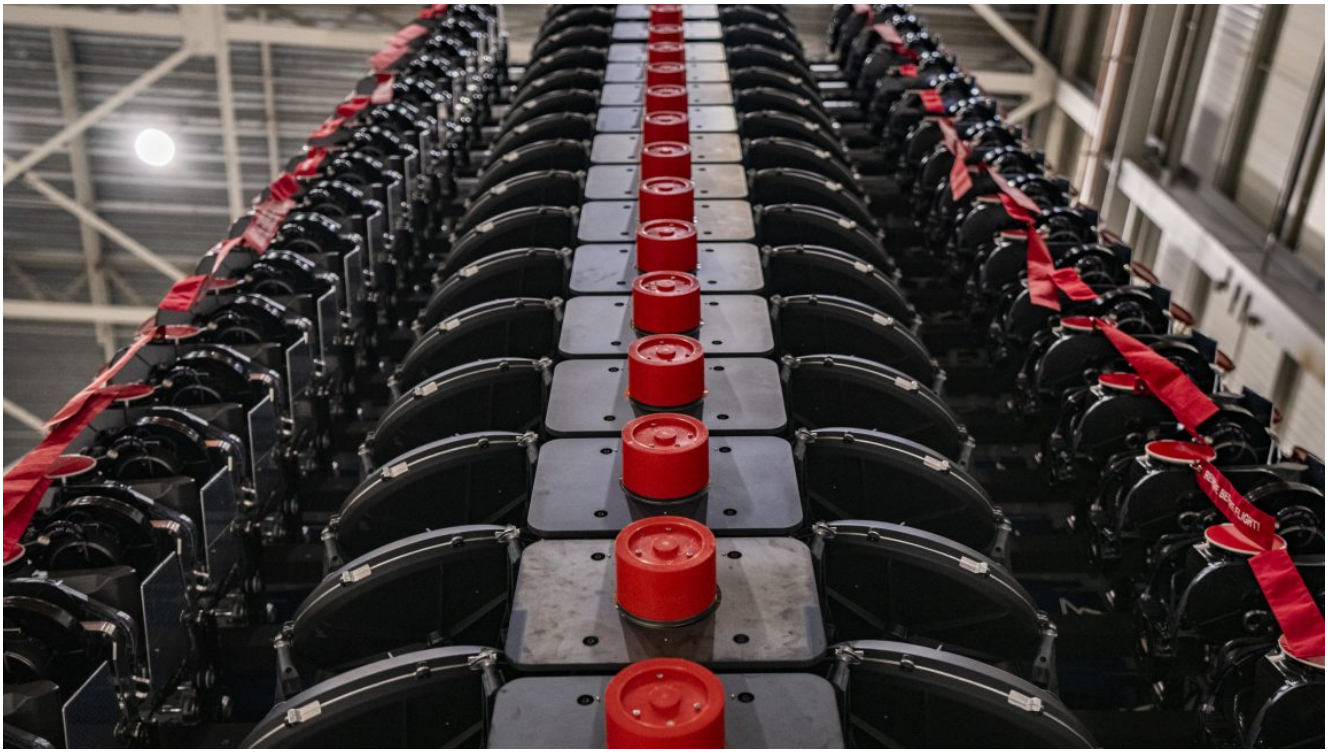
FCC approves Starlink plan for cellular phone service, with some limits



Eliminating cellular dead zones

Starlink says it will offer texting service this year as well as voice and data services in 2025. Starlink does not yet have FCC approval to exceed certain emissions limits, which the company has said will be detrimental for real-time voice and video communications.

For the operations approved yesterday, Starlink is required to coordinate with other spectrum users and cease transmissions when any harmful interference is detected. “We hope to activate employee beta service in the US soon,” wrote Ben Longmier, SpaceX’s senior director of satellite engineering.

Longmier made a pitch to cellular carriers. “Any telco that signs up with Starlink Direct to Cell can completely eliminate

cellular dead zones for their entire country for text and data services. This includes coastal waterways and the ocean areas in between land for island nations," he wrote.

Starlink launched its first satellites with cellular capabilities in January 2024. "Of the more than 2,600 Gen2 Starlink satellites in low Earth orbit, around 320 are equipped with a direct-to-smartphone payload, enough to enable the texting services SpaceX has said it could launch this year," SpaceNews wrote yesterday.

Yesterday's FCC order also lets Starlink operate up to 7,500 second-generation satellites in altitudes between 340 km and 360 km, in addition to the previously approved altitudes between 525 km and 535 km. SpaceX is seeking approval for another 22,488 satellites but the FCC continued to defer action on that request. The FCC order said:

> *Authorization to permit SpaceX to operate up to 7,500 Gen2 satellites in lower altitude shells will enable SpaceX to begin providing lower-latency satellite service to support growing demand in rural and remote areas that lack terrestrial wireless service options. This partial grant also strikes the right balance between allowing SpaceX's operations at lower altitudes to provide low-latency satellite service and permitting the Commission to continue to monitor SpaceX's constellation and evaluate issues previously raised on the record.*

Coordination with NASA

SpaceX is required to coordinate "with NASA to ensure protection of the International Space Station (ISS), ISS visiting vehicles, and launch windows for NASA science missions," the FCC said. "SpaceX may only deploy and operate at altitudes below 400 km the total number of satellites for which it has completed physical coordination with NASA under

the parties’ Space Act Agreement.”

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