FCC awards SpaceX $886 million for satellite internet network

The Federal Communications Commission announced $9.2 billion in awards to companies providing broadband internet to rural areas across the US, and Elon Musk's SpaceX was one of the biggest winners. The company will receive $886 million over the next 10 years for its Starlink satellite broadband project, under the Federal Communication Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund.

Starlink is SpaceX's constellation of satellites that will fly at low altitudes around the Earth, providing internet on the ground below. SpaceX already has launched 900 of the planned 12,000 satellites needed for the Starlink system into low-Earth orbit. Musk has said the company needs 800 satellites in space to provide "significant operational capabilities." SpaceX kicked off its Better Than Nothing Beta for Starlink broadband in October after introducing a private beta over the summer.

Other big winners in the FCC auction included LTD Broadband, which will get $1.3 billion; Charter Communications, which will receive $1.2 billion; and the Rural Electric Cooperative Consortium, which is getting $1.1 billion.

Between 24 and 163 million people lack broadband internet access in the US, and the problem is especially acute in rural areas. The incoming Biden administration is expected to increase federal broadband spending in 2021 to bridge the so-called "digital divide."

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