Report: TP-Link’s low router prices probed in criminal antitrust investigation

The report of a criminal antitrust investigation follows a report in December that US authorities were investigating whether to ban TP-Link wireless routers, which were targeted in high-profile attacks linked to the Chinese government. TP-Link was founded in China in 1996 but said it relocated its headquarters to the US in October 2024.

TP-Link was split into two entities, one based in the US and one based in China, Bloomberg wrote, but the “US-based entity being scrutinized by Justice and Commerce Department officials still has substantial operations in mainland China.” Another Bloomberg article earlier this month described how TP-Link still has a sizable presence in China.

The Bloomberg report said the criminal antitrust investigation is in addition to “a parallel civil investigation into the company’s pricing practices” that was revealed in earlier reporting. Civil complaints have a lower burden of proof, while criminal probes can result in prison time for individuals and companies being fined as much as $100 million, Bloomberg wrote, noting that such “probes can take years to complete and may not result in charges.”

In a statement provided to Ars, TP-Link said it “has not received any inquiry from the Department of Justice regarding these matters” but “stands ready to cooperate fully with any government inquiries.”

“We have earned the trust of our customers through years of

significant growth and consistent high rankings by third parties," TP-Link said. "Unlike competitors, TP-Link owns its manufacturing and R&D operations, enabling cost savings and enhanced control over the security of our vertically integrated supply chain. We do not sell products below cost and maintain a policy of transparency in our business practices, ensuring fair pricing for our valued customers."

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/tp-links-low-router-prices-and-china-ties-reportedly-spark-us-investigation/

Comcast president bemoans broadband customer losses: "We are not winning"

Comcast executives apparently realized something that customers have known and complained about for years: The Internet provider's prices aren't transparent enough and rise too frequently.

This might not have mattered much to cable executives as long as the total number of subscribers met their targets. But after reporting a net loss of 183,000 residential broadband customers in Q1 2025, Comcast President Mike Cavanagh said the company isn't "winning in the marketplace" during an earnings call today. The Q1 2025 customer loss was over three times larger than the net loss in Q1 2024.

While customers often have few viable options for broadband

and the availability of alternatives varies widely by location, Comcast faces competition from fiber and fixed wireless ISPs.

“In this intensely competitive environment, we are not winning in the marketplace in a way that is commensurate with the strength of the network and connectivity products that I just described,” Cavanagh said. “[Cable division CEO] Dave [Watson] and his team have worked hard to understand the reasons for this disconnect and have identified two primary causes. One is price transparency and predictability and the other is the level of ease of doing business with us. The good news is that both are fixable and we are already underway with execution plans to address these challenges.”

The 183,000-subscriber loss lowered Comcast’s residential Internet subscribers to 29.19 million. Comcast also reported a first-quarter drop of 17,000 business broadband subscribers, lowering that category’s total to 2.45 million.

Comcast’s stock price fell 3.7 percent today even though its overall profit beat analyst expectations and domestic broadband revenue rose 1.7 percent year over year to $6.56 billion—a sign that Comcast is extracting more money from customers on average. “Analysts peppered Comcast executives with questions on Thursday regarding its Xfinity-branded broadband and mobile, and how the company will pivot the business,” CNBC wrote.

“We are simplifying our pricing”

Cavanagh said that Comcast plans to make changes in marketing and operations “with the highest urgency.” This means that “we are simplifying our pricing construct to make our price-to-value proposition clearer to consumers across all broadband segments,” he said.

Comcast last week announced a five-year price guarantee for

broadband customers who sign up for a new package. Comcast said customers will get a “simple monthly price starting as low as $55 per month,” without having to enter a contract, giving them “freedom and flexibility to cancel at any time without penalty.” The five-year guarantee also comes with one year of Xfinity Mobile at no charge, Comcast said.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/after-losing-customers-comcast-admits-prices-are-too-confusing-and-unpredictable/

Trump orders Ed Dept to make AI a national priority while plotting agency’s death

Trump pushes for industry involvement

It seems clear that Trump’s executive order was a reaction to China’s announcement about AI education reforms last week, as Reuters reported. Elsewhere, Singapore and Estonia have laid out their AI education initiatives, Forbes reported, indicating that AI education is increasingly considered critical to any nation’s success.

Trump’s vision for the US requires training teachers and students about what AI is and what it can do. He offers no new

appropriations to fund the initiative; instead, he directs a new AI Education Task Force to find existing funding to cover both research into how to implement AI in education and the resources needed to deliver on the executive order's promises.

Although AI advocates applauded Trump's initiative, the executive order's vagueness makes it uncertain how AI education tools will be assessed as Trump pushes for AI to be integrated into "all subject areas." Possibly using AI in certain educational contexts could disrupt learning by confabulating misinformation, a concern that the Biden administration had in its more cautious approach to AI education initiatives.

Trump also seems to push for much more private sector involvement than Biden did.

The order recommended that education institutions collaborate with industry partners and other organizations to "collaboratively develop online resources focused on teaching K–12 students foundational AI literacy and critical thinking skills." These partnerships will be announced on a "rolling basis," the order said. It also pushed students and teachers to partner with industry for the Presidential AI Challenge to foster collaboration.

For Trump's AI education plan to work, he will seemingly need the DOE to stay intact. However, so far, Trump has not acknowledged this tension. In March, he ordered the DOE to dissolve, with power returned to states to ensure "the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely."

Were that to happen, at least 27 states and Puerto Rico—which EdWeek reported have already laid out their own AI education guidelines—might push back, using their power to control federal education funding to pursue their own AI education priorities and potentially messing with Trump's plan.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/trump-orders-doe-to-make-ai-a-national-priority-while-plotting-agencys-death/

New Android spyware is targeting Russian military personnel on the front lines

Russian military personnel are being targeted with recently discovered Android malware that steals their contacts and tracks their location.

The malware is hidden inside a modified app for Alpine Quest mapping software, which is used by, among others, hunters, athletes, and Russian personnel stationed in the war zone in Ukraine. The app displays various topographical maps for use online and offline. The trojanized Alpine Quest app is being pushed on a dedicated Telegram channel and in unofficial Android app repositories. The chief selling point of the trojanized app is that it provides a free version of Alpine Quest Pro, which is usually available only to paying users.

Looks like the real thing

The malicious module is named Android.Spy.1292.origin. In a blog post, researchers at Russia-based security firm Dr.Web wrote:

> *Because Android.Spy.1292.origin is embedded into a copy of the genuine app, it looks and operates as the original, which*

allows it to stay undetected and execute malicious tasks for longer periods of time.
Each time it is launched, the trojan collects and sends the following data to the C&C server:

- *the user's mobile phone number and their accounts;*
- *contacts from the phonebook;*
- *the current date;*
- *the current geolocation;*
- *information about the files stored on the device;*
- *the app's version.*

If there are files of interest to the threat actors, they can update the app with a module that steals them. The threat actors behind Android.Spy.1292.origin are particularly interested in confidential documents sent over Telegram and WhatsApp. They also show interest in the file locLog, the location log created by Alpine Quest. The modular design of the app makes it possible for it to receive additional updates that expand its capabilities even further.

https://arstechnica.com/security/2025/04/russian-military-personnel-on-the-front-lines-targeted-with-new-android-spyware/

Taxes and fees not included: T-Mobile's latest price lock is nearly meaningless

Besides the five-year price guarantee, there's at least one

more notable pricing detail. T-Mobile's previous plans had "taxes and fees included," meaning the advertised price was inclusive of taxes and fees. With the new Experience plans, taxes and fees will be in addition to the advertised price.

This will make the plans cost more initially than customers might expect, and it gives T-Mobile wiggle room to raise prices during the five years of the price guarantee since it could increase any fees that are tacked onto the new plans. The fine print in today's press release describes taxes and fees as "exclusions" to the price guarantee.

"Fees" can refer to virtually anything that a carrier chooses to add to a bill and isn't limited to the carrier's actual costs from taxes or government mandates. For example, T-Mobile has a "Regulatory Programs and Telco Recovery Fee," which it acknowledges "is not a government tax or imposed by the government; rather, the fee is collected and retained by T-Mobile to help recover certain costs we have already incurred and continue to incur."

This can include the cost of complying with legal obligations, "charges imposed on us by other carriers for delivery of calls," and the cost of leasing network facilities that are needed to provide service, T-Mobile says. In other words, T-Mobile charges a separate fee to cover the normal expenses incurred by any provider of telecommunications services.

The promise is thus that the base price of a service plan won't change, but T-Mobile gives itself wide discretion to add or increase fees on customers' monthly bills. "Guarantee means that we won't change the price of talk, text, and 5G smartphone data on our network for at least 5 years while you are on an Experience plan," T-Mobile said today. T-Mobile's terms and conditions haven't been updated, but the terms address price promises in general, saying that price locks do not include "add-on features, taxes, surcharges, fees, or charges for extra Features or Devices."

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/taxes-and-fees-not-included-t-mobiles-latest-price-lock-is-nearly-meaningless/

Harvard sues to block government funding cuts

The suit also claims that the funding hold, made in retaliation for Harvard's letter announcing its refusal to accept these conditions, punishes Harvard for exercising free speech.

Separately, the lawsuit focuses on Title VI, part of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits the government from funding organizations that engage in racial discrimination. It's Harvard's alleged tolerance for antisemitism that would enable the government to put a hold on these funds. But the suit spells out the requirements for cutting funding—hearings, a 30-day waiting period, notification of Congress—that the law requires before funding can be cut. And, quite obviously, the government has done none of them.

Harvard also alleges that the government's decision to hold research funds is arbitrary and capricious: "The Government has not—and cannot—identify any rational connection between antisemitism concerns and the medical, scientific, technological, and other research it has frozen."

Finally, the court is asked to consider an issue that's central to a lot of the questions regarding Trump Administration actions: Can the executive branch stop the flow

of money that was allocated by Congress? “Defendants do not have any inherent authority to terminate or freeze appropriated federal funding,” the suit claims.

Remedies

The suit seeks various remedies. It wants the government’s actions declared illegal, the freeze order vacated, and prohibitions put in place that will prevent the government from accomplishing the freeze through some other means. Harvard would also like any further reactions to allegations of antisemitism to follow the procedures mandated by Title VI and to have the government cover its attorney’s fees.

It also wants the ruling expedited, given the potential for damage to university-hosted research. The suit was filed in the District of Massachusetts, which is the same venue that has been used for other suits seeking to restrain the Trump administration’s attack on federally funded research. So far, those have resulted in rapid responses and injunctions that have put damaging funding cuts on hold. So, there’s a good chance we’ll see something similar here.

https://arstechnica.com/science/2025/04/harvard-sues-to-block-government-funding-cuts/

White House plagued by Signal controversy as Pentagon in “full-blown meltdown”

“Given that, it’s hard to see Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth remaining in his role for much longer,” Ullyot forecasted.

According to NPR—which has been the target of Trump threats to rescind funding—four of Hegseth’s senior advisors abruptly quit after The Times report was published. “They have all released public statements suggesting infighting within the department of defense,” NPR reported.

But Trump and Hegseth are presenting a united front against the public backlash. Trump confirmed that he considers any discussion of Hegseth’s chats a “waste of time,” The New York Times reported. And on Sunday, Hegseth told reporters gathered for a White House Easter event that he and Trump are “on the same page all the way.”

Hegseth labeled The Times’ latest report as a “hit piece.” Citing four people familiar with his family Signal chat, NYT report noted that Hegseth updated both Signal groups about the attack plans at about the same time, and these “were among the first big military strikes of Mr. Hegseth’s tenure.”

The implication is that if the media hadn’t outed the Signal use, perhaps Hegseth may have continued risking leaks of confidential military information. And although he and Trump hope the backlash will die down soon, his inclusion of his wife and brother on the second chat likely raises additional flags and “is sure to raise further questions about his adherence to security protocols,” the NYT suggested.

Sean Parnell, the chief Pentagon spokesperson, joined the White House in pushing back against reports, claiming the NYT’s sources are “disgruntled” former employees and insisting on X that “there was no classified information in any Signal chat.”

According to The Atlantic’s editor-in-chief, Jeffrey Goldberg, who was accidentally copied on the initial Signal chat that sparked the backlash, Hegseth shared “precise information about weapons packages, targets, and timing” two hours before the attack.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/white-house-plagued-by-signal-controversy-as-pentagon-in-full-blown-meltdown/

Trump can’t keep China from getting AI chips, TSMC suggests

“Despite TSMC’s best efforts to comply with all relevant export control and sanctions laws and regulations, there is no assurance that its business activities will not be found incompliant with export control laws and regulations,” TSMC said.

Further, “if TSMC or TSMC’s business partners fail to obtain appropriate import, export or re-export licenses or permits or are found to have violated applicable export control or sanctions laws, TSMC may also be adversely affected, through reputational harm as well as other negative consequences, including government investigations and penalties resulting from relevant legal proceedings,” TSMC warned.

Trump’s tariffs may end TSMC’s “tariff-proof” era

TSMC is thriving despite years of tariffs and export controls, its report said, with at least one analyst suggesting that, so far, the company appears “somewhat tariff-proof.” However, all of that could be changing fast, as “US President Donald Trump announced in 2025 an intention to impose more expansive tariffs on imports into the United States,” TSMC said.

“Any tariffs imposed on imports of semiconductors and products incorporating chips into the United States may result in increased costs for purchasing such products, which may, in turn, lead to decreased demand for TSMC’s products and services and adversely affect its business and future growth,” TSMC said.

And if TSMC’s business is rattled by escalations in the US-China trade war, TSMC warned, that risks disrupting the entire global semiconductor supply chain.

Trump’s semiconductor tariff plans remain uncertain. About a week ago, Trump claimed the rates would be unveiled “over the next week,” Reuters reported, which means they could be announced any day now.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/trump-cant-keep-china-from-getting-ai-chips-tsmc-suggests/

Chrome on the chopping block

as Google’s search antitrust trial moves forward

The remedy phase of Google’s search antitrust trial is getting underway, and the government is seeking to force major changes. The next few weeks could reshape Google as a company and significantly alter the balance of power on the Internet, and both sides have a plan to get their way.

With opening arguments beginning today, the US Justice Department will seek to convince the court that Google should be forced to divest Chrome, unbundle Android, and make other foundational changes. But Google will attempt to paint the government’s position as too extreme and rooted in past grievances. No matter what happens at this trial, Google hasn’t given up hope it can turn back time.

Advantage for Justice Dept.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has a major advantage here: Google is guilty. It lost the liability phase of this trial resoundingly, with the court finding Google violated the Sherman Antitrust Act by “willfully acquiring and maintaining monopoly power.” As far as the court is concerned, Google has an illegal monopoly in search services and general search advertising. The purpose of this trial is to determine what to do about it, and the DOJ has some ideas.

This case, overseen by United States District Judge Amit Mehta, is taking place against a backdrop that is particularly unflattering for Google. It has been rocked by loss after loss in its antitrust cases, including the Epic-backed Google Play case, plus the search case that is at issue here. And just

last week, a court ruled that Google abused its monopoly in advertising tech. The remedies in Google's app store case are currently on hold pending appeal, but that problem is not going away. Meanwhile, Google is facing even more serious threats in the remedy phase of this trial.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/chrome-on-the-chopping-block-as-googles-search-antitrust-trial-moves-forward/

Trump's FCC chair threatens Comcast, demands changes to NBC news coverage

Victor Martinez-Hernandez was convicted of killing Rachel Morin earlier this week. The White House has attempted to link this murder to Abrego Garcia's deportation, but they are entirely separate cases.

Carr's fight against media

Carr's post yesterday, combined with his recent actions to enforce the news distortion policy, suggest that he is likely to open a proceeding if a formal complaint is lodged against any NBC stations. Carr showed he is willing to investigate news distortion complaints into ordinary editorial decisions when he revived complaints against CBS and ABC that were thrown out under the previous administration.

Carr has focused in particular on the CBS complaint, which

concerns the editing of a CBS *60 Minutes* interview with Kamala Harris. The conservative Center for American Rights alleged that CBS distorted the news by airing “two completely different answers” to the same question.

CBS published unedited video and a transcript that shows it simply aired two different sentences from the same response in different segments, but Carr has kept the proceeding open and seems to be using it as a bargaining chip in the FCC review of CBS-owner Paramount’s transfer of TV broadcast station licenses to Skydance.

Carr’s handling of the CBS complaint has been condemned by both liberal and conservative advocacy groups—and former Democratic and Republican FCC commissioners and chairs—who say the FCC’s approach is a threat to the constitutional right to free speech.

Carr has also sent letters to companies—including Comcast—alleging that their diversity policies are “invidious forms of discrimination in violation of FCC regulations and civil rights laws.” Carr last month threatened to block mergers pursued by companies that enforce diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies.

We contacted Comcast and NBC today and will update this article if they provide any response to Carr’s news distortion allegation.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2025/04/trumps-fcc-chair-threatens-comcast-demands-changes-to-nbc-news-coverage/